

# 3. Vatican II: Preparation and Documents

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## *Ecumenism & Interreligious Dialogue*

### **Lumen Gentium**

#### **The text**

- Situates the Church in the mystery of salvation
  - “While it slowly grows, 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 Boundaries of the Church**

- Subsists within the Catholic Church (8)
- Fullest presence in the visible organization headed by the successor of Peter
- Many elements of sanctification are found outside its visible confines

#### **Membership in the Church**

- Hierarchical organization begins with the people of God
  - “Not only, then, is the people of God made up of different peoples but in its inner structure also it is composed of various ranks. This diversity among its members arises either by reason of their duties, as is the case with those who exercise the sacred ministry for the good of their brethren, or by reason of their condition and state of life, as is the case with those many who enter the religious state and, tending toward holiness by a narrower path, stimulate their brethren by their example. Moreover, within the Church particular Churches hold a rightful place; these Churches retain their own traditions, without in any way opposing the primacy of the Chair of Peter, which presides over the whole assembly of charity and protects legitimate differences, while at the same time assuring that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute toward it.” (13)
- The Church is linked to all the baptized (15)
- It is also related to those who have not received the Gospel (16)
  - “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.” (16)

#### **Ministerial Organization**

- The episcopate (and papacy) as ministers of the Communion of the Church (Chapter III)
- The role of the laity is emphasized (Chapter IV)
  - They transform the world
  - “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. By so doing they will imbue culture and human activity with genuine moral values; they will better prepare the field of the world for the seed of the Word of God; and at the same time they will open wider the doors of the Church by which the message of peace may enter the world.” (36)
- All are called to holiness (Chapter V)

#### **Compared with *Mystici corporis***

- Similarities
  - Emphasis on the visible Church
  - Stress that the hierarchical and the spiritual Church are not two separate realities
- Developments (8)
  - The hierarchical society and the spiritual community are not identified but described as “one complex reality”
  - The Church of Christ *subsists in* the Roman Catholic Church
  - Some aspects of the Church exist outside of its confines and give sanctification & truth, in doing this promote unity
    - LG 8: “Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside its visible confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards Catholic unity.”
    - MC 41: “They have taken away the visible head, broken the visible bonds of unity and left the Mystical Body of the Redeemer so obscured and so maimed, that those who are seeking the haven of eternal salvation can neither see it nor find it.”
- The source of the developments

- Further reflection on the thought of Augustine and the practice of the early Church

## Other points

- “No salvation outside the Church” is made more precise
  - LG 14: “Hence, they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it.”
- Further clarification of the relationship of other Christians to the Church (Roman Catholic Church)
  - LG 15: “joined in many ways to the baptized who are honoured by the name of Christian”
  - They “do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or communion under the successor of Peter.”
  - They possess many aspects of the Church: Scripture, faith in Christ, baptism, some even other sacraments and episcopate
  - “There is furthermore a sharing in prayer and spiritual benefits; these Christians are indeed in some real way joined to us in the Holy Spirit for, by his gifts and graces, his sanctifying power is also active in them even to the shedding of their blood.”
  - They are called to unity in one flock, under one shepherd.

## Importance of ecumenism

- LG 15: “Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope and work that this [unity in one flock, under one shepherd] may be achieved, and she exhorts her children to purification and renewal so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the Church.”

## Unitatis Redintegratio

1. The theological problem of a divided Christianity
  - a. The division among Christians hinders the preaching of the Gospel (1).
  - b. The Council “gladly notes” the ecumenical movement among Christians (1).
  - c. An admission of the sinful historical circumstances responsible for the current state of divided Christendom “for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame” (3)
    - Distinction between those who initiated the division and the present generation: “However, one cannot charge with the sin of separation those who at present are born into these communities and in them are brought up on the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers” (3).
2. The extent of communion with the Catholic Church
  - The properly baptized who believe in Christ are all in some communion with the Catholic Church (3)
  - Though there are many differences in doctrine and discipline that create difficulties for full ecclesial communion, “it remains true that all who have been justified by faith in baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.” (3)
  - Visible elements of the Church exist outside the Catholic Church. These belong to the Church and lead people to it. The rites of the separated communities can because of this lead its members to salvation.
  - “For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using [the separated Churches and communities] as a means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.”
3. The Uniqueness of the Catholic Church
 

“For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help towards salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.”
4. The need for ecumenism
  - All the Catholic faithful are urged “to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism” (4)
  - There is no opposition between ecumenism and bringing others into the Catholic Church, but they are distinct.
  - A Catholic’s primary duty “is to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and done in the Catholic household itself, in order that its life may bear witness more clearly and faithfully to the teachings and institutions which have been handed down from Christ through the apostles.”
  - Catholics “must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments of our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren.”

## Ecclesiological Perspectives and the Goal of Ecumenism

- Perspectives
  - Ecumenical progress as a process of recognition, a common search for truth
  - Ecumenical progress as a gradual acceptance of diversity
  - Ecumenical progress as an active program
- Ecumenical Ecclesiologies
  - World Council of Churches
  - Roman Catholic Church as presented in the past
  - Roman Catholic Church today