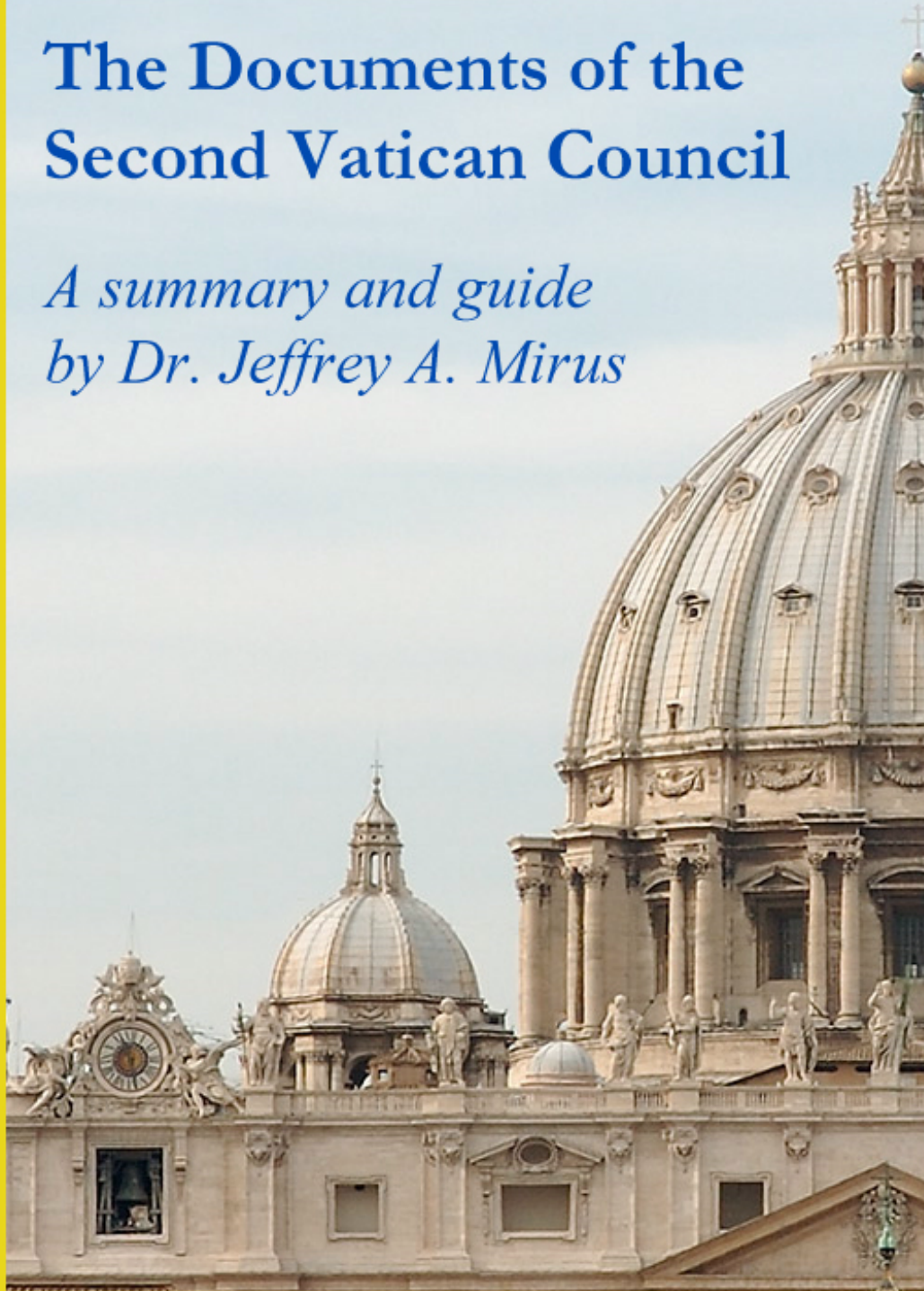


The Documents of the Second Vatican Council

*A summary and guide
by Dr. Jeffrey A. Mirus*



A Catholic Culture publication.

The Documents of Vatican II

A Summary and Guide

by Jeffrey A. Mirus Ph.D.

Summaries with commentary of the sixteen documents of the Second Vatican Council.

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A funny thing about Vatican II ...

They say a funny thing happened on the way to the forum, and that's certainly true of the fate of the documents of the Second Vatican Council on their way to the larger forum of the Church in which they were implemented. It wasn't funny funny, you understand; it was funny peculiar. As an Englishman might say, it was damned peculiar.

This situation calls to mind the tendentious collection of essays by forty Catholic scholars published about 20 years ago under the title of *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*. In a 1991 review, Piers Paul Read notes the unfailingly Modernist trajectory of the contributors, culminating in this:

Most revealing is a section by F. J. Laishley, head of the department of Christian Doctrine at Heythrop College, on the Council's 'Unfinished Business'. With a barrage of intimidating jargon, he appears to advance the theory that the Council fathers did not know what they were *really* saying and therefore did not mean what they *actually* said, particularly about such things as celibacy, birth control, the Pope, or the status of the Roman Catholic Church.

Read concludes that "this may be orthodox deconstructionism but it is not even heterodox Catholicism if the word is to have any meaning." He is right; the intelligentsia took the supposed spirit of Vatican II and twisted it into something that was not so much an ineffective implementation of Catholicism as an effective implementation of something else entirely. That's as succinct a summary of the damned peculiar thing that happened on the way to the Catholic forum as any I've seen.

Today I'm launching an intermittent (and therefore inevitably prolonged) series of commentaries on the individual documents of Vatican II, in which I intend to focus very briefly on their key ideas, illustrating their depth and beauty through select quotes, and highlighting the concepts that have become controversial, especially in light of the peculiar thing that happened to them between their approval by Pope Paul VI and their implementation. They were implemented, of course, by All the Usual Suspects—that is, by the nominally Catholic theologians, bishops, priests and sisters who abandoned the Faith without leaving the Church in the heady days of late 20th century secularization, and who have used their power to take as many unfortunate souls with them as possible. Now is an excellent time to review the documents precisely because the tenure of All the

Usual Suspects in the halls of Catholic influence is finally nearing an end as ignominious as it was slow in coming.

Before turning to the individual documents, however, a few general remarks on the misinterpretation of the Council are in order. By far the biggest offenders have been the Modernists, who were extraordinarily excited (one is tempted to use the word “titillated”) by the Council’s fresh openness to Catholic interaction with the larger world after the siege mentality of the previous two or three generations. In their euphoria they really did claim there was a spirit at work in Vatican II that transcended the letter of the documents, which were viewed as but a temporary effusion of that spirit. They were certain that the Church would move down the new path they were so vigorously blazing. When the Church didn’t keep up, they saw it as proof that she was stifling the spirit of the Council. Never has there been so circular an argument.

Notice that I spell this favorite word “spirit” with a lower-case “s”. These neo-Modernists or Secularists (call them what you will) spoke of this spirit as if its first letter were capitalized and its first name was “Holy”. It was indeed a damned peculiar business, and here I am using the word “damned” advisedly.

But there were also some significantly misguided reactions to the Council on the other side, reactions caused only partially by the excesses and errors of the spiritists. Thus some champions of Catholic tradition also began to read certain conciliar texts as if they were breaks from Tradition when, in fact, there was never any need to do so. Having intellectual difficulty reconciling these (relatively few) texts, they fell back on various implausible arguments to the effect that there was so little spirit of any kind at the Council that its decrees and constitutions did not have to be taken seriously—a position emphatically denied by both John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Some have even bemoaned the “vague” language of the conciliar documents, which are actually generally quite clear and even inspiring, simply because that language contrasts with many earlier councils which had identified long series of formal propositions to be condemned. They seemed not to recognize that denouncing what is *not* true does not take one very far. For example, if the Magisterium condemns the statement that “the Church must conform herself with the modern world”, this anathema teaches us almost nothing about which attitudes, ideas and approaches to contemporary problems the Church may legitimately use, and which she may not. A positive exposition of how the Church ought to engage contemporary culture is far more enlightening—and far more difficult.

Vatican II offered such a positive exposition, and as a result struck a significant blow against the growing tendency of Catholics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to live

their Faith prescriptively (obeying rules and fulfilling duties) rather than evangelistically (living the Gospel out of gratitude and love). The proof that this *was* a huge tendency, if any proof is necessary, can be found in what happened to Catholic life after the rules were relaxed, and after the consequences of breaking them were de-emphasized. While we are still struggling with the resulting chaos, it is also true that the slowly growing number of Catholics today who fully adhere to Church teaching do not live rightly because of rules. No, they live rightly because they love God and understand that the Catholic Church is the key to His Presence in the world.

As we examine the documents of the Second Vatican Council, we shall see that the text of the Council—and therefore its Spirit—almost invariably tends toward this sort of deep and genuine renewal. And in discovering this renewal, we will at last learn what the Council was all about.

The English Editions of the Documents of Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council took place well before the era in which the Vatican Press began to issue translations of Church documents in all major languages. For this reason, the publication of the Council documents in various languages depended on independent projects undertaken by publishers in the various countries around the world. I am indebted to David A. Peterman, Ph.D for information leading to a more complete enumeration of the English editions than I provided in the first version of this blog entry.

Although various scholars translated one document or another, the first comprehensive English translation of the documents was prepared by the National Catholic Welfare Conference. These translations were published individually, and later as a group under the editorship of Rev. J. L. Gonzalez, by the Daughters of St. Paul, which in those days made a considerable point of providing English translations of many Church documents to the general public. The full Gonzalez edition was published as *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II and the Instruction on the Liturgy* in 1967, which actually made it the second full set to become widely available. Later in 1999, the Daughters' Pauline Books and Media published an edition entitled *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II with Introduction* by Douglas G. Bushman, which included outlines. These translations are long since out of print. Though it was once used in at least one college course, the relatively recent Bushman edition will no longer even show up used on Amazon.

The two most well-known English editions of the Documents of Vatican II were put together by Walter M. Abbott, SJ and Austin P. Flannery, OP. The first—which I read as soon as it was published immediately following the Council in 1966—was prepared under the general editorship of Fr. Abbott. It contains an extensive introductory note by the translation editor, Msgr. Joseph Gallagher, which acknowledges a debt to the NCWC translations. Though now also out of print, this was the most widely circulated edition of the conciliar documents in English for many years. The introduction to the volume was written by Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, Archbishop of Baltimore, but it also includes a brief introductory essay by Bishop Reuben H. Mueller, President of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, entitled “An Adventure in Ecumenical Cooperation”. Each document is prefaced and followed by comments from one scholar or

another—priest or lay, Catholic or non-Catholic—except that the majority of the introductions are by Jesuits. The documents were presented in a kind of logical order, beginning with the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, and ending with the Declaration on Religious Freedom. The edition was published by the Jesuit-run America Press.

A second English translation was published nine years later, in 1975, under the direction of Austin P. Flannery, OP. Happily, it is still widely available new in an inexpensive paperback. The edition was issued mainly to take into account various follow-up documents which had been issued in the intervening years to clarify or provide further implementation of the various conciliar texts, and the most important of these are included in the volume. In 1982, a second volume (*Vatican II: More Postconciliar Documents*) was issued, making the two-volume edition the best way to follow the official documentary continuation of the Council's work. In preparing the fresh translation for this edition, Fr. Flannery was able to compare the new translation with both the French and Italian editions, and the Abbot edition, which were already in use. The Flannery edition presents the Council documents in chronological order, based on the date of issue at the Council itself; it omits the papal addresses which opened and closed the Council's individual sessions and the Council as a whole. It was published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Interestingly, while the Abbott volume deliberately cultivates an ecumenical and even progressive tone, the Flannery volume suggests just the opposite. The Preface was by the conservative John Cardinal Wright. Clearly this edition was designed to indicate how Rome understood the Council documents as evidenced by her subsequent decrees. Indeed, in explaining his decision to include the follow-up documents issued by the Holy See, Fr. Flannery notes:

One knows, of course, that there are many, perhaps very many priests, religious and lay people who, since the controversies of the sixties, are unlikely to lose any sleep over the location of a Roman document—any Roman document! In fact they may find the mere mention of a Roman document a soporific. For some of them, the phrase, *Roma locuta, causa finita*: Rome has spoken, the case is finished,” may have taken on a new and cynical meaning, best rendered perhaps by “Rome has spoken, that's one more subject buried.” That is a pity, and they are themselves the poorer.

Thus the battle with theological dissidence within the post-conciliar Church was already

well joined by the mid 1970's.

Had it not been for a kind note from Dr. Peterman, I would have continued to think the state of the editions of Vatican II has remained unchanged since that time, but not so. In 1990, Norman P. Tanner put together an immense two-volume work of some 2,500 pages entitled *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, which includes the official documents of every ecumenical council from Nicaea through Vatican II. It appears to have been published both by Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, and new copies of the two-volume set are still available, though they cost over \$150. This edition is particularly valuable in that the Latin and the English texts appear on facing pages and the translation is reportedly the best of the bunch. Clearly this should be the first choice for a scholarly study of the texts, despite Tanner's decision to employ inclusive language.

At some point in the past ten years, the Vatican added the documents of Vatican II in multiple languages, including English, to its web site (www.vatican.va). A quick check of these texts suggests that they may have been modified slightly from whichever of the pre-existing translations the Vatican thought best. Whatever the case, the texts supplied in the CatholicCulture.org library are the same as those on the Vatican web site. In the commentaries which follow, all quotations will be taken from these digital texts.

On the Liturgy: Introduction

Some of the documents of Vatican II are longer and more detailed, more central to the Church's purposes, or more controversial in their application than others. It has therefore become apparent that if I am to comment usefully on each document within the medium of the *On the Culture* blog, I will have to devote multiple entries to some of the texts. The very first document on the Liturgy is a stellar example. In terms of length, it is in the second tier of the sixteen documents (along with the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* and the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*); only the two documents on the Church herself are longer. The liturgy is the central action of the Church—the worship Christ offers in and through His mystical body to the Father. And the implementation of the Council's proposals for the liturgy touches all Catholics directly and has been extraordinarily controversial. Therefore, I will have to devote four entries to this topic.

The first document issued by the Second Vatican Council was the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* on December 4, 1963. Clearly the reform and renewal of the Church's public worship was a key concern of the Council. Among the problems which had been noted by many bishops and even Pope Pius XII in previous years were the lack of understanding of the words used in the liturgy on the part of most people, a lack of involvement in the action of the liturgy on the part of the laity, and a lack of clarity and simplicity that had gradually afflicted the Tridentine rituals, as well as excessive repetition, which detracted from the "noble simplicity" which was considered the hallmark of the Latin Rite.

Many people feel very strongly about liturgical matters. Moreover, given the liturgical upheaval following the Council, including all the liturgical horrors that came to pass in the first post-conciliar generation, some conservative Catholics have reacted by arguing that the Tridentine Rite as we employed it in the early 1960's was so perfect that there was never any need for liturgical renewal in the first place. By way of defending the Council itself, let me suggest that this extreme position is difficult to maintain unless one really wants to argue (to take one example from among many) that praying the Rosary while the priest attends to the Mass (a common practice at the time) is an *ideal* mode of participation. Also, whatever may be said about the ease with which Mass regularly attended in Latin may be understood, especially with the aid of bilingual missals, the same cannot be said about those sacraments in which the faithful participate

only seldom and typically without benefit of textual aids (such as baptism, confirmation, or anointing of the sick).

Such concerns, and others, are reflected in the text. It is also important to note that the Council sometimes used the term “restoration” to describe its proposed reform of the liturgy. This is the key word in the title of the very first chapter of the Constitution, “General Principles for the Restoration and Promotion of the Sacred Liturgy.” Thus it is clear that the Council was not completely happy with the way in which the Tridentine rite had evolved through various accretions over the years, nor with how that Rite had been adapted to changing historical and cultural situations, nor with what they perceived as a decline over an extended period of the active participation of the whole body of the Church in what should be the central action of the Body of Christ. With these background considerations in mind, we may proceed next to the text itself.

On the Liturgy: Overview & General Norms

Having briefly introduced the concerns of the Council Fathers, let's take a closer look at the text of [Sacrosanctum Concilium](#), leading up to the General Norms which the Council promulgated to guide liturgical reform. Following an introduction which attempts to balance the need for revision with fidelity to tradition, the *Constitution on the Liturgy* is divided into seven chapters:

1. General Principles for the Restoration and Promotion of the Sacred Liturgy;
2. The Most Sacred Mystery of the Eucharist;
3. The Other Sacraments and the Sacramentals;
4. The Divine Office;
5. The Liturgical Year;
6. Sacred Music;
7. Sacred Art and Sacred Furnishings.

There is also an Appendix on the Revision of the Calendar. These divisions show the scope of the document. Perhaps the most important thing to be said from our vantage point is that while what we have now in the areas of chapters 3, 4 and 5 bears a reasonably close resemblance to what the Council called for, things are quite otherwise with chapters 1, 2, 6 and 7. Thus, if we were to attempt to guess what Vatican II said from what we see in these areas today, we will be nothing short of astonished when we read the actual text of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

This astonishment will be nowhere more evident than in rereading the first sub-section of the very first chapter, on "The Nature of the Sacred Liturgy and Its Importance in the Church's Life". Consider:

Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree. (7)

In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle. (8)

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. (10)

From the liturgy, therefore, and especially from the Eucharist, grace is poured forth upon us as from a fountain, and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God to which all other activities of the Church are directed, as toward their end, are achieved with maximum effectiveness. (10)

Without arguing here for any particular change or expressing a preference for any particular rite, I believe most deeply committed Catholics now would agree that the community-oriented liturgical celebrations so common today, which in many dioceses and parishes seem more concerned with a light-hearted celebration of the congregation itself than with glorifying the most high God, do not derive their fundamental inspiration from words such as these. In any case, this seems to be the judgment of Pope Benedict XVI.

There are in fact five sub-sections in this all-important first chapter (General Principles). The first sub-section calls for a clear focus on the Paschal Mystery at the heart of the Church's life and liturgy, with a concentration on Christ's presence in the minister, the Word, and—above all—the Eucharist. This is so important that “pastors of souls must, therefore, realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the laws governing valid and lawful celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it” (11). The second sub-section calls for appropriate training in seminaries and other programs so that all priests and future priests will be well-equipped to promote this sort of active participation. Sub-sections four and five deal briefly with the promotion of liturgical life in the diocese and parish and with the development of commissions on the liturgy to foster true liturgical renewal at the level of the conference, the diocese and the parish. Some will cringe at this, but only because—in the event—such commissions were mostly hijacked by those with ideas of their own.

The third sub-section, entitled “The Reform of the Sacred Liturgy”, sets forth the basic path of restoration and renewal for the liturgy which the Council proposed:

The liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time, if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become less suitable. In this restoration both texts and rites should be drawn up so as to express more clearly the holy things which they signify. (21)

The Council declared in its first General Norm that the “regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See, and, as laws may determine, on the bishop” (a principle frequently ignored with results we have all witnessed). The Fathers also insisted on careful theological, historical and pastoral study of each part of the liturgy to be revised. One may also question the pastoral wisdom which informed these theological and historical studies in the years to follow.

But in this same section of General Norms there was one principle which has, in fact, been successfully implemented:

Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from it that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung. It is from the scriptures that the prayers, collects, and hymns draw their inspiration and their force, and that actions and signs derive their meaning. Hence in order to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy it is essential to promote that sweet and living love for sacred scripture to which the venerable tradition of Eastern and Western rites gives testimony. (24)

Here, apart from continuing quarrels over the translation of Scripture, it is universally acknowledged (indeed, it really cannot be denied) that the use of Scripture in the *Novus Ordo* is substantially greater and more thorough than before. The faithful are exposed to significantly more of the Bible at Mass over the two and three year cycles of readings. In this one area, at least, the intentions of the Council have been fulfilled.

On the Liturgy: Particular Norms & the Eucharist

Following the General Norms, the [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy](#) outlines more particular norms for authentic renewal which clarify more precisely what the Council Fathers intend. In the “Norms Drawn from the Hierarchic and Communal Nature of the Liturgy”, the Council emphasizes that liturgical services are not private functions but “celebrations of the Church which is ‘the sacrament of unity,’ namely, ‘the holy people united and arranged under their bishops’” (26).

Therefore, liturgical services “pertain to the whole Body of the Church. They manifest it, and have effects upon it. But they also touch individual members of the Church in different ways” (26). The text specifies that “each person, minister or layman, who has an office to perform, should carry out all and only those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy” (28). And to promote active participation, “the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns, as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes. And at the proper time a reverent silence should be observed” (30).

In the “Norms Based upon the Educative and Pastoral Nature of the Liturgy”, we find that “the rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity. They should be short, clear, and free from useless repetitions. They should be within the people’s powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation” (34). In context, this may legitimately taken as a call to purify the Tridentine rite of some of its repetition and obscurity. It is undeniable that the structure of the Novus Ordo is easier to follow and the relationship among the parts clearer. Many would argue, however, that liturgists have shown so little respect for the intelligence of non-professionals that they have introduced triviality and banality as a substitute for “noble simplicity”.

In this section also belongs the norm for the use of both Latin and the vernacular. Essentially, “the use of the Latin language...is to be preserved in the Latin rites” but because the use of the vernacular in Mass and the sacraments “may frequently be of great advantage to the people, a wider use may be made of it, especially in readings, directives and in some prayers and chants” (36).

The second Chapter, on the Eucharist, provides the quotations which most closely enshrine what the Council hoped to achieve with respect to the Mass. Two sections are

worth quoting at particular length:

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word, and be nourished at the table of the Lord's Body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves. Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other, so that finally God may be all in all. (48)

And, therefore:

For this purpose the rites are to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance. Parts which with the passage of time came to be duplicated, or were added with little advantage, are to be omitted. Other parts which suffered loss through accidents of history are to be restored to the vigor they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary. (50)

In this section again, the Council calls for the purposes and relationships of the parts of the Mass to be made clear; for the homily to further honor the Word of God by drawing its inspiration from the readings of the day; for the restoration of the prayer of the faithful; for increased use of the vernacular; for the use of hosts at Communion which were consecrated at the same Mass (this was commonly *not* the practice before the Council); for the faithful to understand that they should attend the *whole Mass* (both the liturgy of the Word and of the Eucharist, as many in those days short-changed everything before the Offertory and after Communion); and for proper procedures for concelebration.

It is perfectly consistent with the Council's understanding of the importance of the Liturgy to the Church's life that this second chapter on the Eucharist should complement the first in articulating most clearly the Council's desires and goals. It remains in my final commentary on the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* to look briefly at matters of concern apart from the Mass itself.

On the Liturgy: Related Concerns

Having commented at some length on the Norms for liturgical renewal which first and foremost affect the Mass, the most important work for the understanding and importance of the [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy](#) is completed. Still, as we have seen in the list of chapter titles, the Council did not neglect closely related subjects: the other sacraments, sacramentals, the Divine Office, the Liturgical year, sacred music and sacred art. I can touch only fleetingly on these topics.

Thus the Council calls for the extension of the vernacular in the other sacraments and sacramentals so that these may be more easily understood and appreciated. It further calls particular attention to the fact that Anointing of the Sick should not be construed (as it certainly was at the time) as a sacrament applicable only to those in imminent danger of death.

The Council also mandates a reform of the Divine Office (or Liturgy of the Hours). It calls for the restoration of the traditional sequence of the hours so that the Divine Office may be more easily used to sanctify the entire day; it stresses the importance of an excellent selection of readings from Scripture, the Fathers and other great saints; it encourages the laity to also make use of the Office (as many have since done); and it urges the public celebration of Vespers on major feasts and Sundays.

The Council also calls for a revised liturgical calendar to emphasize, first, the richness of Christ's salvific work; second, the salvific importance and maternal solicitude of Mary; and third, the witness of the martyrs and saints. The Fathers also call strongly for the encouragement of both internal individual and external social penance during Lent.

In the area of sacred music, Gregorian Chant and the pipe organ are accorded pride of place, and instruction is given for the use of other musical compositions and instruments. Such instruments are always to be "suitable for sacred use" so that they "accord with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful" (120). Texts for chants and hymns are to be drawn from Scripture and liturgical sources.

And in the final chapter, norms are set down for education in, and the selection and cultivation of, sacred art. Given what we see so much of in Church architecture and Church adornment today, the following quote may occasion additional astonishment:

Bishops should be careful to ensure that works of art which are repugnant to faith, morals, and Christian piety, and which offend true religious sense either by depraved forms or through lack of artistic merit or because of mediocrity or pretense, be removed from the house of God and from other sacred places. (124)

One would think that such a stricture could have protected the faithful not only from many older, poorly-done and saccharine statues, but from crucifixes that look like grasshoppers and many a glib banner, not to mention churches which, in their fundamental architecture, more or less deliberately obliterate Christian symbolism or even any sense of the sacred at all.

But I digress, and we must mention in closing the unusual appendix, which addresses two special calendar issues, issues that must have been in the air then, but which I am quite sure very few will remember now. Thus, for the Church's own liturgical calendar, the Council does not oppose the proposal of celebrating Easter on a fixed date, but only if it can be worked out with all concerned parties, including the Orthodox. For the civil calendar, the Council does not object to the proposal for a civil perpetual calendar as long as it preserves the seven-day week, which is essential to the rhythm of the Church's life.

The sections devoted to these topics are quite short. On these and any of the topics summarized in this four-part commentary, a quick re-reading of the appropriate sections of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* itself will quickly acquaint the reader with the full mind of the Council. No consideration of the Liturgy can be complete, of course, without due attention to the many liturgical documents which have been issued since the Council. But in these days when the Pope is clearly working on a "reform of the reform", it is important to return to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* so that we can better evaluate where the desires of Vatican II on the liturgy have been realized, and where they have been thwarted by those who claimed to implement the Council's norms.

On Social Communication

The second document promulgated by the Second Vatican Council was the *Decree on the Means of Social Communication (Inter Mirifica)*, issued on December 4, 1963. It is extremely brief, its contents are predictable, and it is easily summarized in a single post. The essential concern of the Council here was to enjoin upon all Catholics the importance of using social media responsibly, for the common good, and to enhance the apostolic ministry of the Church.

The Council also mandated that the Holy See's office of social communication issue a more complete pastoral instruction "to ensure that the principles and rules of the Council on the means of social communication be put into effect" (23). This was fulfilled in the lengthier *Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication (Communio et progressio)* in January of 1971. As a non-conciliar document it does not concern us here, but it is worth noting that its foreword states that the Council's teachings on the media are not limited to *Inter Mirifica*, but may also be found in the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the *Decree on Ecumenism*, the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, the *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, and the *Decree on the Pastoral Duties of Bishops*. Still, one step at a time.

Inter Mirifica has just two (untitled) chapters. The first focuses on moral responsibility in the use of the media. The second covers the use of the media to enhance and expand the apostolate.

Moral Responsibility

The Council immediately affirms that the principles of the moral order must be applied to the media as elsewhere, but it notes that there are two aspects to this application: first, "the subject-matter, or content, which each medium communicates in its own way"; and second, "the circumstances in which the content is communicated." Thus:

The circumstances can modify and even totally alter the morality of a production. In this regard, particular importance may attach to the manner in which any given medium achieves its effect. Its impact may be such that people, especially if they are insufficiently prepared, will only with difficulty advert to it, control it, or, if need be, reject it. (4)

With respect to both of these concerns, the Council stresses several points:

1. The “right to information on the subjects that are of concern to men either as individuals or as members of society” which “demands that the content of the communication be true and—within the limits set by justice and charity—complete” (5);
2. The need to establish a proper relationship “between the rights of art...and the moral law”, especially given increasing controversies arising from an “erroneous understanding either of ethics or of aesthetics,” for the moral law “alone is superior to and is capable of harmonizing all forms of human activity, not excepting art” (6);
3. The importance of avoiding representations of moral evil which, instead of leading to “a deeper knowledge and analysis of man and to a manifestation of the true and the good”, actually undermine the good of souls through presentations which “lead all too easily to base desires in man wounded by original sin” (7).

The text goes on to indicate the proper exercise of responsibility among all parties. Thus the media consumer should possess “a properly motivated selectivity” which “would be wholly in favor of whatever excels in virtue, culture and art” while avoiding “whatever might be a cause or occasion of spiritual harm” (9). All consumers, “especially the young, should learn moderation and discipline in their use” of the media, while parents must remember that “it is their duty to see that entertainments and publications which might endanger faith and morals do not enter their houses and that their children are not exposed to them elsewhere” (10).

Those involved in the creation and dissemination of social media—journalists, writers, actors, designers, producers, exhibitors, distributors, operators, sellers, critics, etc.—self-evidently bear “a very great responsibility” because “they have power to direct mankind along a good path or an evil path by the information they impart and the pressure they exert”. The Council recommends the formation of professional associations “capable of imposing on their members...a respect for the moral law” (11). Civil authorities also bear particular responsibilities because of their role in fostering the common good. They are bound to ensure that “public morality and social progress are not gravely endangered through the misuse of these media” (12).

Apostolate

The second chapter concentrates on the need to make apostolic use of all the means of social communication. The Council begins by emphasizing that if “one really wants to form readers in a truly Christian spirit, an authentically Catholic press ought to be established and supported” and “the faithful should be reminded of the need to read and circulate the Catholic press if they are to judge all events from a Christian standpoint” (14). Brief attention is also given to radio, television, film and theater. The Internet, obviously, was not yet foreseen, but any set of specific media examples clearly serves to highlight the requirements of all.

The Council recommends appropriate training among Catholics for the apostolic use of the media. It is noteworthy that it does not regard a noble purpose as sufficient. Rather, apostolic use of the media “should excel by technical perfection and by effectiveness” (14). At the same time, appropriate training must not be merely technical; it must include “a complete formation, imbued with the Christian spirit and especially with the Church’s social teaching” (15).

The Council mandates that a day be set aside each year in every diocese “on which the faithful will be reminded of their duties” regarding Catholic social communications (18). It also states that all projects for Catholic social communications, regardless of who engages in them, are to be overseen in each diocese by the bishop, “to promote and, where they touch the public apostolate, to regulate them, including those under the control of exempt religious” (20). At the national level, the same office is to be undertaken by episcopal commissions or bishops appointed to the task (21); at the international level, such oversight belongs exclusively to the Holy See (22).

The Council concludes by expressing its confidence that:

all the sons of the Church will welcome the principles and regulations contained in this decree and will observe them faithfully. Thus they will not suffer damage as they use the media. Rather will the media, like salt and light, add savor to the earth and light to the world. (24)

Sadly, contemporary media, even in the Catholic world, seldom resembles what the Council envisioned; clearly the spiritual and moral principles in the *Decree on the Means of Social Communication* have been observed too often only in the breach. Nonetheless, the time may now be ripe. Once again, therefore, it is worth reminding ourselves of what the documents of the Second Vatican Council really say.

On the Church: Introduction

The third document issued by the Second Vatican Council, on November 21, 1964, is undoubtedly the crown jewel—the impressive *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*. It is one of the Council’s two major documents on the Church, the other being the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. The former document is clearly devoted to describing the nature of the Church in her deepest identity, while the latter is pastorally oriented toward her specific situation in the modern age, and her mode of action in contemporary circumstances.

It is noteworthy that the Council issued two dogmatic constitutions, this one on the Church and another on Divine Revelation, and it is necessary to note at least in passing that the very titles of these documents are sufficient to refute those who maintain that, because Vatican II was called primarily for a pastoral purpose, it never intended to teach anything in matters of faith or morals. Not only does this odd notion suggest that faith and morals are irrelevant to the Church’s pastoral activity, but it also ignores the obvious intent of the Council’s decision to entitle two of her documents as “dogmatic”.

Tellingly, the two documents on the Church (again, one dogmatic, the other pastoral) are by far the longest. Each is roughly twice as long as any other document. Clearly these two enshrine the Council’s most central and important purpose, which may be described as bringing the Church to a fuller understanding of herself so that every member of the faithful might more effectively contribute to the fulfillment of her mission in the world. The *Dogmatic Constitution*, removed as it is from issues of place and time and focused on the very nature of the Church herself, is necessarily the font from which all the Council’s pastoral initiatives must draw their wisdom, strength and efficacy. It is not surprising, therefore, that *Lumen Gentium* is one of the most beautiful, deeply spiritual and inspiring documents ever issued by the Magisterium of the Church.

It consists of eight chapters, as follows:

1. The Mystery of the Church
2. On the People of God
3. On the Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular on the Episcopate
4. The Laity
5. The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church

6. Religious
7. The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Its Union with the Church in Heaven
8. The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church

There is also an Appendix, not promulgated by the Council but attached to the official Latin text of *Lumen Gentium* in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, on the *Constitution's* treatment of the bishops as a “college”. This appendix consists of four theological notes which clarify the term “college” in light of the document’s text. To the reader after the fact these clarifications appear to be so amply included in the text itself as to be all but unnecessary; for example, the Conciliar text repeatedly takes great pains to ensure that the idea of “college” is not conceived independently of the authority of the pope, who is the college’s head. Thus it is clear that these clarifications grew out of the memory of the debates which preceded the approval of the final document, memories which were still coloring a proper understanding of the text.

A Necessary Interruption

There is one more point to be made, though it seems a shame to have to give it disproportionate space. Some of those who have been appalled by the secularization of the Church in the West between 1965 and the present, and who have erroneously assumed that this secularization was brought about by *afaitful* implementation of the conciliar documents, have found themselves with a sort of psychological vested interest in establishing that the Council, for all practical purposes, dealt only in recommendations that the faithful could either take or leave. This has given rise to a fruitless quarrel over the authority of the Second Vatican Council. The Theological Commission (the committee of bishops charged with the drafting of the document) addressed this issue briefly prior to the vote on the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, and while not part of the official text of the Constitution, its remarks are also included in the Appendix published in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. The need for this arose because some councils have been more or less entirely dogmatic in character, consisting of brief texts which were almost exclusively composed of formal definitions or anathemas, but Vatican II did not take this form.

Therefore, the Commission stated that “the Council’s text must always be interpreted in accordance with the general rules that are known to all” and to make these rules clear,

it briefly summarized them. First, the Council “defines as binding on the Church only those things in matters of faith and morals which it shall openly declare to be binding.” Second, everything else must be “accepted and embraced by each and every one of Christ’s faithful according to the mind of the sacred Council” as known from the “matter treated or from its manner of speaking, in accordance with the norms of theological interpretation.”

This is simply a succinct statement of the normal rules (“known to all”) of theological interpretation that apply to all magisterial teaching, including that of the papal Magisterium, as in encyclicals. In other words, this statement represents the magisterial norm; it is not some special license for confusion in accepting and obeying the Conciliar decrees. In the light of longstanding quarrels, I have been forced to comment on this. But in fact no part of the Appendix need detain us further in our exploration of the text, because all parts of the Appendix simply reaffirm what is already clear in the text of the Constitution itself when read “in accordance with the general rules that are known to all.”

In closing, it is worth noting that *Lumen Gentium* has two sets of footnotes. The first and longest set are devoted exclusively to Scripture references, enabling the reader to grasp at a glance the rich Scriptural underpinnings of the document. The second set of notes provide doctrinal references to past Magisterial documents and patristic texts. Finally, while a subsequent summary of each chapter of *Lumen Gentium* would be appropriate, in my opinion it would make the series too long. Therefore, the rest of this seminal document will be covered in just four additional posts.

On the Church: The Mystery

The central purpose of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* is “to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission” (1). The first two chapters clearly build toward the document’s great third chapter on the episcopacy, but because they have generated considerable controversy in their own right, I will treat them separately here.

The first chapter (“The Mystery of the Church”) teaches that the Church is the kingdom of Christ “now present in mystery” and that the Holy Spirit was sent on Pentecost to “continually sanctify the Church”, which He “both equips and direct with hierarchical and charismatic gifts and adorns with His fruits” (4). At the same time, while growing slowly, “the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King” (5). The Council also takes up the various images or metaphors of the Church, as used in Scripture and developed by the Fathers. Among other realities thus expressed, the Church is a body with Christ as its head and a bride loved by Christ the bridegroom.

This first chapter closes with a consideration of the Church’s visibility. She is a visible society governed by the Pope and the bishops, “a living organ of salvation” which “by no weak analogy...is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word.” In other words:

[T]he society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthy Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element. (8)

It is in this context that the Council makes a statement which has been abused by both Modernists and Traditionalists: “[T]his Church constituted and organized in the world as a society *subsists in* the Catholic Church” (8; emphasis added). Because earlier doctrinal statements had used “is” where the Council uses the more philosophical term “subsists in”, some thought the Council was teaching that the Church of Christ also exists fully beyond the visible borders of the Catholic Church. But that the Council meant no such thing is clear from the same sentence, which specifically notes only that *many elements*

of sanctification and truth [for example, Scripture and the action of the Holy Spirit] are found outside of its visible structure” (8; emphasis added). In fact, “these elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity” (8) (*cf. Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church and Commentary*).

The second chapter, “On the People of God”, develops the idea of the Church as a messianic people with Christ at its head:

[A]s a messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, it is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth, it is also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth. (9)

Thus can the Church serves as the sacrament of salvation even for those outside her visible borders, as the Council will later note. This section goes on to discuss the role played by each of the sacraments in the priestly and salvific character of the Church, and also emphasizes that “the entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief” (12)—an expression of the Church’s indefectibility.

Because “all men are called to belong to the new people of God” (13) and because the Council emphatically reaffirms that the Church “is necessary for salvation” (14), the chapter concludes with an extended consideration not only of the Church’s catholicity (universality) but also of the relationship of non-Catholics to this universal Church. After clearly outlining what it means to be “fully incorporated in the society of the Church” (14), the Council considers the different degrees of relationship to the Church characteristic of catechumens, non-Catholic Christians, and those who have not yet received the Gospel.

Based on the earlier material describing the Church as the necessary priestly sacrament of salvation for all, the Council notes that salvation is open to those 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” (16). It is worth mentioning that this point is footnoted to the [letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston](#) in 1949 concerning the affair of Fr. Leonard Feeney, which gives a corresponding presentation of the Church’s understanding of the axiom “outside the Church there is no salvation”.

Unfortunately, this is another passage which has been abused by both Modernists and Traditionalists. The former have frequently acted as if it means the Church is irrelevant to salvation (the very opposite of what the Council taught) while the latter have accused the Council of changing Catholic doctrine and effectively rendering missionary activity irrelevant by casting altogether too wide a net. However, not only had these exact points been authoritatively taught earlier, particularly by Pope Pius XII in his great encyclical *On the Mystical Body of Christ (Mystici Corporis)*, but the Council also specifically refutes this objection by noting that missionary activity is essential in order to fulfill Christ's command, overcome the deceptions of the devil, and save men from despair (16) as well as to "snatch them from the slavery of error and of idols...so that through charity they may grow up into full maturity in Christ" (17).

This second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* concludes by clearly focusing the Church's mission on the glory of God:

Through her work, whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men, whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples, is not only saved from destruction but is also cleansed, raised up and perfected unto the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man. (17)

On the Church: The Bishops

In his Angelus message of October 22, 1995, Pope John Paul II called [Lumen Gentium](#) “the keystone of the Council’s whole Magisterium”. In many ways its most important chapter was the third, “On the Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular on the Episcopate”, for it was here that the Council intentionally presented its greatest doctrinal development on a single topic. Referring to (and fully endorsing) Vatican I’s work on the papacy, the Council fathers state: “Continuing in that same undertaking, this Council is resolved to declare and proclaim before all men the doctrine concerning bishops, the successors of the apostles, who together with the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the visible Head of the whole Church, govern the house of the living God” (18).

The core of this “doctrine concerning bishops” is this:

By episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacramental Orders is conferred, that fullness of power, namely, which both in the Church’s liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry. But episcopal consecration, together with the office of sanctifying, also confers the office of teaching and governing, which however, of its very nature can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college. For...it is clear that, by means of the imposition of hands and the words of consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is so conferred, and the sacred character so impressed, that bishops in an eminent and visible way sustain the roles of Christ Himself as Teacher, Shepherd and High Priest, and that they act in His person. (21)

In other words, bishops have the fullness of orders by which they, like the Pope, have the office of teaching, ruling and sanctifying in the Church. Bishops are, indeed, vicars of Christ in their own dioceses, as the Pope is in the universal Church. But unlike the Roman Pontiff, who “has full, supreme and universal power over the Church...and is always free to exercise this power”, the “college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head” (22). Within this context, the bishops, like the apostles and like Peter, have the power to bind and loose.

This principle of collegiality, by which Christ's governance of His Church is most fully imaged and represented when the bishops act in union with their head, is "exercised in a solemn way in an ecumenical council" (and a council "is never ecumenical unless it is confirmed or at least accepted as such by the successor of Peter") (22). Indeed, while the pope is "the visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful" within the universal Church, "the individual bishops...are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches" (23).

Having established the immense dignity and authority of the bishop, which depends at one and the same time upon his possession of the fullness of sacred orders and his unity with the entire college including its head, the Council goes on to stress the threefold office of the bishop:

1. The prophetic (teaching) office: "The infallibility promised to the Church resides also in the body of Bishops, when that body exercises the supreme magisterium with the successor of Peter" (25).
2. The priestly (sanctifying) office: "A bishop, marked with the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is 'the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood', especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered, and by which the Church continually lives and grows" (26).
3. The kingly (governing) office: "Bishops, as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, govern the particular churches entrusted to them.... This power, which they personally exercise in Christ's name, is proper, ordinary and immediate, although its exercise is ultimately regulated by the supreme authority of the Church..." (27).

The chapter concludes with a brief consideration of priests who, "although they do not possess the highest degree of the priesthood, and although they are dependent on the bishops in the exercise of their power, are nevertheless united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity" (28). It also briefly mentions deacons, "upon whom hands are imposed 'not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service'...in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God." The Council also states that "the diaconate can in the future be restored as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy", rather than being restricted to the transitional diaconate, which was then typically the case (29).

An understanding of the immense dignity of the episcopal office, as fully developed

in this section of *Lumen Gentium*, is not only important in its own right, but it provides a particular insight into the mind of Pope John Paul II, who was both active at Vatican II and firmly convinced of its importance to the Church. Here we see one reason why this Pope, for better or worse, was reluctant to govern the Church through a vigorous discipline applied to the bishops from Rome. He chose instead to labor mightily in his teachings, travels and prayers to encourage bishops to fully become what they truly were—to take full and proper apostolic responsibility for the local churches under their care, in unity with the whole college and their head.

On the Church: Lay Holiness

If the first two chapters of *Lumen Gentium* contain the most controversial passages and the third contains the Council's most important doctrinal exposition, the fourth and fifth are vital to the Church's mission in a very different sense. These chapters address a topic too often neglected in earlier periods by stressing the vital part that lay people play in the body of Christ and the fact that all Christians, not just the "professionals", are called to be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect. In the Church, holiness is job one—for everybody.

In Chapter 4 ("On the Laity"), the Council said the laity are called, as "living members" of the Body of Christ, "to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification, since this very energy is a gift of the Creator and a blessing of the Redeemer" (33). Then, in a key passage, the Council went on to identify the essence of the lay apostolate by which the laity are to answer this call:

The lay apostolate...is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, by the sacraments, especially holy Eucharist, that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished. Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church.... (33)

The Council pointed out that the laity can "also be called in various ways to a more direct cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy" and that "they have the capacity to assume from the Hierarchy certain ecclesiastical functions" (33), but it is quite clear that the Council did not intend that these extraordinary forms of "cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy" (such as the liturgical functions of lector and Eucharistic minister) should cause the laity to be cast as miniature clergy instead of being encouraged to engage in their own proper apostolate, which is the transformation of the social order in Christ.

Instead, starting with the principle enunciated by St. Paul that "all things are yours,

and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 *Cor* 3:23), the Council makes the usual and proper focus of the lay apostolate refreshingly clear:

The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God. They must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ and it may more effectively fulfill its purpose in justice, charity and peace. The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfillment of this duty. Therefore, by their competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word.... Moreover, let the laity also by their combined efforts remedy the customs and conditions of the world, if they are an inducement to sin, so that they all may be conformed to the norms of justice and may favor the practice of virtue rather than hinder it. (36)

This chapter concludes with the Council's insistence that "the laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their spiritual shepherds the spiritual goods of the Church." This relates especially to the word of God and the sacraments (rights which were too often denied through heterodox teaching and illicit liturgies in the generation following the Council). The laity are also, "by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church" (37).

From this chapter's stress on the vital role of the laity in the People of God, Chapter 5 on "The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church" follows logically. Important as the concept is, the chapter simply moves through each group in the Church briefly commenting on how true holiness produces an effective witness to Christ proper to each group: Bishops; priests; deacons; married couples; single persons (including widows); laborers; and the poor, infirm and sick. Any number of divisions could have been used; they come together to make the point enunciated at the end of the section:

Finally all Christ's faithful, whatever be the conditions, duties and circumstances of their lives—and indeed through all these—will daily increase in holiness, if they receive all things with faith from the hand of their heavenly Father and if they

cooperate with the divine will. In this temporal service, they will manifest to all men the love with which God loved the world. (41)

As the principle means of becoming holy, the Council identified the use of the sacraments, “frequent participation in the sacred action of the Liturgy”, prayer, self-abnegation, “lively fraternal service”, and the “constant exercise of all the virtues” . The chapter concludes with a special discussion of the immense value of martyrdom and virginity (including celibacy) for the Kingdom of God (42). Thus, “all the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state. Indeed they have an obligation so to strive.”

On the Church: Eschatological Identity

I can see now that it was a mistake not to include Chapter 6 of [Lumen Gentium](#), on “Religious”, in the previous entry (as I had done in my preparatory notes), because the chapter really covers that form of consecration which represents the universal call to holiness (Chapter 5) in a particularly fruitful way. In contrast, Chapter 7 (“The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Its Union with the Church in Heaven”) and Chapter 8 (“The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church”) take up new themes, but I have decided to cover only chapters 6 and 7 here so that, like the Council Fathers themselves, I can reserve Mary for an unplanned separate and final entry.

The chapter on Religious, precisely because it is a special extension of the previous chapter, is the briefest in the document. It explores religious life as a special application of the evangelical counsels which, leading to charity, “join their followers to the Church and its mystery in a special way” (44). Through the profession of the evangelical counsels, the Christian intends “to free himself from those obstacles which might draw him away from the fervor of charity and the perfection of divine worship”, becoming “more intimately consecrated to divine service.” It is the duty of the hierarchy “to regulate the practice of the evangelical counsels by law” to see that they foster “the perfection of love of God and love of neighbor in an outstanding manner and that this profession is strengthened by vows” (45). To locate religious life properly within the Church, the Council notes:

From the point of view of the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious life is not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states. But, rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both these states of life so that they might enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and thus each in one’s own way, may be of some advantage to the salvific mission of the Church. (43)

Chapter 7, “The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Its Union with the Church in Heaven”, is well summarized in its title. While Chapter 6 (Religious) is best understood as a supplement to Chapter 5 (Holiness), it is still true that the perfection of the consecrated life luminously expresses and looks forward to the eschatological nature

of the Church treated in Chapter 7. This chapter explains that the Church “will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven” when “the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ” (48). The governing principle and force of the Church’s eschatological identity is the fact that “Christ, having been lifted up from the earth, has drawn all to Himself.” Until the new heavens and new earth come about, however, the “pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, has the appearance of this world which is passing and she herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God” (48).

Meanwhile we must be constantly vigilant in order to “merit to enter the marriage feast with Him and to be numbered among the blessed, and that we may not be ordered to go into eternal fire”, for “before we reign with Christ in glory, all of us will be made manifest before the tribunal of Christ”(48). Even so, the faithful, whether living or dead, “all in various ways and degrees are in communion in the same charity of God and neighbor and all sing the same hymn of glory to our God. For all who are in Christ, having His Spirit, form one Church and cleave together in Him” (49). The Council teaches that “our union with the Church in heaven is put into effect in its noblest manner especially in the sacred Liturgy” and that, as a result of the Church’s consciousness of the communion of the whole Mystical Body, she has always cultivated both prayers for the dead and the intercession of the saints (50).

Near the end of this chapter, there is a passage which, while applying specifically to popular devotion to the saints, clearly shows the method of renewal adopted by the Council Fathers throughout the rest of their pastoral program. For this reason it is worth quoting at length:

This Sacred Council accepts with great devotion this venerable faith of our ancestors regarding this vital fellowship with our brethren who are in heavenly glory or who having died are still being purified; and it proposes again the decrees of the Second Council of Nicea, the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent. And at the same time, in conformity with our own pastoral interests, we urge all concerned, if any abuses, excesses or defects have crept in here or there, to do what is in their power to remove or correct them, and to restore all things to a fuller praise of Christ and of God. Let them therefore teach the faithful that the authentic cult of the saints consists not so much in the multiplying of external acts, but rather in the greater intensity of our love, whereby, for our own greater good and that of

the whole Church, we seek from the saints “example in their way of life, fellowship in their communion, and aid by their intercession.” On the other hand, let them teach the faithful that our communion with those in heaven, provided that it is understood in the fuller light of faith according to its genuine nature, in no way weakens, but conversely, more thoroughly enriches the laudatory worship we give to God the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit. (51)

I leave the profoundly inspiring last paragraph of this chapter for the reader to discover on his own, but I will remark in closing that this second-last paragraph quoted above once again raises the question of how so many persons, in many of the trends which have plagued the Church for the past fifty years, could have taken such extreme positions on the question of reform with so little attention to what the Council actually said.

On the Church: Mary

The final chapter of the [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church](#) is devoted to “The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church”. This is the only chapter divided into sub-sections. It had been originally planned that the Council would issue a separate document on Mary, but by a small majority the Council Fathers decided instead to add a chapter on Mary to the Council’s central and foundational document, *Lumen Gentium*. This chapter deliberately unites the separate perspectives which led some fathers to emphasize Mary’s relationship with Christ and others to emphasize her relationship with the Church.

The section are entitled as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Role of the Blessed Mother in the Economy of Salvation
3. On the Blessed Virgin and the Church
4. The Cult of the Blessed Virgin in the Church
5. Mary the Sign of Created Hope and Solace to the Wandering People of God

In the Introduction, the Council explains that Mary is endowed with the “high office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God” yet at the same time, as one of the offspring of Adam, she is also “one with all those who are to be saved.” Thus she is “the mother of the members of Christ...having cooperated by charity that faithful might be born in the Church” and “she is hailed as a preeminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity.” Indeed, the Church “honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother” (53). Here the Council effectively identifies Mary as the mother of the Church, but that precise title was not actually formally conferred until Pope Paul VI did so in his final allocution closing the Council.

The second section, covering the role of Mary in the economy salvation, is a beautiful and inspiring exposition of Mary’s unique role in the history of our salvation, beginning with the earliest passages of the Old Testament concerning “the figure of the woman” (55) and ending with Mary’s exaltation as “Queen of the universe, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and the conqueror of sin

and death” (59).

It is in the third section, on Mary’s relationship with the Church, that the Council most fully presents the synthesis of Mary’s relationships to both Christ and the Church. This process begins by emphasizing the unique mediation of Christ:

...the maternal duty of Mary toward men in no wise obscures or diminishes [the] unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power. For all the salvific influence of the Blessed Virgin originates, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. In no way does it impede, but rather does it foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. (60)

In outlining Mary’s role the Council repeatedly acknowledges Christ’s pre-eminence. “By her obedience, faith and burning charity in the work of the Savior in giving back supernatural life to souls” Mary has become “our mother in the order of grace” (61). Nor did she lay aside this salvific duty after Christ’s work was completed and she herself was assumed into heaven, “but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation”, sustaining “this maternity in the order of grace”, which will last “until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect.” Hence “the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix.” But this honor given to Mary must be “so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator”:

For no creature could be counted as equal with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer. Just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by the ministers and by the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is really communicated in different ways to His creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source. (62)

In this context, just as Mary is preeminently “united with her Son”, she is also “intimately united with the Church.” She is “a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ” (63). In addition, the Church in “contemplating her hidden sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father’s will, by receiving the word of God in faith, becomes herself a mother” (64). But while in Mary “the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she is without spot or wrinkle,” the followers of

Christ “still strive to increase in holiness by conquering sin.” Therefore, “they turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues” (65).

In the fourth section, the Council turns to the cult of the Blessed Virgin and, in contrast to so much of what was done in the Council’s name during the first generation following its conclusion, the Council deliberately “admonishes all the sons of the Church” that:

the cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin be generously fostered, and the practices and exercises of piety, recommended by the magisterium of the Church toward her in the course of centuries be made of great moment, and those decrees which have been given in the early days regarding the cult of images of Christ, the Blessed Virgin and the saints, be religiously observed. (67).

The Council also issues appropriate warnings: “Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues” (67).

The chapter on Mary concludes with a very brief final section on Mary as a sign of hope and solace. There follows immediately the final paragraph of *Lumen Gentium*, which leaves no doubt as to the document’s authority. It is Pope Paul VI’s statement of promulgation:

Each and all these items which are set forth in this dogmatic Constitution have met with the approval of the Council Fathers. And We by the apostolic power given Us by Christ together with the Venerable Fathers in the Holy Spirit, approve, decree and establish it and command that what has thus been decided in the Council be promulgated for the glory of God. (68)

On Eastern Catholics

The fourth document issued by the Second Vatican Council, on November 21, 1964, was the *Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite (Orientalium Ecclesiarum)*.

This is a very brief decree designed to set down the basic principles for the proper understanding and operation of Eastern Rite Catholic Churches within the whole body of the Church of Christ.

Orientalium Ecclesiarum must be read against the background of the prevailing attitudes of the preceding period which had led to a somewhat restricted understanding, and perhaps even somewhat restricted operations, of the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rites. The Council wished to reaffirm the importance and the equality of the Eastern Catholic Churches, and so it begins by declaring:

The Holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government and who, combining together into various groups which are held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or Rites. (2)

It follows that:

[T]hese individual Churches, whether of the East or the West, . . . are, each as much as the others, entrusted to the pastoral government of the Roman Pontiff, the divinely appointed successor of St. Peter in primacy over the universal Church. They are consequently of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others as regards rite and they enjoy the same rights and are under the same obligations, also in respect of preaching the Gospel to the whole world (cf. Mark 16, 15) under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff. (3)

The leaders (“hierarchs”) of the various Churches “with jurisdiction in one and the same territory should, by taking common counsel in regular meetings, strive to promote unity of action” (4), while at the same time each Catholic “must retain his own rite wherever he is, must cherish it and observe it to the best of his ability” without prejudice to the right of recourse to the Apostolic See.

Having established the value and importance of the Churches of the East, the Council

solemnly declares that the Churches of the East, as much as those of the West, have a full right and are in duty bound to rule themselves, each in accordance with its own established disciplines, since all these are praiseworthy by reason of their venerable antiquity, more harmonious with the character of their faithful and more suited to the promotion of the good of souls. (5)

Thus “all members of the Eastern Rite should know and be convinced that they can and should always preserve their legitimate liturgical rite and their established way of life, and that these may not be altered except to obtain for themselves an organic improvement.” The Council insists that all the faithful should be properly instructed in “knowledge and veneration” of the “rites, discipline, doctrine, history and character of the members of the Eastern rites”, and it even recommends that religious and associations of the Latin Rite working among Eastern faithful should found houses or provinces of the Eastern Rite “as far as this can be done” (6).

Next, the Council emphasizes that the patriarchate (the jurisdiction of one bishop over all the bishops, clergy and people of his own territory or rite) “has existed in the Church from the earliest times and was recognized by the first ecumenical councils” (7). Addressing the possibility of dissension among the patriarchates, the Council affirms that “all are equal in respect of patriarchal dignity, without however prejudice to the legitimately established precedence of honor” (8), and the Council decrees that “their rights and privileges should be re-established in accordance with the ancient tradition of each of the Churches and the decrees of the ecumenical councils,” that is, the rights and privileges “that obtained in the time of union between East and West” (9). This also applies to major archbishops who rule some individual Churches or rites (10).

Along with the restoration of the dignity of the patriarchate, the Council “confirms and approves the ancient discipline of the sacraments existing in the Oriental Churches” and wishes them to be re-established as circumstances may warrant (12), including the Eastern practice of the priest being the ordinary minister of Confirmation, using chrism blessed by a patriarch or bishop (13). The Council upholds the validity of the sacrament of confirmation performed by ministers of any rite for members of another rite (14), and it also decrees that faculties for hearing confession generally apply to all of the faithful within the entire territory of a Rite, and not just to members of the Rite in question (16). Finally, the Council wishes that the permanent diaconate should be restored in the Eastern Churches, wherever it has fallen into disuse, “in order that the ancient established practice of the Sacrament of Orders in the Eastern Churches may flourish again”, though it leaves the subdiaconate and minor orders to the legislative authority of

each individual Church (17).

The Council also discusses the authority required to alter the feast days common to all Eastern Churches or of an individual Church, the importance of coming to an agreement on the date of Easter within each particular region, the right of the faithful to follow the established custom of a region with respect to the law of the sacred seasons, the importance of the Divine Office for both priests and faithful in the Eastern Rites, and the authority to regulate the use of languages in the liturgy (19-23).

The last section deals with relations with the separated Churches (*i.e.*, Eastern Churches not in communion with Rome), stressing the requirement to promote unity (24) and to recognize the validity of the priesthood of those who may wish to come into union with Rome (25). For these reasons, the Council wishes to adopt a “rather mild policy” which permits the use of each others’ sacraments “where the needs of the salvation of souls and their spiritual good are impelling motives” (26), including common participation in sacred functions “for a just cause” (28). Thus separated Eastern Catholics with the right disposition may be admitted to the sacraments of Penance, the Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick; and Catholics may ask these sacraments of separated Churches “as often as necessity or a genuine spiritual benefit recommends such a course and access to a Catholic priest is physically or morally impossible” (27). But the Council warns:

Common participation in worship (*communicatio in sacris*) which harms the unity of the Church or involves formal acceptance of error or the danger of aberration in the faith, of scandal and indifferentism, is forbidden by divine law. (26)

Orientalium Ecclesiarum concludes by asking all Catholics, whether Eastern or Western, “to pray to God fervently and assiduously, nay, indeed daily, that, with the aid of the most holy Mother of God, all may become one” (30).

On Ecumenism: Principles

Vatican II's [Decree on Ecumenism \(Unitatis Redintegratio\)](#) was issued on November 21, 1964, the same day as the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and the *Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches*, for the three documents are closely connected. *Unitatis Redintegratio* is divided into three chapters covering the principles and practice of ecumenism, and the Churches and ecclesial communities separated from Rome. Although it is not a long document, I will devote this entry exclusively to Chapter I, "Catholic Principles on Ecumenism", and will cover the rest of the document more briefly later.

The concept of ecumenism refers to Our Lord's wish that all His followers should be one, and ecumenism properly applies only to Christians. Even so, the *Decree on Ecumenism* has been rendered controversial by the experience of many that subsequent ecumenical practice has weakened the Catholic understanding of the importance of the Church. To the contrary, however, the whole motive for ecumenism from the Council's point of view is the vital importance of bringing all Christians into unity in the one Church of Christ, which it clearly identifies as the Catholic Church.

In keeping with the importance of the unity Christ desired, the first chapter on principles begins with a clear statement of the work of Christ who, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, "has called and gathered together the people of the New Covenant, who are the Church, into a unity of faith, hope, and charity" (2). Further:

In order to establish this His holy Church everywhere in the world till the end of time, Christ entrusted to the College of the Twelve the task of teaching, ruling and sanctifying. Among their number he selected Peter, and after his confession of faith determined that on him He would build His Church. Also to Peter He promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and after His profession of love, entrusted all His sheep to him to be confirmed in faith and shepherded in perfect unity. (2)

Unfortunately, divisions quickly occurred in the body of Christ, causing it to split into rival communities, and the Council notes that "the children who are born into these Communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation." To the contrary, the Council here establishes the key theological principle which governs the document: "All who believe in Christ and have been

baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect” (3). This is the principle of one faith, one baptism: If you’re baptized, you’re baptized Catholic.

Nonetheless, this communion intrinsic to baptism and faith in Christ is seriously incomplete for those who are separated in any way from the Church:

The differences that exist in varying degrees between them and the Catholic Church—whether in doctrine and sometimes in discipline, or concerning the structure of the Church—do indeed create many obstacles, sometimes serious ones, to full ecclesiastical communion. (3)

It is the point of the ecumenical movement to strive to overcome these obstacles.

Next, the Council enunciates again one of the principles of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, namely that “many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church” (such as Scripture, grace, faith, hope, charity, other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and some visible elements as well, such as certain aspects of sacramental life and liturgy). “All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ” (3). For this reason, the separated communities “most certainly can truly engender a life of grace” and “must be regarded as capable of giving access to the community of salvation” (3).

Balanced against this salvific reality is the inescapably sad fact that “our separated brethren...are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those who through Him were born again into one body.” It is only through “Christ’s Catholic Church” that “they can benefit fully from the means of salvation”, for “Our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, in order to establish the one Body of Christ on earth to which all should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God” (3).

Thus the Council exhorts all the Catholic faithful “to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism”, that is, “the initiatives and activities planned and undertaken, according to the various needs of the Church and as opportunities offer, to promote Christian unity” (4).

These activities are enumerated as follows:

1. Avoidance by all of the failure to represent the condition of the separated brethren with truth and fairness;

2. Dialogue between competent experts from the different Churches and communities;
3. Cooperation among the Churches and communities in duties for “the common good of humanity”;
4. Where allowed, prayer in common;
5. Examination by each person of his own faithfulness to Christ’s will for the Church, and the consequent need to “undertake with vigor the task of renewal and reform”.

The Council also notes the distinction between ecumenical action, which concerns the differences among religious bodies, and the “preparation and reconciliation” of those who “wish for full Catholic communion” (4)—that is, individual converts. *Unitatis Redintegratio* firmly insists that “there is no opposition between the two, since both proceed from the marvelous ways of God” (4).

To me the most interesting section in this first chapter is the Council’s explanation of the primary ecumenical task of each Catholic:

Catholics, in their ecumenical work, must assuredly be concerned for their separated brethren, praying for them, keeping them informed about the Church, making the first approaches toward them. But their primary duty is to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be done or renewed in the Catholic household itself, in order that its life may bear witness more clearly and faithfully to the teachings and institutions which have come to it from Christ through the Apostles. (4)

The Council is painfully aware that even though the Church “has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all means of grace”, its members “fail to live by them with all the fervor that they should” so that “the radiance of the Church’s image is less clear” and “the growth of God’s kingdom is delayed” (4). Thus all Catholics should see to their own renewal first, “preserve unity in essentials”, show charity in all things, and exercise the diversity of gifts they have received to give “ever better expression to the authentic catholicity and apostolicity of the Church”. They should likewise “gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren” (4).

In closing, this chapter of *Unitatis Redintegratio* makes again the important point

which provides the motive for ecumenism in the first place: While the unity of the Church “subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose”, it is also true that “the divisions among Christians prevent the Church from attaining the fullness of catholicity proper to her” (4). Thus the Council expresses the hope that the unity proper to the Church “will continue to increase until the end of time” (4).

On Ecumenism: Practice

The remainder of the [Decree on Ecumenism](#) can be summarized more briefly. It consists of a chapter on “The Practice of Ecumenism” and a chapter on “Churches and Ecclesial Communities Separated from the Roman Apostolic See”.

The second chapter covers ecumenical practice. The Council stresses that “every renewal of the Church is essentially grounded in an increase of fidelity to her own calling” and that “undoubtedly this is the basis of the movement toward unity” (6). Among the areas which ought to contribute in a special way to the ecumenical enterprise are Biblical and liturgical movements, preaching and catechetics, the apostolate of the laity, new forms of religious life, the spirituality of married life, and the Church’s social teaching and social activity. Yet again, amid all these potential activities, the Council insists that “there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart” (6). The soul of the ecumenical movement is “this change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians” (8).

Throughout the discussion of ecumenical practice, the Council strives for a delicate balance. For example, the Council notes that while prayer should be undertaken in common, this does not mean indiscriminate worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*). Worship in common is to be guided by the authority of the local bishop. It is certainly to be desired as a sharing in the means of grace, but as a witness to the unity of the Church, worship in common is generally forbidden where that unity does not exist (8). Rather, in order to work toward the necessary unity, we must study the situation and attitudes of our separated brethren, and the theological problems which have led to this separation (9).

Similarly, the Council insists that the theological and historical forms of training of future bishops and priests be carefully worked out “with due regard for the ecumenical point of view, so that they may correspond more exactly with the facts” rather than “polemically” (10). But at the same time, “nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss and its genuine and certain meaning is clouded” (11).

The Council also envisions that wherever ecumenical cooperation proceeds properly, there should be positive social results which can lead to greater theological unity. Thus ecumenical effort ought to contribute to:

a just evaluation of the dignity of the human person, the establishment of the blessings of peace, the application of Gospel principles to social life, the advancement of the arts and sciences in a truly Christian spirit, or also in the use of various remedies to relieve the afflictions of our times such as famine and natural disasters, illiteracy and poverty, housing shortage and the unequal distribution of wealth. All believers in Christ can, through this cooperation, be led to acquire a better knowledge and appreciation of one another, and so pave the way to Christian unity. (12)

The third chapter highlights the nature of the separation between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches on the one hand and the Western ecclesial communities on the other. In the East, the chief reason for separation is the failure to properly understand and accept the Petrine authority. Nonetheless, the Eastern Churches possess special gifts which should be prized by Catholics: A great love for the sacred liturgy, devotion to Mary, attachment to Tradition, the apostolic succession, true sacraments, and monastic life. Even certain forms of theological expression in the East may “come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation”. The Churches of the East are churches in their own right, with great spiritual riches, and reunion with the Apostolic See should not detract from their own governance and traditions. Therefore, the Council “solemnly repeats the declaration of previous Councils and Roman Pontiffs, that for the restoration or the maintenance of unity and communion it is necessary ‘to impose no burden beyond what is essential’” on the Churches of the East (14 – 16).

In the West, however, the condition of the separated brethren is far more complicated: “There exist important differences from the Catholic Church, not only of an historical, sociological, psychological and cultural character, but especially in the interpretation of revealed truth” (19). Even the positive gifts of these communities are occasions for division. For example, the Council acknowledges “a love and reverence of Sacred Scripture” in the separated Western ecclesial communities, but notes that they differ “regarding the relationship between Scripture and the Church” (20). The Council also notes that most of these communities preserve an authentic sacrament of Baptism, explaining that “whenever the Sacrament of Baptism is duly administered as Our Lord instituted it, and is received with the right dispositions, a person is truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ, and reborn to a sharing of the divine life” (22). And yet:

Baptism is only a beginning, an inauguration wholly directed toward the fullness of life in Christ. Baptism, therefore, envisages a complete profession of faith, complete incorporation in the system of salvation such as Christ willed it to be, and finally complete ingrafting in eucharistic communion. (22)

In the midst of these difficulties, these separated brethren are nourished by their faith in Christ and strengthened by both baptismal grace and the Word of God, as witness their private prayer, Christian family life and community worship, as well as their thanksgiving for blessings and their sense of justice and charity. For this reason, the Council suggests, “ecumenical dialogue might start with discussion of the application of the Gospel to moral conduct” (23).

Unitatis Redintegratio concludes by recognizing that we must place our hope in Christ’s prayer that we may all be one, and not in mere human effort, which can so often be misplaced. Thus the Council issues a stern commandment in the final section, a commandment which has too often been observed only in the breach, providing yet another reason for returning at last to what Vatican II actually taught:

This Sacred Council exhorts the faithful to refrain from superficiality and imprudent zeal, which can hinder real progress toward unity. Their ecumenical action must be fully and sincerely Catholic, that is to say, faithful to the truth which we have received from the apostles and Fathers of the Church, in harmony with the faith which the Catholic Church has always professed, and at the same time directed toward that fullness to which Our Lord wills His Body to grow in the course of time. (24)

On Bishops: The Bishops Themselves

The sixth document issued by Vatican II—the first coming out of its 1965 sessions—was the [Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church \(Christus Dominus\)](#), promulgated on October 28th. I'll cover this in two parts. Since the most highly-developed section of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* dealt with the episcopate, *Christus Dominus* is based on the same dogmatic principles, enabling us to move directly into its primarily pastoral purpose.

After a brief first chapter on the place of bishops in the universal church, the second and central chapter, “Bishops and their Particular Churches or Dioceses”, is primarily devoted to explaining how this ordinary power is to be exercised. The first sub-section of this chapter focuses on the bishops themselves. One of the most important concepts developed at Vatican II was the ordinary power of bishops who, while operating under the authority of the pope, are nonetheless vicars of Christ in their own dioceses: “Individual bishops who have been entrusted with the care of a particular church—under the authority of the supreme pontiff—feed their sheep in the name of the Lord as their own, ordinary, and immediate pastors, performing for them the office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing” (11).

With respect to their teaching office, bishops should first announce the Gospel, expound the whole mystery of Christ, and explain how to give glory to God and attain eternal happiness. They are also to show “that earthly goods and human institutions...are also disposed for man’s salvation.” To this end, they are to teach “according to the doctrine of the Church” the value of the human person (his freedom and bodily life), the family (its unity and stability), the procreation and education of children, civil society (laws, professions, labor and leisure, the arts, technical innovations, poverty and affluence), and they should “set forth the ways by which are to be answered” the most serious questions concerning “the ownership, increase, and just distribution of material goods, peace and war, and brotherly relations among all countries” (12).

As a practical matter, the bishops should teach in a manner “adapted to the needs of the times, that is to say, in a manner that will respond to the difficulties and questions by which people are especially burdened and troubled.” They must guard Catholic doctrine, “teaching the faithful to defend and propagate it”. They should show solicitude for all people, whether believers or not, and a special concern for the poor. They should lead the way in “dialogue” (“conversations on salvation”) with non-believers. They should make

use of all forms of media. And they must provide for sound catechetics through schools, institutes and CCD programs, and for the proper training of catechists. (13)

With respect to their office of sanctifying, the bishops must be supremely confident that, since they possess the fullness of Orders, they are the “principal dispensers of the mysteries of God, as well as being the governors, promoters, and guardians of the entire liturgical life in the church committed to them” (15). They must be “diligent in fostering holiness among their clerics, religious, and laity” and mindful of their obligation to give “an example of holiness in charity, humility, and simplicity of life” (15).

In exercising his office of “father and pastor” (which is the rubric under which the Council addresses the concept of “governing” in this document), bishops should especially “be solicitous for the spiritual, intellectual and material welfare of the priests so that the latter can live holy and pious lives and fulfill their ministry faithfully and fruitfully” (16). They should encourage institutes and meetings for priestly renewal and deeper study. In addition, bishops should encourage various forms of the apostolate, urging the laity to “assume their duty of carrying on the apostolate”, promoting and supporting associations which “either directly or indirectly pursue a supernatural objective”, that is, associations devoted to the Gospel, Christian doctrine, public worship, social goods, works of piety and charity—all properly coordinated under episcopal authority so they may be brought into harmonious action. (17)

The Council recommends that all these apostolic activities “should be properly adapted to the needs of the present day with regard not only for man’s spiritual and moral circumstances but also for his social, demographic, and economic conditions”, and so the Fathers recommend “religious and social research, through offices of pastoral sociology” (17). In addition, both individual bishops and episcopal conferences are urged to show “special concern” for those who “on account of their way of life cannot sufficiently make use of the common and ordinary pastoral care of parish priests”, such as migrants, exiles, refugees, seafarers, air-travelers, gypsies, and so on. (18)

This first sub-section of this central chapter closes by insisting that bishops are to be completely independent of and unhindered by civil authority in the discharge of their duties, including their communication with the Holy See, each other, and the faithful (19). Accordingly, the Council states that rights or privileges of election, nomination, presentation or designation for the office of bishop should no longer be granted to civil authorities, and that civil authorities which have in the past negotiated such rights should give them up freely after discussion with the Apostolic See. (20)

On Bishops: Episcopal Collaborators

After a very brief sub-section in which the Council comments on the need to revise the boundaries of dioceses to take into account current population patterns and pastoral needs, [The Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church](#) proceeds to the third section of its central chapter, “Assistants in the Pastoral Office of the Diocesan Bishops”. Under the heading of “Coadjutor and Auxiliary Bishops”, the Council indicates that bishops should not hesitate to request auxiliaries to better fulfill the needs of their dioceses, and that both coadjutors and auxiliary bishops should be given the faculties they need to perform their roles and manifest their episcopal dignity, while making a point of operating together with the ordinary in single-minded agreement.

Under the heading of “The Diocesan Curia and Commissions”, stress is placed on the importance of the diocesan curia and, in particular, the office of vicar general, to the administration of a diocese. In addition, the Fathers recommend the establishment of a pastoral council in each diocese, consisting of priests, religious and laity, to foster more fruitful examination of pastoral conditions and more effective solutions to pastoral problems (27).

Under the heading of “The Diocesan Clergy”, the Council emphasizes the importance of pastors as direct collaborators with the local bishop in his office of teaching, sanctifying and governing. Community life for priests is recommended wherever possible. Pastors are to be imbued with a missionary zeal to reach out to all within the parish boundaries. Preaching and catechetical instruction are to be used to “bring the faithful to a full knowledge of the mystery of salvation” (30). Pastors should make the “Eucharistic Sacrifice” central to the community, labor to ensure frequent reception of the sacraments by the faithful, and stress especially the sacrament of Penance (30). To facilitate effective governance by the bishop, all local rights of presentation, nomination, and reservation of pastors are to be suppressed, and the distinction between removable and irremovable pastors is to be abrogated. (31)

Under the heading of “Religious”, the Council makes the point that, with respect to the care of souls within a diocese, all religious must collaborate with the local bishop, and are “obliged to discharge their duties as active and obedient helpers of the bishops”, whom they should revere as successors of the Apostles. Indeed, all religious “are subject to the authority of the local Ordinaries” in public worship, the care of souls, preaching to the faithful, religious and moral education of the faithful, catechetical instruction,

liturgical formation, and clerical decorum—and insofar as they run schools, they are subject to the Ordinaries for overall school policy. (35)

The third and final chapter is entitled “Concerning Bishops Cooperating for the Common Good of Many Churches”. This is very brief, but it is here that the Council recommends both the more frequent use of synods of bishops (36) and the establishment of episcopal conferences, where they do not yet exist, for each nation or region (37). In the specific guidelines for such conferences, permanent bureaucracies are not mentioned. An episcopal conference is “a council in which the bishops of a given nation or territory jointly exercise their pastoral office”. It consists of all local Ordinaries. Its decisions are to be reached by a two-thirds majority vote and “are to have juridically binding force only in those cases prescribed by the common law or determined by a special mandate of the Apostolic See” (37).

Christus Dominus closes by mandating that its provisions be taken into account in the revision of the Code of Canon Law, and that directories should be drawn up for the care of souls generally, for individual groups in special circumstances, and for general catechetical instruction to assist bishops and pastors in the discharge of their duties. (44)

In conclusion, it may be worth pointing out that a number of provisions of this document have become key battlegrounds in Church governance. Thus the emphasis on pastoral councils, clearly designed to increase the bishop’s ability to make sound judgments regarding the needs of his diocese, has led at times to reimagining the Church as a democratic institution, while undermining the willingness of some bishops to provide firm leadership. Institutes and programs for priestly renewal and study have often been used to inculcate Modernism, which is still shamefully dominant in Catholic university and religious life. The use of sociological studies has been exploited by many commentators to argue that the Church should change her teachings to match the shortcomings common to particular cultures, rather than to show where more work must be done to transform the lives of the faithful according to eternal principles. “Dialogue” has often served as an excuse for a lack of clarity, rather than becoming a true “conversation on salvation”, which is how the Council defined it. To rediscover the intentions of the Council, these errors in pastoral conception and administration must be corrected.

On Religious Life

The seventh document issued by the Second Vatican Council, on October 28, 1965, was the *Decree on Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (Perfectae Caritatis)*. It is one of the shorter documents, chiefly because it deals only with the broadest guidelines. This has led many to consider the document too vague. Before focusing on the document's strengths, therefore, a word is in order about what specific problems in religious life the Council Fathers might have hoped to address.

In general, we receive only very broad hints. Thus:

The manner of living, praying and working should be suitably adapted everywhere, but especially in mission territories, to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the members and also, as required by the nature of each institute, to the necessities of the apostolate, the demands of culture, and social and economic circumstances. According to the same criteria let the manner of governing the institutes also be examined. (3)

Similarly, religious communities “should continue to maintain and fulfill the ministries proper to them” but “should adapt them to the requirements of time and place, employing appropriate and even new programs and abandoning those works which today are less relevant to the spirit and authentic nature of the community” (20). These two passages reflect the lack of specificity in the text when it comes to enumerating attitudes and practices which require adaptation and renewal.

Nonetheless, a few particular issues are addressed. For example, “care should be taken that there be only one class of Sisters in communities of women. Only that distinction of persons should be retained which corresponds to the diversity of works for which the Sisters are destined” (15). Also, “monasteries of men and communities which are not exclusively lay can... admit clerics and lay persons on an equal footing and with equal rights and obligations, excepting those which flow from sacred orders” (15). These prescriptions clearly hint at unwarranted concern about rank and precedence in some communities.

Other specific concerns include:

- **Papal Cloister:** “Papal cloister should be maintained in the case of nuns engaged

exclusively in the contemplative life.” But “obsolete practices” must be “suppressed” (16).

- **Religious Habit:** The habit should be simple, modest, poor yet becoming; it must meet the requirements of health and “be suited to circumstances of time and place and to the needs of the ministry.” Inadequate habits “must be changed” (17).
- **Union of Institutes:** Independent institutes should “form federations”, particularly if they have highly similar spirits, constitutions and apostolates, and especially when they have “too few members” . The purpose is clearly to reduce debilitating fragmentation. (22)
- **Councils of Major Superiors:** “This synod favors conferences or councils of major superiors, established by the Holy See” as well as similar conferences for secular institutes, to help each institute achieve its purpose, encourage cooperation for the welfare of the Church, ensure a just distribution of ministers, and handle common concerns. (23)

If *Perfectae Caritatis* offers relatively little in terms of concrete proposals, it nonetheless excels at its primary purpose, which is to articulate the wellsprings of authentic renewal for religious. This is clear right from the opening sentence, which roots all religious life in “the pursuit of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels” (1). The whole point of the document is to set down the prescriptions required “in order that the great value of a life consecrated by the profession of the counsels and its necessary mission today may yield greater good to the Church” (1). We note in this purpose an essentially ecclesial focus which permeates the entire document.

Authentic renewal “includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time” (2). This renewal must proceed “under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church” (2). In this context, the authentic principles of renewal are summarized in section 2:

- The “ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ set forth in the Gospels.”
- The spirit and aims of the founders, as well as the institute’s “sound traditions”, must be “faithfully held in honor.”

- All institutes must “share in the life of the Church, adopting as their own and implementing in accordance with their own characteristics the Church’s undertakings and aims in matters biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social.”
- Institutes should promote among their members “an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times...and of the needs of the Church.”
- The purpose of religious life is to help the members “follow Christ and be united to God” through the profession of the evangelical counsels. This point is emphasized: “Even the best adjustments made in accordance with the needs of our age will be ineffectual unless they are animated by a renewal of spirit. This must take precedence over even the active ministry.”

In order to achieve true renewal, therefore, *Perfectae Caritatis* insists that religious must “strive to foster in all circumstances a life hidden with Christ in God;” they must “resolutely cultivate both the spirit and practice of prayer;” and they must “love Christ’s members as brothers, honor and love their pastors as sons...and, living and thinking ever more in union with the Church, dedicate themselves wholly to its mission”(6). The document goes on to explain the special importance of each kind of religious life: communities devoted to contemplation (7) and to apostolic and charitable activity (8), monastic communities (9), and secular institutes (11).

Perfectae Caritatis also provides an extended reflection on the evangelical counsels. Chastity requires the “practice of mortification and custody of the senses” so that religious “will not be influenced by those false doctrines which scorn perfect continence as being impossible or harmful to human development.” Chastity also demands that candidates possess “the required psychological and emotional maturity” (12). Poverty includes not only personal poverty but the need for communities to “avoid every appearance of luxury, excessive wealth and the accumulation of goods” (13). Obedience is the means by which “religious offer the full surrender of their own will as a sacrifice of themselves to God and so are united permanently and securely to God’s salvific will” (14).

The great value of this document, intentionally lacking in particulars, consists in its spiritual depth. In our historical situation, its principles move one to tears over what has been squandered in their abandonment. It is true that institutes both new and old have born rich fruit wherever these principles have been observed. But it has been predominately otherwise, and how deep and widespread the destruction has been!

On Priestly Training

The eighth document issued by the Second Vatican Council, on October 28, 1965, was the [Decree on Priestly Training \(Optatam Totius\)](#). This simply sets forth basic principles to guide the establishment of more specific programs for priestly formation in the different countries and rites throughout the world (1). The reason for the document, as stated in the opening sentence, is that “the desired renewal of the whole Church depends to a great extent on the ministry of its priests.”

After indicating in the second section the need for everyone in the Church to show forth “the need, the nature and the importance of the priestly vocation”, the Fathers begin their exposition of priestly training. Minor seminaries, however, are treated as incidental. Where they exist, their programs are to be age-appropriate; open to family, social and cultural contacts; and focused on studies which can be easily continued should the students choose a different state of life (3). In contrast, “major seminaries are necessary for priestly formation” (4) and are the subject of the third section.

At the major seminary, students are to be prepared for the ministry of the word, the ministry of worship and sanctification, and the ministry of the parish. Seminary administrators and teachers must be carefully prepared in “sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special spiritual and pedagogical training” (5). These men are “to form a very closely knit community both in spirit and in activity”, forming a kind of family with the students. In discernment, they must consider each student’s progress, intention, and freedom; his spiritual, moral and intellectual qualifications; and his physical and psychic health (6).

The fourth section covers spiritual formation, which must be imparted such that students “might learn to live in an intimate and unceasing union with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit” (8)—and with love and filial trust in Mary. Traditional practices of piety are to be encouraged, but the essence of spiritual formation is neither pious practices nor affectation but learning to live “according to the Gospel ideal” imbued with faith, hope and charity.

The students are to be “made clearly aware of the burdens they will be undertaking”, and they are to “deeply realize how gratefully” they should receive “the venerable tradition of celibacy”, as “a precious gift of God for which they should humbly pray” (10). They are to be “warned of the dangers that threaten their chastity especially in present-day society”, and they must integrate their renunciation of marriage in a way

that, far from experiencing harm, they will “rather acquire a deeper mastery of soul and body and a fuller maturity, and more perfectly receive the blessedness spoken of in the Gospel” (10).

The norms of Christian education are to be “religiously observed” but also “properly complemented by the newer findings of sound psychology and pedagogy” (11). Thus, an effective formation will become evident “in stability of mind, in an ability to make weighty decisions, and in a sound evaluation of men and events”, with resulting virtues such as “sincerity of mind, a constant concern for justice, fidelity to one’s promises, refinement in manners, modesty in speech coupled with charity.” (11) It is left to the bishops to provide for suitable interruptions in seminary training for a more intense introduction to the spiritual life or an introduction to pastoral work, so that the fitness of candidates can be more effectively discerned. (12)

In the fifth section on the revision of ecclesiastical studies, the Council indicates that students should have the humanistic and scientific education common to their culture before they begin, plus good knowledge of Latin, the language of their rite, and the languages of Scripture and Tradition. (13) But the first priority in revising ecclesiastical studies themselves should be “that the philosophical and theological disciplines be more suitably aligned and that they harmoniously work toward opening more and more the minds of the students to the mystery of Christ” (13).

Students should attain a knowledge of man, the world and God, “relying on a philosophical patrimony which is perennially valid”, but also taking into account later philosophical investigations, so that they can correctly understand the “characteristics of the contemporary mind” and will be “prepared for dialogue with men of their time” (15). Theological studies should be “so taught that the students will correctly draw out Catholic doctrine from divine revelation, profoundly penetrate it, make it the food of their own spiritual lives, and be enabled to proclaim, explain and protect it in their priestly ministry” (16). These studies should include Scripture, exegesis, and the themes of divine revelation, leading to a study of the Fathers and of dogmatic theology as properly rooted in these themes.

A deeper theological penetration is to be fostered “with the help of speculation, under the guidance of St. Thomas” (16). Moreover, students must be taught to recognize the same themes and mysteries in the liturgy and, indeed, in the entire life of the Church, and should “learn to seek the solutions to human problems under the light of revelation” (16). Given the upheaval in the Church since this Decree was written, one point presents itself now with particular force:

Special care must be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific exposition, nourished more on the teaching of the Bible, should shed light on the loftiness of the calling of the faithful in Christ and the obligation that is theirs of bearing fruit in charity for the life of the world. (16)

The sixth section, on pastoral training, emphasizes preparation for catechesis, preaching, liturgical worship, and administration of the sacraments; works of charity and assistance to “the erring and the unbelieving” (19); fostering and inspiring the apostolic activity of the laity; and promoting the various forms of the apostolate (20). Students are to be initiated into pastoral work not only during their studies but also during their vacations.

The final section charges episcopal conferences with the responsibility to establish various programs of training to be pursued after ordination, through which young priests can be “gradually introduced into the priestly life and apostolic activity” (21). The Council concludes by noting that “the Fathers of this holy synod have pursued the work begun by the Council of Trent”, which first established seminaries as a key to proper priestly formation.

On Christian Education

The Second Vatican Council's ninth document was the [Declaration on Christian Education \(Gravissimum Educationis\)](#), issued on October 25, 1965. It is one of the shorter documents of the Council, but even though it attempts to comment briefly on each aspect of education of interest to the Church, a few central principles stand out.

The first principle, established in section 1, is that all men have “an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth.” The purposes of this education includes the following:

- Harmonious development of the students' physical, moral and intellectual endowments, leading to mature responsibility, including a “positive and prudent” sexual education;
- Instruction in the knowledge and skills necessary to discourse with others and promote the common good;
- Motivation to appraise moral values with a right conscience and to embrace them with personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God.

In the second section, the Council states the additional right, for all Christians, to a truly Christian education, which encompasses the following purposes:

- That the baptized become ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received, learn how to worship God in spirit and truth, and be conformed “to the new man created in justice and holiness of truth”;
- That they develop ever more perfectly into “the mature measure of the fullness of Christ” and strive for the growth of the Mystical Body;
- That they learn to bear witness to the hope that is in them and to assist in the Christian formation of the world, contributing to the good of society through natural powers redeemed by Christ.

From these outlines, it is clear that the right to an education arises from the duty, which

is part of human dignity, to strive for responsible maturity, the common good, and the love of God; and that the right to the particular purposes of Christian education derives from the responsibilities of each Christian person with respect to both God and man.

This linking of rights to duties is even more obvious in the third section, “The Authors of Education”. Thus “since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and *therefore* must be recognized as the primary and principal educators” (emphasis added). The Council points out that the parental role is so important that “only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking,” as the family is the “first school of the social virtues that every society needs” and the Christian family is not only the first experience of wholesome human society but also of the Church.

Civil society, for its part, has certain rights deriving from its duty “to direct what is required for the common temporal good”. Thus there is a civil responsibility to “protect the duties and rights of parents and others who share in education and to give them aid” and, “according to the principle of subsidiarity, when the endeavors of parents and other societies are lacking, to carry out the work of education in accordance with the wishes of parents” and, moreover, “as the common good demands, to build schools and institutions.”

Finally, the Church “has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all men, of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and in her unfailing solicitude, of assisting men to be able to come to the fullness of this life.” Hence the Church’s right to educate must be recognized.

The Council goes on in Section 5 to describe the importance of schools, but it sets out a further key principle in Section 6 on the duties and rights of parents, namely:

Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools. Consequently, the public power, which has the obligation to protect and defend the rights of citizens, must see to it, in its concern for distributive justice, that public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children.... It must always keep in mind the principle of subsidiarity so that there is no kind of school monopoly, for this is opposed to the native rights of the human person....

The introductory paragraphs of *Gravissimum Educationis* had already acknowledged the particular and growing concern for education which is characteristic of modern culture.

In the statement quoted here, the Council boldly proclaims that any system of public education which tends to create a State monopoly is a grave violation of human freedom. Having already seen this sort of education at full strength in the Communist world, the Council Fathers apparently anticipated what is now a nearly universal problem with public education throughout the West as well.

It would render this summary incomplete to pass over the Council's reminder to parents "of the duty that is theirs to arrange and even demand that their children be able to...advance in their Christian formation to a degree that is abreast of their development in secular subjects" (7) and the admonition, in consequence, that they have "the duty of entrusting their children to Catholic schools wherever and whenever possible and of supporting these schools to the best of their ability" (8). Forty-five years after the promulgation of the *Declaration on Christian Education* it remains astonishing how few Catholic parents take their faith seriously enough to both demand and make provision for such formation for their children.

The remainder of the document touches on the need for the Church to make moral and religious education available in all schools, and on the critical importance of Catholic schools at every level and for every type of study, from general education of the young to faculties of Sacred Sciences. Perhaps the most important point made in this survey of the whole field of education is that the Church and her schools depend upon teachers "almost entirely" for the accomplishment of their goals. Thus teachers must "by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher", and "the work of these teachers, this sacred synod declares, is in the real sense of the word an apostolate most suited to and necessary for our times and at once a true service offered to society" (8).

On Non-Christian Religions

By far the shortest document issued by the Second Vatican Council was the [Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions \(Nostra Aetate\)](#). The text runs to only about 1,600 words in English, or less than twice the length of this summary. Clearly, then, the Council Fathers did not have in mind a theological treatise, but simply an exhortation on what all men have in common in seeking to answer the questions of life through religion, and how Christians ought to act toward their brothers and sisters who do not share the fullness of Christ. *Nostra Aetate* was the tenth document issued by the Council, on October 25, 1965. It consists of just five numbered paragraph groups.

First, the Council affirms that “all men form but one community”. This is so because they “all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth” and they “all share a common destiny, namely God”, whose “providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men”. The Fathers then set the stage for the rest of the document by noting that men look to different religions for an answer to the “riddles of human existence”—the nature of man, the purpose of life, moral concerns, the problem of suffering, the meaning of death, and questions of judgment, reward and punishment.

Second, the Fathers note that one finds in every people “a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life”, and sometimes one even finds recognition of “a supreme being or still more of a Father.” This awareness and recognition “results in a way of life imbued with a deep religious sense.” Two examples of this basic sort of religiosity are given: Hinduism, with its exploration of divine mystery in both myth and philosophy; and Buddhism, which “testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world.” Both religions propose means of escape from the trials of life into some sort of superior illumination. The Council then makes the point that the Church “rejects nothing of what is true and holy” in these religions; she has a high regard for anything which may “reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.” Yet the Church remains duty-bound to “proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life.” As God has reconciled all things to himself in Christ, it is only in Him that “men find the fullness of their religious life.”

Though the text does not say so, it contains a clear progression (also used in some other documents) from religions which have not benefitted from revelation to those that have, among which Islam has benefited by borrowing elements of Judaism and

Christianity. Thus, in the third place, the Council states the Church's high regard for Muslims, because they worship "God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth" and they strive to do His will. Muslims also have some recognition of Jesus and His mother. Moreover, because they await the day of judgment following the resurrection of the dead, they value an upright life in worship, alms-giving and fasting. Therefore, the Fathers ask all to forget past quarrels and to make a sincere effort at mutual understanding: "For the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values."

Fourth, the Council acknowledges the special ties which link "the people of the New Covenant to the stock of Abraham", and so explores briefly the relationship of the Church to Judaism. The Church understands that "the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets" and that the salvation of the Church is mystically prefigured in the exodus. She realizes she received the revelation of the Old testament through the Jews, and that the "she draws nourishment from that good olive tree onto which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted" (cf. Rom. 11:17-24), because Christ has reconciled Jews and Gentiles through His cross. She also knows that the apostles and Mary were Jews, as were many pillars of the early Church.

Although the Church holds "as holy Scripture testifies" that "Jerusalem did not recognize God's moment when it came" (cf. Lk 19:42), she recognizes with St. Paul that the "Jews remain very dear to God" and that God "does not take back the gifts He bestowed or the choice he made." Therefore, "the Church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all peoples will call on God with one voice." Since all this is so, the "Council wishes to encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation". In particular the Fathers note that "neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during the passion." Moreover, although "it is true that the Church is the new people of God", yet "the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture." Thus the Church opposes every form of persecution, and deplores all anti-Semitism. To the contrary, "it is the duty of the Church... to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace."

Fifth—and bringing the discussion full circle—the Council declares that it is impossible to "truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God's image". Citing 1 John 4:8, the Fathers affirm that "he who does not love does not know God". The text closes with this statement:

Therefore, the Church reproveth, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion. Accordingly, following the footsteps of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, the sacred Council earnestly begs the Christian faithful to “conduct themselves well among the Gentiles” (1 Pet 2:12) and if possible, as far as depends on them, to be at peace with all men (cf. Rom 12:18) and in that way to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt. 5:45).

On Divine Revelation

What is the purpose and nature of Divine Revelation? That is the question which the Second Vatican Council set out to answer in its eleventh document on November 18, 1965, the [Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation \(Dei Verbum\)](#). As the Council's second dogmatic constitution, *Dei Verbum* emphasizes perennial doctrine and deals very little with pastoral analysis and advice. Nonetheless, the text manifests once again the Council's desire to set forth a comprehensive view of its chosen subjects, in the hope of stimulating genuine renewal, rather than to address only disputed questions.

Though fairly short, the Constitution is divided into six chapters, and it is interesting that while Tradition is clearly explained and upheld as one of the twin sources of Revelation, there is no separate section on it. The first two chapters are especially important in that they explain the overall nature of Revelation and its mode of transmission. The final four, all on Scripture, follow easily from this.

In the first chapter ("Revelation Itself"), the Council teaches that God "chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature" (2). God realized His plan "by deeds and words having an inner unity" and also a clear historical pattern. First He revealed Himself through created realities (3); second He undertook the formation of a special people to acknowledge Him as "the one living and true God, provident father and just judge" and to wait for "the Savior promised by Him"; third, He sent His Son:

To see Jesus is to see His Father. For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. (4)

In consequence, "we now await no further new public revelation" and "the obedience of faith is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals" (5).

In the second chapter ("Handing on Divine Revelation"), the Council teaches that

God has chosen to convey His revelation through Scripture and Tradition under the authentic interpretive authority of the Magisterium of the Church. The Gospel had been promised before Christ and, when Christ came, He brought it to fulfillment and entrusted it to the Apostles who “handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit”. Then:

[T]o keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, “handing over” to them “the authority to teach in their own place.” This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face. (7)

Furthermore, “this tradition...develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down” (8). The Fathers “witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church” (8), and “through the same tradition the Church’s full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her” (8). Finally:

[T]he task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully.... (10)

Thus it is clear that Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church “are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others” (10).

The third chapter (“Sacred Scripture, its Inspiration and Divine Interpretation”) explains that the books of the Old and New Testaments are sacred and canonical because, “written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself” (11). The Council then provides a succinct summary of Scriptural inspiration:

In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they

made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted. (11)

But the Council fathers also stress that, because “God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion”, care in interpretation is needed in order “to see clearly what God wanted to communicate”, and they mention especially the need for attention to literary forms and to “the content and unity of the whole of Scripture” if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out (12).

In the fourth chapter (“The Old Testament”), the Council outlines the purpose of the books of the Old Testament which, “in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men” (15). But the Old Testament is also completed in the New. Its books, “caught up into the proclamation of the Gospel, acquire and show forth their full meaning” (16).

The fifth chapter (“The New Testament”) explains that the four Gospels “faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day He was taken up into heaven” (19), while in the remaining New Testament books “His true teaching is more and more fully stated, the saving power of the divine work of Christ is preached, the story is told of the beginnings of the Church and its marvelous growth, and its glorious fulfillment is foretold” (20).

In the sixth and last chapter (“Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church”), the Council emphasizes that the preaching of the Church must be nourished by Sacred Scripture (21), easy access to Scripture should be provided for all the faithful (22), the Eastern and Western Fathers as well as the early liturgies should be studied along with Scripture (23), and “sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation” (24).

Finally, the Council insists on the need for frequent reading of Scripture on the part of clergy, religious and “all the Christian faithful”, offering this exhortation:

Let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for “we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying” [St. Ambrose] (25).

On the Lay Apostolate: Mission

What role do the laity play in the Church's apostolic activity? Are they simply to follow the detailed instructions of those set over them in the Church hierarchy? Do they have an apostolic mission in their own right? These are the questions answered by the Second Vatican Council's twelfth document, the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem)*. While the document seems almost ordinary to those who have since become thoroughly accustomed to the lay apostolate, it appeared almost revolutionary in the more clericalist Catholic atmosphere of the mid-20th century.

Issued on November 18, 1965, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* begins immediately with the assertion that “the apostolate of the laity derives from their Christian vocation and the Church can never be without it.” Moreover, “modern conditions demand that their apostolate be broadened and intensified” because of increasing population, progress in science and technology, and the “serious danger to Christian life” occasioned by an increasing autonomy in many areas of life which has unfortunately involved “a degree of departure from ethical and religious order” (1).

For summary purposes, I will divide the document into two parts. In the first of two installments, I'll cover the mission of the laity outlined in the first three chapters; and in the second and final installment, I'll discuss the implementation of that mission as covered in the remaining chapters.

Chapter I, “The Vocation of the Laity to the Apostolate”, first defines “apostolate” as all activity of the Mystical Body directed to the goal for which the Church was founded, namely “the spreading of the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth for the glory of God the Father, to enable all men to share in His saving redemption, and that through them the whole world might enter into a relationship with Christ.” Thus the “Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate”, so much so that “the member who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself” (2).

The Council teaches that for the laity, this mission or apostolate grows from their share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ, and it must be “directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel” (2). Each one engages in the apostolate through “the faith, hope, and charity which the Holy Spirit diffuses in the hearts of all members of the Church.” The exercise of this apostolate is also rooted in whatever

special gifts the Holy Spirit confers on each (3), and it is further shaped according to each one's state of life, state of health, and professional and social activity. Above all, "the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's living union with Christ" (4).

In the second chapter, entitled "Objectives", the Council Fathers note that Christ's redemptive work, while essentially concerned with salvation, "includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order," which Christ intends to raise up and make into a new creation (5). For this reason, lay persons are both to offer the witness of their way of life and to look for specific opportunities to announce the gospel to unbelievers and to instruct and strengthen believers. In a passage which balances the Council's frequently positive outlook on many human developments, the Fathers also emphasize a harsh necessity:

Since, in our own times, new problems are arising and very serious errors are circulating which tend to undermine the foundations of religion, the moral order, and human society itself, this sacred synod earnestly exhorts laymen—each according to his own gifts of intelligence and learning—to be more diligent in doing what they can to explain, defend, and properly apply Christian principles to the problems of our era in accordance with the mind of the Church. (6)

"All those things which make up the temporal order" are to be touched and transformed by this apostolic activity: the family, culture, economics, the arts, the professions, laws, international relations, every human good and all legitimate human development, for these "not only aid in the attainment of man's ultimate goal but also possess their own intrinsic value." Moreover, these values must be recovered in our technocratic era, in which many "have fallen into an idolatry of temporal things and have become their slaves rather than their masters" (7).

Thus the whole Church must work to make people "capable of rectifying the distortion of the temporal order and directing it to God through Christ." And here we come to a critical distinction and perhaps the critical point the Council wishes to make about the lay apostolate: While pastors must teach the principles and offer the spiritual aids by which the temporal order may be renewed, "the laity must take up the *renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation*" [emphasis added]. And they must take up this obligation with true and obvious charity, which is one of the signal marks of the Kingdom of God (7).

Chapter III, "The Various Fields of the Apostolate", briefly identifies the spheres of potential action for the lay apostolate, such as church communities, the family, youth,

and the social order at the local, national and international levels (9). It discusses the need for the laity to work harmoniously with their priests in the building up of the parish (10). It goes on to discuss the importance of cultivating a sense of apostolic mission in youth (12), and the need to “infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and the structure of the community”(13), always attempting to serve the true common good through participation in public affairs by those “adequately enlightened in faith and Christian doctrine” (14).

In a prophetic central paragraph in this chapter, the Fathers take special notice of the importance of apostolic activity undertaken by married couples and entire families together, to manifest “the indissolubility and sacredness of the marriage bond”, to affirm “the right and duty of parents and guardians to educate children in a Christian manner”, and to defend “the dignity and lawful autonomy of the family.” In addition, the apostolate of the family can include adoption, hospitality, education, work with adolescents, formation of engaged couples, catechetical work, and support for families in need (11).

Thus is the mission of the laity given not only a universal definition but a particular emphasis for our times. In the remaining chapters, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* covers the forms of the apostolate, relations between the hierarchy and the laity, and proper apostolic formation. These will be considered in the second part of this summary.

On the Lay Apostolate: Implementation

The [first part](#) of my summary of the [Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity \(Apostolicam Actuositatem\)](#) covered the special mission of the laity, as discussed in the document's first three chapters. The document continues in its final chapters to consider the various forms, relations, and preparations that are necessary for the success of this mission. This second and final installment will summarize these reflections on the implementation of the lay apostolate.

In the fourth chapter, "The Various Forms of the Apostolate", the Council emphasizes that "the individual apostolate, flowing generously from its source in a truly Christian life, is the origin and condition of the whole lay apostolate, even of the organized type, and it admits of no substitute" (16). For this reason, lay persons must remember that they "can reach all men and contribute to the salvation of the whole world by public worship and prayer as well as by penance and voluntary acceptance of the labors and hardships of life whereby they become like the suffering Christ" (16).

The Fathers also emphasize the special need for a strong and active laity in all those places where the freedom of the Church's ordained ministers is restricted by hostile authorities (17), and they stress the need in all instances for united effort (18) and the formation of effective associations (19). Wherever possible, the formation of formal apostolic associations working in cooperation with the hierarchy (often called "Catholic Action") is highly recommended. Thus lay persons can take charge of their own organizations to facilitate the organic action of the laity to fulfill the Church's apostolic aims (20).

Chapter V, "External Relationships", briefly discusses the need for proper relations between laity and the hierarchy, such that "the hierarchy should promote the apostolate of the laity, provide it with spiritual principles and support, direct the conduct of this apostolate to the common good of the Church, and attend to the preservation of doctrine and order." While many associational relationships are possible, no project may claim the name "Catholic" unless it has obtained the consent of the lawful Church authority (24).

While the laity has as its special province the renewal of the temporal order, the hierarchy nonetheless plays an important role. Thus with respect to temporal works and

institutions, the bishops are to “teach and authentically interpret the moral principles to be followed in temporal affairs”, and they have the right to judge “whether or not such works and institutions conform to moral principles” and to decide “what is required for the protection and promotion of values of the supernatural order” (24). At the same time, however, “bishops, pastors of parishes, and other priests of both branches of the clergy should keep in mind that the right and duty to exercise this apostolate is common to all the faithful, both clergy and laity, and that the laity have their own roles in building up the Church” (25).

As is typical throughout the Council documents, the Fathers call for the establishment of councils to assist the apostolic work of each diocese, as well as a secretariat for this purpose at the Holy See (26).

The final chapter, “Formation for the Apostolate”, emphasizes the need for a flexible formation characterized “by the distinctive secular and particular quality of the lay state” which nonetheless teaches the layman to “perform the mission of Christ and the Church by basing his life on belief in the divine mystery of creation and redemption and by being sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit”. Such formation must include “a solid doctrinal instruction in theology, ethics, and philosophy adjusted to differences of age, status, and natural talents” (28). In this way

the lay person engages himself wholly and actively in the reality of the temporal order and effectively assumes his role in conducting the affairs of this order. At the same time, as a living member and witness of the Church, he renders the Church present and active in the midst of temporal affairs. (29)

In addition, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* stresses the important role of parents in raising children in such a way that the “whole family in its common life...should be a sort of apprenticeship for the apostolate” (30). In the final section of this chapter, the document recognizes that a special formation is required in a materialistic age, in which the laity should “not only learn doctrine more diligently, especially those main points which are the subjects of controversy, but should also exhibit the witness of an evangelical life in contrast to all forms of materialism” (31). It also recommends training the laity “in the right use of things and the organization of institutions, attentive always to the common good in line with the principles of the moral and social teachings of the Church”, so that by learning Catholic social doctrine, they may be more capable of applying it properly to specific cases.

The concluding “Exhortation” reaffirms that “through this holy synod, the Lord

renews His invitation to all the laity to come closer to Him every day, recognizing that what is His is also their own, to associate themselves with Him in His saving mission” (33). It is a tribute to the growth of the lay apostolate since 1965—both because of the teaching of the Council and as a result of the unfortunate vacuum created by widespread failures among members of the hierarchy—that this invitation no longer sounds strange or even revolutionary, as it did to many in the ecclesiastical context in which the Council met.

On Religious Freedom

One of Vatican II's more controversial teachings is found in the thirteenth document, the [Declaration on Religious Freedom \(Dignitatis Humanae\)](#), issued on December 7, 1965. Some Traditionalist groups hold that this document contradicts earlier Magisterial teachings on the responsibility of government to recognize the true religion and suppress error. So that it need not detain us, I have already addressed this issue in [Doctrinal Development on Religious Liberty](#). Here I simply wish to continue our series by summarizing, without unnecessary controversy, what the Council itself taught on the subject.

Dignitatis Humanae actually begins by setting forth five principles which place its own purposes in the context of the Catholic Tradition (1):

1. The one true religion subsists in the Catholic Church, to which Our Lord committed the duty of teaching all nations.
2. All are bound to seek truth, to embrace the truth they come to know, and to hold fast to it.
3. "It is upon the human conscience that these obligations fall and exert their binding force."
4. Religious freedom relates to immunity from coercion in civil society, and so it "leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion."
5. The Council, then, "intends to develop the doctrine of recent popes on the inviolable rights of the human person and the constitutional order of society."

Then the Council declares its essential teaching:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

(2)

There are two important things to note here: First, that men and women are not to be forced to act contrary to their beliefs but, second, that this freedom from coercion is operative only within due limits.

This principle of liberty is advanced simply because duties always entail corresponding rights, and persons cannot discharge their obligation to seek the truth “unless they enjoy immunity from external coercion as well as psychological freedom.” This freedom has its foundation “not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature”. Hence it applies even to those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it. But again, there is a limitation: The exercise of this right “is not to be impeded, provided that just public order be observed” (2). In other words, “within due limits” includes the observance of “just public order”.

The Council teaches that the reason for religious liberty “is that the exercise of religion, of its very nature, consists before all else in those internal, voluntary and free acts whereby man sets the course of his life directly toward God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind.” These acts “transcend by their very nature the order of terrestrial and temporal affairs”. Therefore, government ought to “take account of the religious life of the citizenry and show it favor” but “it would clearly transgress the limits set to its power, were it to presume to command or inhibit acts that are religious” (3).

Among the particular freedoms which the Council enumerates within the general heading of religious liberty are the following (again “provided the just demands of public order are observed”) (4-5):

- Religious communities may govern themselves, worship publicly, assist and instruct their members, and promote institutions for ordering their lives in accordance with religious principles.
- Religious communities are not to be hindered in selecting, training, appointing, transferring, or communicating with their ministers, or in acquiring funds, purchasing properties or erecting buildings for religious purposes.
- Religious communities “also have the right not to be hindered in their public teaching and witness to their faith”, providing that they themselves refrain from acting in ways that are either coercive or dishonorably persuasive.
- Religious communities “should not be prohibited from freely undertaking to show the special value of their doctrine” to society as a whole, and so are free to

hold meetings and establish charitable and social organizations “under the impulse of their own religious sense.”

- The family in particular has the “right freely to live its own domestic religious life under the guidance of parents,” who have the right to determine “the kind of religious education that their children are to receive.” Government must guarantee and protect this freedom.

Since protection of rights is an essential duty of government, “government is to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens in an effective manner,” and to “help create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life”. However, if special civil recognition is given to one religious community, the right of all citizens and religious communities to religious freedom must still be recognized and made effective. Government must never violate the freedom and equality of citizens before the law for religious reasons. Finally, it is “a violation of the will of God” when force is brought to bear in any way in order to destroy or repress religion. (6)

Having fleshed out its principle of religious liberty, the Council turns to an explication of the limitations it has already mentioned: “The right to religious freedom is exercised in human society: hence its exercise is subject to certain regulatory norms.” First, all “are bound by the moral law to have respect both for the rights of others and for their own duties toward others and for the common welfare.” Second, “society has the right to defend itself against possible abuses committed on the pretext of freedom of religion.” Government should follow norms for this purpose which, far from being arbitrary, are drawn from the need to “safeguard the rights of all” and for “peaceful settlement of conflicts of rights”, for “adequate care of genuine public peace”, and from the need “for a proper guardianship of public morality.” (7)

The remaining paragraphs of the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* constitute a brief reflection on the Church’s insistence that man’s response to God be truly free, and on what we can learn from Revelation and Christ himself about God’s patience, His willingness to allow both the cockle and the wheat to grow until the harvest, His sacrifice as a ransom for us, and His refusal to impose the truth by force. These themes are further developed from the Acts of the Apostles and St. Paul’s letters. (8-12)

Finally, noting that “the freedom of the Church is the fundamental principle in what concerns the relations between the Church and governments and the whole civil order” (13), the Council insists on the necessary harmony between this freedom of the Church and that religious freedom which is the right of all. Enjoining the Christian faithful, “in

the formation of their consciences”, to “carefully attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church” (14), the Council concludes by stating the necessity that “religious freedom be everywhere provided with an effective constitutional guarantee and that respect be shown for the high duty and right of man freely to lead his religious life in society.” (15)

On Missionary Activity: Principles

“The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (2). So begins the first chapter of the Second Vatican Council’s fourteenth document, issued on December 7, 1965, the *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (Ad Gentes)*. This is one of the Council’s longer documents (though not nearly as long as the two constitutions on the Church herself); its length suggests that it covers a topic very dear to the Council fathers’ hearts.

Ad Gentes reflects in many ways that positive outlook of the Council which some later commentators have unfortunately dismissed as mere optimism. The sense of the fathers that the Church was on the verge of a great opportunity, if only she could renew herself to take advantage of it, is expressed nicely in the second introductory paragraph of this text:

In the present state of affairs, out of which there is arising a new situation for mankind, the Church, being the salt of the earth and the light of the world, is more urgently called upon to save and renew every creature, that all things may be restored in Christ and all men may constitute one family in Him and one people of God. (1)

The document is divided into six chapters, the first of which (“Principles of Doctrine”) thoroughly articulates the Church’s missionary nature, which arises from God’s plan to “call men to share His life, not just singly, apart from any mutual bond, but rather to mold them into a people in which His sons, once scattered abroad, might be gathered together” (2). I’ll devote this entry to these principles, reserving the remainder of the document to part two.

Ad Gentes teaches that what “the Lord preached that one time, or what was wrought in Him for the saving of the human race, must be spread abroad and published to the ends of the earth” (3). For this purpose Christ ordered the ministry of the apostles and promised to send the Holy Spirit. Finally Our Lord, “having now received all power in heaven and on earth, before He was taken up into heaven, founded His Church as the sacrament of salvation and sent His Apostles into all the world just as He Himself had been sent by His Father” (5). (The word “mission”, of course, comes from the Latin verb

“mitto”, which means “to send”.)

The Council sees in this mission not a mere proclamation but a process of enlightenment and healing for diverse peoples in the diverse cultures of the world. God’s universal plan of salvation is carried out not only “secretly in the soul of a man, or by the attempts (even religious ones) by which in diverse ways it seeks after God,” for “these attempts need to be enlightened and healed” even though “they may sometimes serve as leading strings toward God, or as a preparation for the Gospel.” Therefore, God intervened “in human history in a way both new and final by sending His Son, clothed in our flesh, in order that through Him He might snatch men from the power of darkness and Satan and reconcile the world to Himself” (3).

Because this reconciliation must be initiated and nurtured under many different circumstances, the exact pattern of the Church’s missionary activity will vary according to all the factors and opportunities: “The differences recognizable in this, the Church’s activity, are not due to the inner nature of the mission itself [which is unchanging], but rather to the circumstances in which this mission is exercised” (6). These differences depend partly on the situation in the Church and partly on the peoples or groups to whom the mission is directed. But in every case, the term “mission” applies to evangelization, to the spreading of the Faith to those who are not yet Christian. Thus missionary activity “differs from pastoral activity exercised among the faithful as well as from undertakings aimed at restoring unity among Christians” (6).

The Council stresses the importance of the Church for salvation, and reaffirms that “those men cannot be saved, who though aware that God, through Jesus Christ, founded the Church as something necessary, still do not wish to enter into it, or to persevere in it” (7). At the same time, missionary activity is not something foreign or alien to man, but is “bound up even with human nature itself and its aspirations”, and it transforms not only persons but all the goods of the world, “which bear the mark both of man’s sin and of God’s blessing,” and so must be transformed in Christ for the glory of God. (8)

The need for missionary work “extends between the first coming of the Lord and the second.” Thus, the Council concludes its chapter on first principles by describing the Church’s missionary activity as “nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of God’s decree, and its fulfillment in the world and in world history, in the course of which God, by means of mission, manifestly works out the history of salvation.” Therefore, of its very nature, “missionary activity tends toward eschatological fullness” and through it “the mystical body grows to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ” (9).

In the next installment, I’ll summarize the details of how missionary work is to

unfold, its basic organization, and the participation of the whole Church in its success.

On Missionary Activity: Mission Work

Following its exploration of principles in the first chapter (see the [previous entry](#)), the remainder of the *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (Ad Gentes)* covers missionary work itself, both in its character and stages and in the means necessary to ensure its progress.

The second chapter (“Mission Work Itself”) contains three parts. In Article 1 on “Christian Witness”, the Council picks up the theme of enlightenment and healing mentioned earlier. In order to offer salvation to all the various groups and cultures of mankind, the Church “must implant herself into these groups for the same motive which led Christ to bind Himself, in virtue of His Incarnation, to certain social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He dwelt” (10). Thus the missionary is to become one with the culture to which he is sent (insofar as this is possible for a Christian), living as those people do and speaking their language, but for a higher purpose:

Even as Christ Himself searched the hearts of men, and led them to divine light, so also His disciples, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should know the people among whom they live, and should converse with them, that they themselves may learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth. But at the same time, let them try to furbish these treasures, set them free, and bring them under the dominion of God their Savior. (11)

In Article 2, the fathers describe the first phase of missionary activity, the “preaching of the Gospel and gathering together of the People of God,” and in Article 3 they describe the second phase, the “forming of the Christian community” so that over time it comes to possess the “priestly, prophetic and royal” offices within itself, including its own clergy, in communion with the universal Church. The Council recommends the restoration of the permanent diaconate (16) for service in mission territory and stresses the importance of lay catechists, who typically play a critical role in new Catholic communities (17). It also insists on the fostering of religious communities, including those pursuing the contemplative life (18).

The third chapter (“Particular Churches”) covers the next phase, when the Church in a mission territory comes to a realization of its full stature, under its own bishops, and marked by an active, self-aware Catholic laity who are beginning to transform the larger culture. “In such new churches, the life of the People of God must mature in all those fields of Christian life which are to be reformed by the norms of this council.” Such churches are likely still to be quite poor and in need of assistance and support from more established churches throughout the world, yet they too must begin to play their role in the universal Church, and the first duty of the bishop is to be “a herald of the Faith who leads new disciples to Christ” (19).

The Council fathers emphasize that “the church has not been really founded, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men, unless there is a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy” (21). The main duty of the laity “is the witness which they are bound to bear to Christ by their life and works in the home, in their social milieu, and in their own professional circle” (21)—a point which applies to the fully mature Church everywhere and in all times. Once again, these young churches are to “borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be” (22).

The final three chapters deal primarily with pragmatic issues. Chapter 4 (“Missionaries”) covers the preparation and formation of missionaries. They must be “sent by legitimate authority” and “set apart for the work” (23) and ready to stay at their vocations “for an entire lifetime”, renouncing themselves and all that they once considered their own, for the missionary must “‘make himself all things to all men’ (1 Cor 9:22)” (24).

Chapter 5 (“Planning Missionary Activity”) outlines the duties of bishops, the role of special institutes, the need for study of the mission territories, the importance of accurate reports, the assignment of mission territories to various groups, lines of authority, and the role of the episcopal conferences and the Holy See (28-34).

Chapter 6 (“Cooperation”) stresses that “all the faithful are duty-bound to cooperate in the expansion and spreading out of [Christ’s] Body, to bring it to fullness as soon as may be.” But it also issues this caution: “Let everyone know that their first and most important obligation for the spread of the Faith is this: to lead a profoundly Christian life” (36). The fathers emphasize too that “all bishops, as member of the body of bishops succeeding to the College of Apostles, are consecrated not just for some one diocese, but for the salvation of the entire world.” (38) Therefore, they should designate some of their

best priests for mission work. All Catholic priests and teachers should “stir up and preserve amid the faithful a zeal for the evangelization of the world” (39); religious institutes should also participate in or pray for the success of the missions (40); and the laity are likewise called to be involved, through their direct work in mission lands and through their economic cooperation with missionary work (41).

Ad Gentes closes with a prayer that “the nations may soon be led to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4) and the glory of God which shines on the face of Jesus Christ may shine upon all men through the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 4:6)” (42).

On Priests: Priestly Ministry

Oddly enough, since the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* focused on bishops and the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* tended to overshadow everything else at the time, the Second Vatican Council has often been said to have ignored priests. But priests are the only group to which two documents are devoted. We have already surveyed the [Decree on Priestly Training](#) which Vatican II issued in October 1965. On December 7th, the Council returned to this subject so dear to its heart and issued its fifteenth document, the [Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests \(Presbyterorum Ordinis\)](#). The text is of medium length, and I'll cover it in two entries.

Presbyterorum Ordinis begins with this statement: “Priests by sacred ordination and mission which they receive from the bishops are promoted to the service of Christ the Teacher, Priest and King. They share in His ministry, a ministry whereby the Church here on earth is unceasingly built up into the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit” (1). This sets the tone for the entire document, which is divided into three chapters.

The first chapter covers “The Priesthood in the Ministry of the Church”, and it explains that the ministry of the priest derives from what is completely unique to priests, namely the “sacred power of orders to offer sacrifice and to forgive sins.” Thus priests “are signed with a special character and are conformed to Christ the Priest in such a way that they can act in the person of Christ the Head.” They receive a “special grace to be ministers of Christ among the people” so that “the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect in union with the sacrifice of Christ.” Indeed, “the ministry of priests is directed toward this goal and is perfected in it.” Properly understood, then, the purpose of priestly ministry and life “is to procure the glory of God the Father in Christ” and “that glory consists in this—that men working keenly and with a grateful spirit receive the work of God made perfect in Christ and then manifest it in their whole lives” (2).

The second chapter covers “The Ministry of Priests”. In section 1, the Council enumerates and explains “Priests’ Functions” as follows:

1. **The primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel:** “To all men, therefore, priests are debtors that the truth of the Gospel which they have may be given to others.” They are not to rely on their own wisdom but on the “word of Christ”, and they are to apply “the lasting truth of the Gospel to the particular circumstances of

life” (4).

2. **Performing sacred functions:** By their special title in the priesthood of Christ, priests are to act as His ministers. “Especially by the celebration of Mass they offer sacramentally the Sacrifice of Christ” to which all the other sacraments and all apostolic work are directed. Priests are to lead their people to pray, confess their sins, live the evangelical counsels, and offer their own lives with the Eucharist. (5)
3. **Gathering the family of God together:** Priests are given a spiritual power for the building up of the Church. “They should act towards men, not as seeking to please them, but in accord with the demands of Christian doctrine and life.” They also have a special obligation to the poor and, in seeking to minister to every person and group they must foster a spirit of community which embraces “not only the local church but also the universal Church.” (6)

The second section covers “Priests’ Relationships with Others.” Priests are “necessary helpers and counselors” to bishops, who must “regard them as their brothers and friends and be concerned as far as they are able for their material and especially for their spiritual well-being” (above all, the Council states, “upon the bishops rests the heavy responsibility for the sanctity of their priests”). Priests in turn must respect in their bishops “the authority of Christ, the Supreme Shepherd” and must stand by them “in sincere charity and obedience” (7). Priests are also united with each other in “an intimate sacramental brotherhood”, and must “help one another always to be fellow workers in the truth” (8). The Council calls for a priest senate in each diocese to advise the bishop (7) and expresses the desire that “some kind of common life or some sharing of common life be encouraged among priests” (8).

With respect to the laity, the priest stands in the role of “father and teacher”, leading them in the discipleship of the Lord that they share in common. Thus priests are to “acknowledge and promote the dignity of the laity,” listen carefully to their concerns, and allow them “freedom and room for action”. Priests “have been placed in the midst of the laity to lead them to the unity of charity”, and they must be “defenders of the common good, with which they are charged in the name of the bishop.” They are to be “strenuous assertors of the truth, lest the faithful be carried about by every wind of doctrine” (9).

The third section (“The Distribution of Priests, and Vocations to the Priesthood”) emphasizes that priests are ordained “for the widest possible and universal mission of

salvation ‘even to the ends of the earth’.” The Council stipulates that the norms of incardination and excardination should be revised to bring about a better distribution of priests throughout the world. However, priests should not be sent out alone to new fields of labor, but by twos and threes, making sure they have learned the language and studied the psychological and social milieu of the people they go to serve (10). All the faithful are to “cooperate in one way or another, by constant prayer and other means at their disposal, that the Church will always have a sufficient number of priests to carry out her divine mission” (11).

After these two chapters on the ministry of priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* turns to the life of priests in chapter three, which I’ll explore in the second entry on this document.

On Priests: Priestly Life

While the first two chapters of the [Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests](#) (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) dealt primarily with the ministry of priests (see previous entry), the third and final chapter covers “The Life of Priests” in three sections. The first section, “The Vocation of Priests to the Life of Perfection” discusses in some depth the special grace of the priesthood, the need for priests to “mortify the works of the flesh in themselves and give themselves entirely to the service of men”, and the need for priests to strive for holiness (12)—which will be best achieved by indefatigably performing their duties in the Spirit of Christ, including offering themselves entirely to God in the Sacred Liturgy and joining the voice of the Church in the recitation of the Divine Office (13).

There is in this section an interesting discussion of the problem of “burn out”, in that priests can feel “constrained by so many obligations of their office” that they “have reason to wonder how they can coordinate and balance their interior life with feverish outward activity.” The document notes that “neither the mere external performance of the works of the ministry, nor the exclusive engagement in pious devotion, although very helpful, can bring about this necessary coordination.” Rather, the Council teaches that the way priests can solve the problem is to imitate Christ, seeking the will of the Father in a complete gift of self to the flock, in complete fidelity to the Church, not in a vacuum, but with strong bonds of union with their bishop and brother priests. “Fidelity to Christ,” *Presbyterorum Ordinis* categorically states, “cannot be separated from faithfulness to His Church” (14).

The second section touches on “Special Spiritual Requirements in the Life of a Priest”. The first requirement is obedience to the Church, to the Holy Father and their own bishop or superior: “By this humility and by willing responsible obedience, priests conform themselves to Christ. They make their own the sentiments of Jesus Christ who ‘emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant,’ becoming obedient even to death” (15).

The second requirement (expressed without prejudice to the different custom in the Eastern Church) is celibacy, which is “held by the Church to be a great value in a special manner for the priestly life” and is “a sign and stimulus for pastoral charity and a special source of spiritual fecundity in the world” (16). Priests are exhorted to “magnanimously and wholeheartedly adhere” to celibacy, acknowledging it as an “outstanding gift of the Father which is so praised and extolled by the Lord” (16).

The third requirement is detachment from temporal goods. Priests should achieve freedom “from every inordinate concern and become docile to the voice of God in their daily life,” for priests “have the Lord as their ‘portion and heritage’ (Num 18:20).” Excess income provided to the priest for the exercise of his ecclesiastical office should be “set aside for the good of the Church or for works of charity”. Ecclesiastical goods themselves should be “administered by priests with the help of capable laymen” and should as far as possible “always be employed for those purposes in the pursuit of which it is licit for the Church to possess temporal goods”: divine worship, “honest sustenance” for the clergy, and apostolic and charitable works. Finally, priests “are invited to embrace voluntary poverty by which they are more manifestly conformed to Christ and become eager in the sacred ministry” (17).

The third section considers “Aids to the Life of Priests”, which include: (1) The Eucharist and fruitful reception of the sacraments (especially Penance), daily examination of conscience, spiritual reading, devotion to Mary, and “the spirit of true adoration” (18); (2) Ongoing meditation on and study of Sacred Scripture, as well as pastoral studies, with the aid of such centers as ought to be erected in each territory (19); and (3) Suitable remuneration for priests (20), including the establishment of social assistance funds and health insurance programs as needed (21).

In its Conclusion, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* notes that a common problem today is that faithful priests “and sometimes the faithful themselves” can “feel like strangers in this world.” There are, the Fathers note, “new obstacles which have arisen to the faith: the seeming unproductivity of work done, and also the bitter loneliness which men experience can lead them to the danger of becoming spiritually depressed” (22). The depressing character of this lack of visible success can be overcome only by a sure Faith and confidence in Christ, which the Fathers express clearly in this final exhortation:

All priests cooperate in carrying out the saving plan of God, that is, the Mystery of Christ, the sacrament hidden from the ages in God, which is only brought to fulfillment little by little through the collaboration of many ministries in building up the Body of Christ until it grows to the fullness of time. All this, hidden with Christ in God, can be uniquely perceived by faith. For the leaders of the People of God must walk by faith, following the example of faithful Abraham, who in faith “obeyed by going out into a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8). Indeed, the dispenser of the mysteries of God can see himself in the man who sowed his field, of whom the Lord said: “then sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed should sprout without

his knowing (Mark 4:27).

On the Church and the World: Man's Calling

The final document of the Second Vatican Council addresses the relationship of the Church to the modern world, and what the Church has to offer men as they struggle to develop and solve problems old and new. The [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World \(*Gaudium et Spes*\)](#), promulgated on December 7, 1965, is also the Council's longest document. However, as the Council wishes in this case to address modern problems in fairly broad terms, the document is not doctrinally dense. We can cover it in three parts.

The English title indicates that *Gaudium et Spes* has a pastoral purpose—the purpose of enabling the Church to speak more effectively to mankind. Therefore it should be distinguished from the earlier *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, which was devoted primarily to doctrine on the nature and constitution of the Church. By way of introduction to the current *Pastoral Constitution*, the Council Fathers note that the Church shares all human joys, hopes, anxieties and griefs, and so the Church wishes to propose the wisdom of Christ to the whole of redeemed humanity. “The human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed,” the Council notes. “Hence the focal point of our total presentation will be man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will” (3).

A special “Introductory Statement” calls attention to the paradox of modern society in that “while man extends his power in every direction, he does not always succeed in subjecting it to his own welfare.” He has never had such a wealth of resources yet “a huge proportion of the world’s citizens are still tormented” by hunger, poverty and illiteracy. He has a keen interest in freedom, yet “at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance.” He has an intense vision of unity and solidarity, and yet the world is divided into opposing camps and conflicting forces, and “political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly.” And finally, “man painstakingly searches for a better world, without a corresponding spiritual advancement”(4).

In the midst of all this, certain specific problems arise. The modern world has moved from a “rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one”, and the rate of change is very rapid (5). This has a deleterious impact on the wisdom of

well-established traditions (6). The scientific worldview has enabled us to distinguish religion from magic or superstition, but as a result “growing numbers of people are abandoning religion” (7). There is a growing “imbalance between specialized human activity and a comprehensive view of reality” (8). Rapid communications have bred widespread discontent among those who “judge themselves to be deprived either through injustice or unequal distribution” of the benefits of our material culture (9). And, all in all:

Many look forward to a genuine and total emancipation of humanity wrought solely by human effort; they are convinced that the future rule of man over the earth will satisfy every desire of his heart. Nor are there lacking men who despair of any meaning to life and praise the boldness of those who think that human existence is devoid of any inherent significance and strive to confer a total meaning on it by their own ingenuity alone. (10)

But “the Church firmly believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through His Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny” (10). And so the Council offers this document.

The first part of *Gaudium et Spes* consists of four chapters covering “The Church and Man’s Calling”. The first chapter, entitled “The Dignity of the Human Person”, emphasizes that man was created in the image of God, can know and love his Creator, “and was appointed by Him as master of all earthly creatures that he might subdue them and use them to God’s glory” (12). But because man abused his liberty and finds he has “inclinations toward evil”, “therefore man is split within himself” (13). Against this promising but difficult background, the Church explains that man is a unity of body and soul and, while he “is not allowed to despise his bodily life”, nonetheless “by his interior qualities he outstrips the whole sum of mere things.” Thus he “discerns his proper destiny beneath the eyes of God” and “recognizes in himself a spiritual and immortal soul” (14). Finally, it is “through the gift of the Holy Spirit that man comes by faith to the contemplation and appreciation of the divine plan” (15).

The Fathers note that the “more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality” (16). But man can pursue the good only in freedom, and so he achieves full dignity only when, “emancipating himself from all captivity to passion, he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and procures for himself through effective and skillful action, apt helps to that end” (17). Moreover, though “the riddle of human

existence grows most acute” in the face of death, the Church firmly teaches that “man has been created by God for a blissful purpose beyond the reach of earthly misery”, and that he “is restored to wholeness by an almighty and merciful savior” (18).

Consequently, “atheism must be accounted among the most serious problems of this age” (19). The Council goes on to review atheism in its various forms, and considers some of its causes. The Fathers sadly observe that Christians themselves contribute to the rise of atheism “to the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life” (20). Nonetheless the Church proposes that “recognition of God is in no way hostile to man’s dignity” and that the remedy for atheism is “to make God the Father and His Incarnate Son present and in a sense visible” through “the witness of a living and mature faith, namely, one trained to see difficulties clearly and to master them” (21). This is critical because, in the end, “the truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light” (22).

In the remaining three chapters in Part I, the Council considers the nature of mankind as a community, the nature of human activity, and the role of the Church. Part II takes up the special problems of marriage and family, the development of culture, economic and social life, the political order, and the fostering of peace. I’ll cover all these sections in the next two installments.

On the Church and the World: Community and Activity

The remaining three chapters of the first part of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* continue sketching the contemporary human situation and the role of the Church. Having examined “The Dignity of the Human Person” in the first chapter, the Council focuses on “The Community of Mankind” in the second, describing the social nature of the human person, which is even more obvious in the modern world with its increasing interdependence (23). Indeed, “God, Who has a fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (23). Jesus himself prayed to the Father “that all may be one...as we are one” (Jn 17:21-22).

Consequently, the Council first lays particular “stress on reverence for man” and declares the following:

Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. (27)

The Council warns against contenting ourselves “with a merely individualistic morality”, for “the obligations of justice and love are fulfilled only if each person, contributing to the common good, according to his own abilities and the needs of others, also promotes and assists the public and private institutions dedicated to bettering the conditions of human life” (30). The Council teaches that “this communitarian character is developed and consummated in the work of Jesus Christ” who formed “a new brotherly community composed of all those who receive Him in faith and in love”, namely the Church (32).

The third chapter, “Man’s Activity throughout the World”, takes note of the prodigious output of human activity and asks “what is the meaning and value of this feverish activity” (33)? The answer is that man was “created to God’s image” and

“received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness, a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him Who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all” (34). Hence, the Council argues, “it is clear that men are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows, but that they are rather more stringently bound to do those very things” (34).

The Fathers also take up the claim that people make for autonomy in earthly affairs. “If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy.” Indeed, “by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order.” But if the independence of temporal affairs “is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is” (36).

This falsehood leads to grave problems, “for a monumental struggle against the powers of darkness pervades the whole history of man.” Therefore, “if anyone wants to know how this unhappy situation can be overcome, Christians will tell him that all human activity, constantly imperiled by man’s pride and deranged self-love, must be purified and perfected by the power of Christ’s cross and resurrection” (37).

The fourth and final chapter in Part One covers “The Role of the Church in the Modern World.” Entrusted with the mystery of God “who is the ultimate goal of man”, the Church “opens up to man at the same time the meaning of his own existence, that is, the innermost truth about himself” (41). Since “whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man”, the Church “can anchor the dignity of human nature against all tides of opinion.” She both “proclaims the rights of man” and ensures that human movements are “penetrated by the spirit of the Gospel and protected against any kind of false autonomy” (41). And since “she is bound to no particular form of human culture...the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations” (42).

The Council “exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit.” Therefore, “let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other.” However, “secular duties and activities belong properly although not exclusively to layman”, and the following passage was considered remarkable by some in the 1960s:

Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city; from priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role. (43)

Part One concludes by stating the Church's single intention: the salvation of all in the coming Kingdom of God. "For God's Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that as perfect man He might save all men and sum up all things in Himself." Thus the Church and all people together "journey toward the consummation of human history, one which fully accords with the counsel of God's love: 'To reestablish all things in Christ, both those in the heavens and those on earth' (Eph. 11:10)" (45).

On the Church and the World: Special Problems

Part 2 of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* is devoted to “some problems of special urgency.” Covered in five chapters, these problems are marriage and the family; the development of culture; economic and social life; politics; and peace.

Chapter 1 is entitled “Fostering the Nobility of Marriage and the Family”. Although the Council did not foresee the problem of gay marriage, it was well aware of such problems as “polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love and other disfigurements,” as well as “excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human generation” (47). Accordingly, the Council teaches that “the intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent.” Moreover, “authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ’s redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church” (48). Therefore, married love “far excels mere erotic inclination, which, selfishly pursued, soon enough fades wretchedly away” (49).

By contrast, “marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children” (50). There can be no contradiction “between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to authentic conjugal love;” indeed, the Council condemns abortion and infanticide as “unspeakable crimes” (51). Finally, and this is still several years before *Humanae vitae*, the Council notes that the morality of procedures to regulate conception “does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives, but must be determined by objective standards” which “reserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love.” Couples “may not undertake methods of birth control which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church” (51).

Chapter 2, “The Proper Development of Human Culture” addresses the problems that have arisen because of rapid cultural change: the loss of tradition and heritage; the inability to harmonize the “particular branches of study with the necessity of forming a synthesis of them, and of preserving...the faculties of contemplation and observation which lead to wisdom”; the lack of equality in sharing the advantages of cultural

development; and the growing emphasis on the autonomy of human culture which is too often associated with a “humanism that is merely terrestrial, and even contrary to religion itself” (56). The Fathers identify the following keys to authentic cultural development: focus on the understanding of truth, goodness and beauty (57); the ability of the Gospel to correct and remove “the errors and evils resulting from the permanent allurements of sin” (58); and the necessary subordination of culture to “the integral perfection of the human person, to the good of the community and of the whole society” (59).

The Council holds that “within the limits of morality and the common utility, man can freely search for the truth, express his opinion and publish it; that he can practice any art he chooses; that finally he can avail himself of true information concerning events of a public nature.” And it emphasizes that it is not the function of the public authority “to determine the character of the civilization, but rather to establish the conditions and to use the means which are capable of fostering the life of culture” (59). This section closes with a consideration of the imperatives to free humanity from the misery of ignorance (60), to synthesize the various branches of knowledge (61), and to harmonize culture with Christian teaching (62), including literature and the arts.

In Chapter 3, “Economic and Social Life”, *Gaudium et Spes* emphasizes that “man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all economic and social life” (63). The Fathers briefly explore the problems associated with uneven economic development. They stress that human labor “is superior to the other elements of economic life” (67), and that in economic enterprises “it is persons who are joined together, that is, free and independent human beings created in the image of God” (68). Every person has a right to “a share of earthy goods sufficient for oneself and one’s family” (69). Investments “must be directed toward procuring employment and sufficient income for the people both now and in the future” (70). Ownership should be fostered because ownership contributes “to the expression of the personality” and furnishes “an occasion to exercise one’s function in society and in the economy.” But “it is the right of public authority to prevent anyone from abusing his private property to the detriment of the common good” (71).

In Chapter 4, “The Life of the Political Community”, the Council condemns those political systems “which hamper civic or religious freedom, victimize large numbers through avarice and political crimes, and divert the exercise of authority from the service of the common good to the interests of one or another faction or of the rulers themselves” (73). The political authority must operate “within the limits of the moral order...directed toward the common good” (74). Rulers must not “hamper the development of family, social or cultural groups, nor that of intermediate bodies or organizations”, and citizens must “be careful not to attribute excessive power to public authority, nor to make

exaggerated and untimely demands upon it in their own interests, lessening in this way the responsible role of persons, families and social groups” (75). Especially in pluralistic societies, the Council insists that governments must understand the “clear distinction between the tasks which Christians undertake, individually or as a group, on their own responsibility as citizens guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience, and the activities which, in union with their pastors, they carry out in the name of the Church” (76).

The fifth and final chapter covers “The Fostering of Peace and the Promotion of a Community of Nations”. In this section, the Council emphasizes that peace is not an absence of war but “an enterprise of justice” governed above all by the natural law (78-79). The Fathers condemn both weapons designed to kill large populations indiscriminately and guerilla warfare carried out by deceit and terrorism (79-80), and they describe the arms race as “an utterly treacherous trap for humanity” (81). To further peace, the Council recommends effective international bodies (83), greater international economic cooperation (85), and efforts at development which do not emphasize material conveniences in a way “contrary to man’s spiritual nature and advancement” (86). Finally, population concerns must not be an excuse for solutions “which are contrary to the moral law”; the decision concerning the number of children to have “depends on the right judgment of the parents and it cannot in any way be left to the judgment of public authority” (87).

Gaudium et Spes concludes by reminding everyone of two aphorisms of Jesus Christ, one gentle and the other severe. It is perhaps fitting that these are also the final warnings of the Second Vatican Council as a whole: First, “By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35); and second, “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 7:21) (93).

Afterword: The Mythology and the Reality of Vatican II

I began our survey of the documents of Vatican II (starting with [A Funny Thing about Vatican II](#)) because it seemed to me that the Church was just now becoming capable of responding to them as the Council Fathers would have wished. The period between the closing of the Council in 1965 and 1985 was marked by a wholesale distortion of the Council's message by the Modernist intelligentsia, which had an overwhelming influence over the Church in the West. The battle for the meaning of the Council commenced during the pontificate of John Paul II and gathered critical mass at the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops he called in Rome in 1985. Since that time, there has been a painfully slow but more or less steady attempt to "reform the reform." The current pope has described this in terms of applying a hermeneutic of continuity to the Council instead of a false hermeneutic of rupture.

The Modernists rightly saw from the first that the Council emphasized collegiality among the pope and the bishops, that it called the laity to assume a more mature role in the Church, that it encouraged Catholics to engage the modern world in a way that demonstrates how Christ and the Church provide the deepest answers to all legitimate human aspirations, and that it saw a great need for renewal of just about everything: spirituality, culture, scholarship, socio-economic life, politics, liturgy.

Knowledgeable observers interpreted these things (rightly) as evidence that the Council Fathers believed the Church was losing the battle for souls partly because of her own contemporary weaknesses, specifically her own tendencies to be authoritarian, isolated, condemnatory and self-satisfied—the all-too-human tendency to proceed by formula and by rote. The Council called every rank—indeed every person—in the Church to go deeper, and to respond proactively to the challenges of contemporary culture with a keen personal sense of the power and wisdom of Christ.

But after a little experience in the conciliar sessions, it also became clear to the Modernists that what they really wanted was not going to be enunciated in the documents. The Council was calling for renewal; it was not attempting to remake the Church in the Modernist image. The Fathers were not abandoning the sacred hierarchy for democracy, jettisoning tradition in favor of modernity, exchanging doctrine for fashionable cultural ideas, or substituting the signs of the times for the authority of

Christ and His vicar.

Faced with this (to them inexplicable) intransigence the Modernists developed a mythology of the Council. Beginning with the earliest press reports, they misreported what the Council was calling for and, when checked against the letter of the texts, they proposed that their interpretation was either what the Fathers really wanted (but were afraid to say) or that their interpretation was the undoubted goal of a process the Fathers had set in motion. Thus they justified their own program not by the letter but by the so-called “spirit of Vatican II.”

The Traditionalists (the term here refers to those who make an “ism” out of tradition, applying their own version of it against the living authority of the Church) also saw the real trajectory of the Council, but they seldom agreed that the flaws the Council saw in the contemporary Church were really flaws at all. In general, they liked the authoritarian tendencies of early 20th century churchmen, they were satisfied with the ecclesiastical tendency to keep modern culture at a distance and to condemn its shortcomings from the heights, they were comfortable with a certain degree of clericalism, and above all they tended to view the Tridentine Mass as very close to perfect and irreformable. They also thought the Council was taking the wrong tack in emphasizing ecumenism, the possibility of salvation for non-Catholics, and the role of religious liberty in man’s effort to know and follow God. The Traditionalists even believed (wrongly) that the Council had contradicted earlier infallible teaching in some of these matters.

Imagine their horror, then, at what followed. The Western Catholic intelligentsia at the time of the Council was already more or less secretly modernist, and the cultural shift toward secularization in the 1960’s enabled them to garner enthusiastic support by becoming openly so. It also turned out that the bishops in the West had been too much formed by this intelligentsia, and were far too willing to put all of the committees, commissions, consultative bodies, faculties, and programs—advocated by the Council to assist in an authentic renewal—into their tendentious hands. At the same time, Western culture generally denigrated any sort of discipline. Thus the vast majority of ecclesiastical developments in the West took on a distinctively Modernist slant.

To explain this, the Traditionalists promulgated a mythology of their own. Vatican II, they said, was directly responsible for this problem (the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy). Then, when faced like the Modernists with contrary evidence from the texts, they modified the myth to suggest that at the very least Vatican II, in calling for a positive and outreaching renewal when the Church was so weak, was really a colossal exercise in naïveté.

Alas, even good seed often falls on stony ground or among thorns, as evidenced by

the fact that both sides are still saying that they are right. But both sides are also shrinking as an increasing number of Western bishops, priests and theologians have been inching forward over the past twenty-five years in accordance with the papal effort to recover the meaning of the Council.

Meanwhile, it is only fair to say a word about an unfortunately large number of Catholics who have not responded to Vatican II on any level. If left alone, they would have no particular ideological axe to grind. Modernists are hell-bent for spiritual destruction. Traditionalists have their own blind spots, but at least they try very hard to take God seriously in a hostile universe. But what of all those who have failed to enter into the renewal called for by the Council out of sheer spiritual laziness? They followed the rules in the 50's when living prescriptively was the norm, and they became hostile to Magisterial authority in the 70's when hostility was all the fashion—dull sheep who always follow the most convenient voice without any serious reflection on its message.

So here we have an ecumenical council—a universal assembly of the bishops of the entire world whose collective acts are promulgated by the successor of St. Peter himself—and I am very much convinced that we need to stop arguing about it based on the myths of the opposing camps and instead study and take to heart what the Council actually said. The summaries of the sixteen documents in our series were designed to make it easy to do just that, to see that the Council had a great many important things to say about the Church, her need for renewal, and her action in the modern world.

It should surprise nobody that these summaries, relying heavily on the actual text, do not much resemble what many others have said about the Council. But they will have served an admirable purpose if they help readers to understand why Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have worked so hard to recover the authentic meaning of the Second Vatican Council, and—at long last—to see it implemented in the Church of Christ.

Appendix

Doctrinal Development on Religious Liberty

One of our generous supporters, Jonathan Liem, has asked me to examine the Second Vatican Council's teaching on religious liberty in order to resolve the questions some have expressed about how the *Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae)* can be reconciled with certain preceding elements in Catholic Tradition. I had addressed this question briefly in [Conflicting Teachings of the Magisterium?](#), pointing out that a number of scholars have shown different ways in which the various Magisterial teachings can be reconciled, but the Church herself has not approved one explanation over another. Therefore, in this essay, I can only indicate what I believe the best solution to be.

Setting the Stage

This is a complex topic, and I will propose that anyone wishing to understand its resolution completely *must* be willing to read two longer essays available in our library, which I believe are the best things yet written on the subject. These essays demonstrate conclusively, in my judgment, first that there is no conflict between past teaching and the teaching of Vatican II once one carefully parses what each really requires Catholics to believe; and second that the Council actually provided a legitimate doctrinal development of the Church's teaching on religious liberty, a development which makes that teaching clearer and more complete. As an essential preliminary, however, it is necessary to consider the proper method to be followed in cases of this kind, and to clear away factors which, while possibly clouding our judgment, ought to have no real bearing on the question.

Whenever we perceive a conflict or confusion between two Magisterial teachings, the proper approach demands that we recognize that the deficiency is in our own lack of perception, not in the truth of the Magisterial teachings. This lack of perception may consist in a misunderstanding of one or the other teaching because we have jumped to a conclusion about "what it must mean" without analyzing it with sufficient care to determine what it specifically requires us to believe. Or it may consist in a confusion of common theological opinion or even widespread Catholic practice with what the Magisterium actually teaches. Or it may simply consist in our own personal inability to

perceive how two or more statements can be reconciled. For example, it took theologians centuries to understand how the Scriptural statements which emphasize Christ's omniscience could be reconciled with His statements of apparent limitation, such as not knowing the time of the end of the world. Yet none of the Church Fathers held that some passages were true and others false.

In any case, the proper attitude is one of acceptance of the Church's Magisterium in all its manifestations, confident of their truth even when we do not wholly understand them. It is not possible to prefer the authority of one statement to another, if both are properly Magisterial, as if the Magisterium is protected from error in some eras but not in others. In the right spirit, therefore, one must lay out all the relevant statements and closely analyze what each says, striving to come to an understanding which admits the truth of all.

Four Difficulties with this Particular Issue

The Second Vatican Council upheld the right of all persons to be free from coercion by the State in religious matters, within due limits. Some have taken this to contradict an earlier emphasis by the Church on the duties of the State to acknowledge the truth and to suppress error in religious matters. In the continuing debate, it is possible to identify four particular difficulties which have made the relevant questions more difficult for many people to resolve.

Category Mistakes: The first difficulty is the tendency to get bogged down in irrelevant matters. This has been the case, for example, with those commentators who have applied principles appropriate to Canon Law to the elucidation of doctrine, which is a category mistake. Thus we cannot resolve doctrinal problems by appealing to other statements made at the time of the doctrinal formulation which shed light on what the formulators (either pope or council) had in mind, or from the common practice of the Church at the time. No, what they may have had in mind—or how most Churchmen acted—is doctrinally irrelevant. It is only what the Magisterium succeeded in writing down and promulgating that matters, for it is precisely at this stage that the Holy Spirit ensures that mistaken aspects of the human understanding do not bleed through to the final draft.

As an example, Fr. Brian Harrison, who has written many good things about the issue of religious liberty, has sometimes fallen afoul of this methodological difficulty, and his critics have done the same. Indeed, the long and still ongoing debate between Fr. Harrison and Arnold Guminski (some of which is available in our library) is extremely difficult to follow because it quickly gets lost in arguments over intention (irrelevant),

the “practical infallibility” of ecclesiastical practice in earlier times (an infallibility which does not exist), and other similar confusions. These are highly relevant to the interpretation of law, but they have no bearing on doctrinal questions whatsoever.

Preconceptions: A second difficulty has often afflicted both modernists and traditionalists in their handling of the religious liberty issue. I refer to preconceptions and predispositions. Modernists don’t accept the consistency and stability of Church teaching, so they find no problem in what others may perceive as innovation. Their understanding of religious truth is risible and cannot possibly interest us in resolving the concerns before us now. Traditionalists have an unfortunate tendency to assume that they know what older Magisterial statements “must mean” without parsing them precisely and in light of more recent and equally authoritative statements. There tends to be a traditionalist animus against newer doctrinal developments in favor of older emphases, and this apparent willingness to accord the Magisterium supreme authority in one era but not in another too often leads to sloppiness of interpretation.

I will dwell on this particular predisposition for just a moment because it is, in fact, the traditionalist inability (or refusal) to see how the older and more modern texts fit together that continues to fuel a controversy which, for everybody else, was laid to rest by scholarly work done within 20 years of the Council. Essentially, the traditionalist view of the matter is lifted from the work of the late Michael Davies, an extremely articulate scholar who was uniformly critical of the Council and the post-conciliar Church, and who had the unfortunate habit of appearing to master extensive traditional references while failing to understand their precise meaning, their authoritative weight, or the irrelevance of his own inability to imagine a satisfactory reconciliation of what he perceived as divergent statements.

It is one of the best services of Fr. Harrison on this subject that he has made these problems of understanding eminently clear in the case of Davies’ treatment of the religious liberty controversy, by his [review of Davies’ book](#) on the subject. It is worth noting in this context that the one article referenced by Jonathan Liem in asking me to address this issue was taken from a traditionalist newspaper, *The Remnant*, and written by a guest columnist, John Salza, who apparently follows Davies in every respect. In some circles, Michael Davies tends to be regarded as more authoritative than the pope, but I honestly cannot over-emphasize the need to detach oneself from the shortcomings of his traditionalist (not to say traditional) perspective as a precondition for fully understanding the problem of religious liberty.

Rights: The third problem which afflicts this issue is a misunderstanding of human rights. Human rights are never absolute in and of themselves, but always entail

corresponding duties, the failure of which nullifies the right. Even the most basic right, the right to life, can be forfeited if we fail in our duty to refrain from attacking innocent persons. So too with lesser rights, such as the right to freedom of speech (one may not shout “Fire!” in a crowded room). This is also the case with the right of the State to suppress error (it depends on how the error has been determined and what the consequences of attempting to suppress it are). Finally, this also applies to religious liberty, which carries a corresponding duty to engage in one’s quest for God in a manner that neither subverts the common good nor does violence to the Catholic religion. Thus Vatican II talked about religious liberty “within due limits”, and the nature of those limits is highly relevant to our discussion.

Divine Brinkmanship: A fourth and final major difficulty which applies in a special way to the problem of religious liberty is what Fr. William Most has called “divine brinkmanship.” Freedom is built into God’s creation of man, because the decision to love is inescapably a free decision. This means that God (from His own love) is constrained to do everything He can to ensure man’s salvation without violating man’s freedom. Therefore, in all matters touching human liberty, we see God’s “brinkmanship” at work, that is, His perfect ability to give exactly what is due to His effort to bring man to salvation (and no more) and to give exactly what is due to human freedom (and no more)—two trajectories which are held, in ways often obscure to ourselves, in a precise balance which compromises neither. We should not be surprised, then, to find that the question of religious liberty with respect to the authority of the State participates in this same delicate balance, and that God’s requirements as expressed in Catholic doctrine on this subject are similarly characterized by a delicate balancing of the twin trajectories in yet another instance of Divine brinkmanship.

Resolving the Issue

The first task in reconciling apparent contradictions among magisterial texts is, as we have seen, to examine the texts and determine carefully what each one enjoins or prohibits, and then to seek an understanding of the doctrinal question which satisfies the requirements of each of the texts. We might refer to this exercise as “finding the overlap”, for whenever a series of statements, all known to be true, appear to contradict each other, a close examination will reveal that there is some confluence in their requirements within which, by expressing the doctrine within this overlapping region, all statements are understood to be true. It is in fact exactly this process which permits us to clarify doctrine over time, understanding it more precisely as divergent aspects of the issue it represents are considered under different circumstances and in the face of

different problems.

Back in 1983, when I was a professor at Christendom College and the editor of the College's academic journal, *Faith & Reason*, I requested several scholars of noteworthy intelligence and unimpeachable orthodoxy to contribute articles reconciling the older Magisterial pronouncements on religious liberty with the newer teachings in *Dignitatis Humanae* at Vatican II. The two most successful treatments I have ever seen were submitted and published in response to this request, and so you can see why I have not been overly concerned about this topic since that time. These are the two articles referred to above which I insist must be read for a complete understanding of the problem of religious liberty at Vatican II.

The first, by the late Scripture scholar and theologian Rev. William G. Most, did a superb job of setting forth the proper method to be used (some of which I have summarized above), of marshalling the relevant Magisterial texts, of showing what each formally enjoins or excludes, and of demonstrating the "overlap" within which we find an understanding of religious liberty which recognizes all the Magisterial statements as true. Not coincidentally, Fr. Most was the foremost scholar in the world on the question of grace and free will, having made breakthroughs on this topic in the 1950's when he published his masterwork *Grace, Predestination and the Salvific Will of God: New Answers to Old Questions*. While his article is not overly long, and is exceedingly easy to follow, it is certainly too much to repeat here. Instead I present it as required reading number one: [Religious Liberty: What the Texts Demand](#).

Clarifying the Statements

Exploring the texts of Pope Gregory XVI, Pope Pius IX, Pope Leo XIII, and Pope Pius XII, Fr. Most first seeks to set forth their teachings according to the strict requirements of what these texts enjoin or prohibit. He draws out seven definitive statements which represent a precise and proper understanding of the Church's full teaching on religious liberty prior to Vatican II:

1. No one has a *right* to just any wrong belief or worship. (Gregory XVI)
2. It is wrong to say that one can be saved precisely *by* false beliefs. (Gregory XVI)
3. It is wrong to say that no authority at all, church or state, has any right to restrain manifestation and publication of errors no matter how gross or immoral they are. (Gregory XVI)
4. It is wrong to say that those who do violence to the Catholic religion should not

- be restrained unless public order demands it. (Pius IX)
5. The state has the obligation to worship God, and to do it in the way God wills. (Leo XIII)
 6. But it is necessary, for the common good, to permit some errors, as God Himself does. (Leo XIII)
 7. Moreover, God does not give a right to repress certain kinds of errors at all. (Pius XII)

Fr. Most then concludes by examining the teachings of the Council in order to find an understanding which satisfies not only Vatican II but earlier teachings, in particular the potential source of conflict in proposition number 4. He finds that a consideration of what it means to “do violence” to the Catholic religion (Pius IX) and the exercise of religious liberty “within due limits” (Vatican II) present plenty of room for an accommodation of all teachings, as indicated by “the nicely balanced teaching of Pius XII in *Ci riesce*: In some cases, God does not even give a right to repression, and the good of the universal Church would exclude repression.”

Again, to get the full force of the examination, with all aspects of the problem duly considered, it is necessary to read the article.

Doctrinal Development at Vatican II

In my own ideal solution to the questions we have been discussing, I wish to take the matter one small step farther than did Fr. Most. I believe that the teaching of Vatican II on religious liberty is not only something that can be understood to fit within the already established tradition. Rather, in one particular way it extends that tradition through a legitimate development of doctrine—that is, as Newman put it, a change which makes Catholic doctrine more precise while corroborating, rather than obscuring, the teachings from which it springs. We saw exactly this kind of development in the case of the Church’s teaching on capital punishment during the pontificate of John Paul II, who pointed out that the traditionally-acknowledged right of the State to execute for a grave reason was legitimately exercised *only when it was necessary to protect society*.

The same thing, I believe, occurred with respect to religious liberty at the Second Vatican Council, and it is very important to examine a compelling review of the Church’s teaching which includes a formulation of exactly how the Council developed it. This is the contribution made by the second critical essay in my arsenal, by Dr. William H. Marshner, entitled [Dignitatis humanae and Traditional Teaching on Church](#)

[and State](#), published in the same Fall 1983 issue of *Faith & Reason*. Dr. Marshner is one of the founders of Christendom College, the first chair of its Theology Department, and still a professor of Theology there. He is an acknowledged expert not only in theology but in the intersection between theology and politics. For a full understanding, his article is required reading number two.

Identifying the Development

There is one point on which I disagree with Dr. Marshner as he expresses himself in the article in question, though I do not know whether his opinion has changed since that time. He held then that the new ground broken at Vatican II “is non-infallible teaching” but still part of the Church’s Magisterium, meaning that “the kind of religious assent which Catholics owe to that teaching is the kind of assent which does not exclude the logical possibility that the teachings is wrong; rather, our assent excludes any *probability* that the new teaching is wrong.” I have never been comfortable with this distinction (not that it is a matter of personal comfort), but it makes no practical difference to Marshner’s effort to understand the texts, and he concludes that “the new ground can be given an adequate rationale within the framework of the old”.

Nonetheless, I wish to state again my own view that as an ecumenical council (*i.e.*, a full expression of the Church’s authority in the body of bishops confirmed and promulgated by the pope), Vatican II actually is infallible in everything it intended to teach to the whole Church on faith or morals.

Be that as it may, Dr. Marshner demonstrates the unfolding of the Church’s teaching on religious liberty with unrivalled lucidity. Reading his analysis will reinforce, clarify, and make even more coherent and memorable the lessons drawn from Fr. Most’s preliminary textual analysis. Marshner enumerates first the principles which Vatican II clearly teaches which are obviously compatible with previous doctrine:

- No one ought to use force to change another’s beliefs (especially his religious beliefs).
- No human authority may set penalties for non-conversion to Catholicism or for failure to elicit the first assent of supernatural faith.
- God obligates all men to obey the natural Moral Law; and beyond that, God obligates all men to seek and embrace the religious truth which He has revealed.
- Since God obligates all men to seek and embrace the religious truth which He has revealed, it follows that man has, over against any human government, a *right*

right to seek and hold that truth.

Dr. Marshner then seeks to properly express the special teaching about these matters which Vatican II “projects into the social sphere, onto the terrain of exercise”—that is, the “rights affirmed” in the preceding principles—and he does so as follows:

- No one ought to interfere with anyone’s doing those acts which (a) he believes he ought to do on religious grounds and which (b) cannot justly be treated as crimes because they conform to Natural Law norms of intellectual probity and moral innocence.

Conclusion

Like Fr. Most, Dr. Marshner concludes that Pius XII in *Ci riesce* had already provided the key to understanding that the State’s duty to suppress moral and religious error is limited. As Marshner puts it, Pius XII taught that “the duty to suppress moral and religious error, though genuine, is not the Catholic State’s *ultimate norm of action*.” He explains what he means by quoting Pius XII: “It must be subordinated to higher and more general norms which, under certain circumstances, permit, and may even show that the best choice for promoting greater good is, the toleration of error.” Thus, Pius XII established what Marshner calls a “must-do” law of toleration—teaching, in effect, that when the Church notifies the State of errors on the part of its citizens, then if repression of such errors would harm the common good, the State “will have a genuine *right* to tell the clergy to carry out their own evangelical mission to immunize the faithful, and stop asking the police to solve their problems for them.”

Finally, Dr. Marshner concludes that “all Vatican II does” is add another “must-do” law of toleration, which he expresses thus: “To the precise extent that those holding a religious error nevertheless profess something rationally defensible and practice what is morally inoffensive, they enjoy an immunity from civil penalties by virtue of which the State has a second ground for telling the Church that it cannot justly use its force against them.” He is quick to point out that this does not revoke the State’s obligation, authority and power to protect supernatural truths. Rather, the right of religious liberty enjoyed by every human person simply requires that the State’s actions be determined by reason of injurious natural consequences rather than by reason of supernatural error itself.

This, I believe, is the development of doctrine on religious liberty which occurred at the Second Vatican Council, and it is completely consistent with the Magisterial

statements on these issues which preceded the Council. I grant that it would be very helpful to many if the Church would authoritatively clarify the matter, presumably along these lines, in order to lay to rest needless worries. Until that happens, however, those who wish to get the entire picture firmly in mind really should complete my “required reading”. Or, you could simply rest assured that the Church does not contradict herself, and so put your mind at rest. I am also happy to note that, when we come at length to the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* in my ongoing series on the documents of Vatican II, this exposition is going to save us all a great deal of time.

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