Celebrating Vatican II

A Practical Guide for Reading and Reflecting on the Documents Lumen Gentium Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Part I



By Jim and Barbara Campbell

DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH *LUMEN GENTIUM* SOLEMNLY PROMULGATED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI ON NOVEMBER 21, 1964

Topic 1The Father, Son and Holy Spirit

2. The eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men to a participation of the divine life. Fallen in Adam, God the Father did not leave men to themselves, but ceaselessly offered helps to salvation, in view of Christ, the Redeemer "who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature"

3. To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom. By His obedience He brought about redemption. The Church, or, in other words, the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world.

4. By the power of the Gospel [the Holy Spirit] makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. Uninterruptedly He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, "Come!" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium, In *Vatican II Documents*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011)

Context

Matthew 3: 16 – 17

¹⁶ After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. ¹⁷ And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." *(New American Bible*. 2011 (Revised Edition) (Mt 3:16–17). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

Catechism of the Catholic Church

232 Christians are baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Before receiving the sacrament, they respond to a three-part question when asked to confess the Father, the Son, and the Spirit: "I do." "The faith of all Christians rests on the Trinity."⁵⁴ (*189, 1223*) (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (62). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

Caritas in Veritate

The Trinity is absolute unity insofar as the three divine Persons are pure relationality. The reciprocal transparency among the divine Persons is total and the bond between each of them complete, since they constitute a unique and absolute unity. God desires to incorporate us into this reality of communion as well: "that they may be one even as we are one" (Jn 17:22). The Church is a sign and instrument of this unity (Benedict XVI. (2009). *Caritas in Veritate*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Question

What does it mean for us to realize that God is closer to us than our very breath, and is calling us into an even more intimate relationship with him and others?

Action

Explore the opportunities in your diocese or parish to participate in a time of adoration.

The Catholic Church

8 This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Savior, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd, (John 21:12) and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority, which He erected for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). (Catholic Church. (2011). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Context

John 21: 15 – 17

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He then said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." [Jesus] said to him, "Feed my sheep. (*New American Bible.* 2011 (Revised Edition) (Jn 21:15–17). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

Catechism of the Catholic Church

811 "This is the sole Church of Christ, which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic." These four characteristics, inseparably linked with each other,²⁵⁷ indicate essential features of the Church and her mission. The Church does not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities. (*750; 832, 865*) (Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (214). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

Ecclesiam Suam

41. Our intense desire is to see the Church become what Christ intended it to be: one, holy, and entirely dedicated to the pursuit of that perfection to which Christ called it and for which He qualified it. In its pilgrimage through the world the Church must really strive to manifest that ideal of perfection envisaged for it by the divine Redeemer. (Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam.* August 6, 1964)

Question

What is the source of the characteristics of the Catholic Church? How can we faithfully live out these qualities?

Action

Research the story of one of a saint who is a special example of holiness for you. Share the story with your family.

Topic 3The Relationship of the Church to the World

8 Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ. While Christ, holy, innocent and undefiled knew nothing of sin, but came to expiate only the sins of the people, the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal. (Catholic Church. (2011). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Context

Matthew 25: 40

⁴⁰ And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.(*New American Bible*. 2011 (Revised Edition) (Mt 25:40). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

1397 *The Eucharist commits us to the poor.* To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren: (2449)

You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, yet you do not recognize your brother, ... You dishonor this table when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food someone judged worthy to take part in this meal.... God freed you from all your sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful. (Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (353). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

Deus Caritas Est

14. Faith, worship and *ethos* are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God's *agape*. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart. "Worship" itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. (Benedict XVI. (2005). *Deus Caritas Est*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Question

What kind of relationship is God calling us to with himself and others? What kind of responsibilities towards him and others is God calling us to?

Action

Explore the possibilities of giving direct service to the poor in your parish or neighborhood, including donations to St Vincent de Paul Society, or to a local soup kitchen.

The Church and Salvation

14 They are fully incorporated in the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and are united with her as part of her visible bodily structure and through her with Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. The bonds which bind men to the Church in a visible way are profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government and communion. He is not saved, however, who, though part of the body of the Church, does not persevere in charity. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but, as it were, only in a "bodily" manner and not "in his heart." All the Church's children should remember that their exalted status is to be attributed not to their own merits but to the special grace of Christ. If they fail moreover to respond to that grace in thought, word and deed, not only shall they not be saved but they will be the more severely judged. (Luke 12:48) (Catholic Church. (2011). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Context

Luke 8: 16- 18 ¹⁶ "No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a bed; rather, he places it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. ¹⁷ For there is nothing hidden that will not become visible, and nothing secret that will not be known and come to light. ¹⁸ Take care, then, how you hear. To anyone who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away." (*New American Bible*. 2011 (Revised Edition) (Lk 8:16–18). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

430 Jesus means in Hebrew: "God saves." At the annunciation, the angel Gabriel gave him the name Jesus as his proper name, which expresses both his identity and his mission. Since God alone can forgive sins, it is God who, in Jesus his eternal Son made man, "will save his people from their sins."¹⁹ In Jesus, God recapitulates all of his history of salvation on behalf of men. (*210; 402*) (Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (108). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

Redemptoris Missio

31. The Lord Jesus sent his apostles to every person, people and place on earth. In the apostles, the Church received a universal mission—one which knows no boundaries—which involves the communication of salvation in its integrity according to that fullness of life which Christ came to bring (cf. Jn 10:10). The Church was "sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God to all people and nations." (John Paul II. (1990). *Redemptoris Missio*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Question:

What does the Church teach about what it means to be a responsible Catholic?

Action

Make a commitment to regularly celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and to become a better Catholic in your heart.

Salvation of Others

But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Savior wills that all men be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). (Catholic Church. (2011). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Context

1 Timothy 2: 1 – 4

¹First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, ² for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. ³This is good and pleasing to God our savior, ⁴ who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

⁵ For there is one God.

There is also one mediator between God and the human race,

Christ Jesus, himself human,

⁶ who gave himself as ransom for all. (*New American Bible*. 2011 (Revised Edition) (1 Ti 2:1–6). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

The Catechism of the Catolic Church

620 Our salvation flows from God's initiative of love for us, because "he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (*1 Jn* 4:10). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (*2 Cor* 5:19). (Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (161). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

Ecclesia in Africa

66. Particular care will therefore be taken so that Islamic-Christian dialogue respects on both sides the principle of religious freedom with all that this involves, also including external and public manifestations of faith.(113) Christians and Muslims are called to commit themselves to promoting a dialogue free from the risks of false irenicism or militant fundamentalism, and to raising their voices against unfair policies and practices, as well as against the lack of reciprocity in matters of religious freedom.(114) (John Paul II. (1995). *Ecclesia in Africa*. Apostolic Exhortations. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Question

According to this teaching, how are we called to view others who are not Catholic?

Action

Learn more deeply the Church's teaching on Judaism and Islam.

Those Who Do Not Know Christ

16. Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. [19] Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life. (Catholic Church. (2011). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Context

Luke 2: 12 – 14

¹³And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (*New American Bible*. 2011 (Revised Edition) (Lk 2:12–14). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

780 The Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation, the sign and the instrument of the communion of God and men. (Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (205). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

Congregation of the Holy Office

In the late 1940's Rev. Leonard Feeny taught that only those who formerly entered the Catholic Church would be saved. At the request of Archbishop Richard Cushing of the Archdiocese of Boston, Cardinal Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani of the Sacred Cardinal of the Holy Office sent the following clarification.

The same in its own degree must be asserted of the Church, in as far as she is the general help to salvation. Therefore, that one may obtain eternal salvation, it is not always required that he be

incorporated into the Church actually as a member, but it is necessary that at least he be united to her by desire and longing.

However, this desire need not always be explicit, as it is in catechumens; but when a person is involved in invincible ignorance God accepts also an implicit desire, so called because it is included in that good disposition of soul whereby a person wishes his will to be conformed to the will of God. (From Letter of the Congregation of the Holy Office, Given on August 8, 1949)

Question

Based on this teaching, how are Catholics called to view the rest of the world?

Action

Invite a neighbor or colleague who is not Catholic to attend Mass and be prepared to answer any questions that may come up.

Jim Campbell

16 But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator. Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair. Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, "Preach the Gospel to every creature", the Church fosters the missions with care and attention. (Catholic Church. (2011). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Context

Matthew 28: 16 – 20

¹⁸ Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (*New American Bible*. 2011 (Revised Edition) (Mt 28:16–20). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

849 *The missionary mandate.* "Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men": "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and Lo, I am with you always, until the close of the age." (Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (225). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

Redemptoris Missio

9. The first beneficiary of salvation is the Church. Christ won the Church for himself at the price of his own blood and made the Church his co-worker in the salvation of the world. Indeed, Christ dwells within the Church. She is his Bride. It is he who causes her to grow. He carries out his mission through her. (John Paul II. (1990). *Redemptoris Missio*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Question

What graces can we pray for in order to proclaim the Gospel in our time? ... for the grace of courage? ... of greater insight into our Catholic faith? ... of perseverance?

Action

Attend an apologetics class or begin to read a book on the Catholic faith for at least 15 minutes a day to prepare to become someone more able to share your faith with others.

18. [Jesus Christ] willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world. And in order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed Blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion. And all this teaching about the institution, the perpetuity, the meaning and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and of his infallible magisterium, this Sacred Council again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful. 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. (Catholic Church. (2011). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Context

John 20: 19 – 22

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ [Jesus] said to them again, "Peace be with you." As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. (*New American Bible*. 2011 (Revised Edition) (Jn 20:19–22). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

869 The Church is apostolic. She is built on a lasting foundation: "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (*Rev* 21:14). She is indestructible (cf. *Mt* 16:18). She is upheld infallibly in the truth: Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops. (Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (230). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

Deus Caritas Est

Recently, however, the *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* explored more specifically the duty of charity as a responsibility incumbent upon the whole Church and upon each Bishop in his Diocese, and it emphasized that the exercise of charity is an action of the Church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning. (Benedict XVI. (2005). Deus Caritas Est. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Question

What kind of faithful obedience do we as Catholics owe to the pope and bishops as directors of the house of God? How is our obedience reflected in our acceptance of the teachings quoted in these pages from the *Constitution on the Church*?

Action

Visit the websites for the Diocese of Rockford (rockforddiocese.org) and the United States Catholic Conference (usccb. org) to learn the concerns of the bishops on religious, social, and political issues.

The Holiness of the Church is Expressed in Her Members

41. The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity. (Catholic Church. (2011). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Context

Ephesians 1: 3 – 4

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, ⁴as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. (*New American Bible*. 2011 (Revised Edition) (Ephesians 1:3–4). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

823 "The Church ... is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as 'alone holy,' loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her; he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God." The Church, then, is "the holy People of God,"²⁹⁰ and her members are called "saints." (Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (218). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

Pope John Paul II

"In all the commandments and exhortations of Jesus and of the Church the primacy of charity stands out. In the words of St. Paul, charity is 'the bond of perfection' (Col 3:14). It is Jesus' will that 'we love one another as he has loved us' (Jn 15:12). That means with a love like his, 'unto the end' (Jn 13:1). This is the patrimony of holiness bequeathed by Jesus to his Church. We are all called to partake in it, and thus to draw on the fullness of grace and life which is in Christ." (John Paul II, General Audience, July 23, 1988)

Question

How do we see the call to holiness by Jesus? ... a challenge? ... an opportunity? ... a sacred trust? ... a responsibility?

Action

Research the life of Frederic Ozanam, (ahttp://www.stvincentdepaul.net/about-History.htm) a French layman, to discover how his simple act of kindness led to the ministry to the needy that still is active in the Church today.

Holiness in Daily Life

42. Therefore, all the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state. Indeed they have an obligation to so strive. Let all then have care that they guide aright their own deepest sentiments of soul. Let neither the use of the things of this world nor attachment to riches, which is against the spirit of evangelical poverty, hinder them in their quest for perfect love. Let them heed the admonition of the Apostle to those who use this world; let them not come to terms with this world; for this world, as we see it, is passing away. (Catholic Church. (2011). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. In *Vatican II Documents*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.)

Context

1 Peter 2: 4 – 6

⁴ Come to him, a living stone,* rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ and, like living stones, let yourselves be built* into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it says in scripture:

"Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion,

a cornerstone, chosen and precious,

and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame." (*New American Bible*. 2011 (Revised Edition) (1 Pe 2:4–6). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

The Catechism of the Catholic Faith

1268 The baptized have become "living stones" to be "built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood." By Baptism they share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission. They are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that [they] may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light."⁷⁵ Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers. (Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (323). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.)

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

You know, Mother, that I have always wanted to be become a saint. Unfortunately when I have compared myself with the saints, I have always found that there is the same difference between the saints and me as there is between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and a humble grain of sand trodden underfoot by passersby. Instead of being discouraged, I told myself: God would not make me wish for something impossible and so, in spite of my littleness, I can aim at being a saint. It is impossible for me to grow bigger, so I put up with myself as I am, with all my countless faults. But I will look for some means of going to heaven by a little way which is very short and very straight, a little way that is quite new[...] It is your arms, Jesus, which are the lift to carry me to heaven, And so there is no need for me to grow up. In fact, just the opposite: I must stay little and become less and less. –(St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*. (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 113.)

Question

Who by their daily actions for God and others can we identify as an example of holiness?

Action

Research the lives of Blessed Zélie and Louis Martin, parents of St Therese of Lisieux to see how they also discovered the way to holiness in their state of life.