



Summary of Lumen Gentium – Dogmatic Constitution of the Church

By. Deacon Ed Sheffer

October 2012 is the 50th Anniversary of the opening of the *Second Vatican Council*. Pope Benedict XVI declared October 11, 2012 until November 24, 2013 a *Year of Faith*. He said: *It will be a moment of grace and commitment to a more complete conversion to God, to strengthen our faith in Him and proclaim Him with joy to the people of our time.* In a world becoming more and more secularized, I believe we Catholics desperately need to open our eyes and hearts. If we are to become more *one with Christ*, we need to see and live the great beauty and gift of Catholicism. Throughout this year I hope to provide some snippets of the richness rooted in the Second Vatican Two Documents, to the St Thomas the Apostle Life Teen Family. What follows in this issue of LT Times is a summary of *Lumen Gentium*. This document holds a central place among all of the other documents issued by the fathers of Vatican Two. It also holds a special place in the hearts of my personal family. My great uncle was a constant presence in our young life and he was one of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. He was a Benedictine Abbot and was appointed by Pope John XXII to be one of his consulters of the *Pontifical Theological Commission for the Preparation of the Ecumenical Council of the Vatican II*. Abbot Ambrose was filled with faith, hope, and love. He never saw the conclusion to this historical Council. He died in the midst of it, but not before one of my brothers, sisters, and I received a final blessing, a loving smile and a wave goodbye from the window of hospital room. My mother would tell me later that his prayer was that we would be one with Christ and His Church.

Pope Paul VI urged our Church's leaders to accept the importance of a document that would provide a fundamental understanding of the Church. The debate the Council fathers had in respect to this document was: *Is the Roman Catholic Church still equal to the Church Christ handed on to Peter and the Apostles.*

Chapter One: The Mystery of the Church

The primary role of the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in order that all might have an opportunity to receive Christ. Jesus' act of love was not so he could be anyone's *personal Savior*. His dying on the Cross was an act of love for the world, by which all are called to be in union with Christ, and God's love continues to flow to us through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the one who leads those who are lost to find eternal life. We the Church receive all that we need from the Spirit in order to be provided the means for holiness. Our pursuit of holiness is tied to the Spirit. The Spirit is also relevant to how unity is established. It is established through pursuing God-like love. The unity of love present in the Trinity is the same love that binds us together. The depth of this love cannot be fully understood by humanity. However, it can be understood much better by coming to know what

it is built on – Jesus Christ. Through Baptism we in a mysterious way become one body. We all make up this *Body of Christ*. Connectedness to this Body is to lead to a profound concern for all. There is both a human and a divine element to the Church, but it is one Holy and Universal and Apostolic Church. We are sanctified through the cross and provided strength through his Church. We receive the grace to overcome through the gifts of patience and love. If we remain faithful, we succeed in announcing Christ to the world.

Chapter Two: *The People of God*

It is in the unity of belief that the truth of faith is plainly seen and becomes clear to unbelievers. The Spirit provides each of us individual gifts in order for us to become exactly who we were created to be. The use of these graces is what forms us into a community – The People of God. Unity is so important in the plan of God that He became one of us in Jesus, so we might realize better the divine beauty of oneness. We are to understand that the Church is necessary for salvation according to Scripture and Tradition, for it is in the Church that we are to encounter Christ who is *The Way*. It is in encountering Christ that a heart can learn to be rooted in Christ and live for others. Those who seek Christ in other churches are linked to us through Scripture, prayer, love, and in specific sacraments. There are also many who are not Christian and yet remain connected to the People of God. It is the person who persists in evil and desires to foster despair that ultimately cuts off any relationship to the People of God. The key law of membership is simple: to love as Christ loved. The Catholic Church remains the sign of unity and is a sacrament of salvation for all. God saves us not as individuals but as the People of God.

Chapter Three: *The Church is Hierarchal*

Christ entrusted the apostles with the mission of leading, assigning Peter as the head. Their successors, the bishops, are entrusted with the same mission until the end of the world. The bishops are to work with each other and with the pope to lead the People of God. The bishop's highest priorities are to lead the people towards order, harmony, and unity. It is in the fullness of the priesthood that a bishop is spiritually named as one who will take the place of Christ for us. The episcopal consecration empowers a bishop to sanctify, teach, and lead. They must lead bound together in relationship to all bishops and in a more special way with the pope. This is vital to the hierarchal order. The bishops serve as a sign of unity in their own diocese. Preaching the Gospel is their number one priority. They are to also ensure that the People of God have access to the Sacraments, especially to the Eucharist. The bishop is responsible for the souls of those given to him by Christ. A bishop requires assistance in carrying out the mission of the Church. Therefore God established two levels of ministry to help in the cause – priest and deacon. The priest becomes the representative of the bishop, and as such, works in conjunction with the bishop. The priest effort is pastoral in nature. They are to look after the spiritual needs of their parishioners. The deacon is ordained to the ministry of service. Through sacramental grace they are committed to serve in the ministry of word, liturgy, and charity. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church is firmly established in Scripture and Tradition.

Chapter Four: *The Laity*

The laity is most responsible for bringing holy order to the world. The laity profoundly evangelize by how they live their everyday lives. Life is meant to be a vocation whereby each

person seeks out the will of God in his or her everyday work. The laity will certainly be attacked throughout time, and a lay person, just like the ordained and religious, has an obligation to develop their faith so they can gain the spiritual necessities to fend off that which is evil. Their life is to be about love and the love the laity is to aim for is to express mercy, humility, and patience. There is a distinct and a unique call for each of us to reveal love. The personal gift's each of us receives determines in a real way the path we are to take. These gifts are to be accepted in faith, accepting them as holy and a treasured gift from God.

Chapter Five: *The Call to Holiness*

Holiness is only possible through the grace of God. We must always remember that the People of God are never as holy as God would like them to be. Our vision needs to be about reunification, justice based on human dignity, and a preference of love to be given to poor and marginalized. The key to holiness rests in love – love of God. This call to holiness is from Christ himself. It is the Holy Spirit who moves us closer to God's holiness.

Chapter Six: *Religious Orders*

The vast majority of those called to live out holiness in religious orders must practice poverty, chastity, and obedience. These vows allow a community to be set free from certain obstacles that can get in the way of them specifically worshipping God. Religious orders must cooperate with the bishop, in serving in ministries needed in the diocese. The calling to religious life is to be praised for its rightful place, and those in religious life are significantly useful to society. They are to be an inspiration and model for others to follow.

Chapter Seven: *Mystical Body*

Paul VI sought to honor Pope John XXIII request that the Council address our connectedness to the saints. The reality is we are all travelling through time and place and on-the-way to the reign of God. We are to realize that we must live for the One who died for us if there is to be hope for us. To be wide-awake to the realization that heaven is but a breath away. The promise from Jesus is that we are to become like God. We are in a special way connected to all those who have attained Christ's promise. Those in heaven are much more secure and alive in God's holiness. They are the ultimate witnesses of faith and love. We are to be inspired by them, so we might be transformed in our life into the likeness of Jesus as well. Our union in the *Mystical Body of Christ* is never more real than when we participate in the Sacred Liturgy/the Mass. Celebrating the Eucharist closely unites us to the Church in heaven. We are together in communion with those in heaven and we worship God together, through Christ, in the Spirit. All though we cannot fully grasp all the details, the final destiny of human beings and the world is revealed.

Chapter Eight: *Our Lady*

God's plan included providing a Savior who entered this world through a dual choice: God chose Mary and Mary chose God. The Church honors Mary because she is the beloved Mother of Jesus. Mary was part of God's plan for salvation. As the Mother of God and as the Mother of the Redeemer, she maintains a place of honor in both the earthly Church and in the heavenly. Her relationship is distinct from all other humankind, because she was born sinless. Mary was

completely human, born without sin and remained sinless. By nature of her humanity she required salvation. Mary's role was not forced on her; she was completely free to say yes or not. Jesus restored grace to the world. Mary participated in this by her loving cooperation with God. Mary played an integral part in God's plan to save the world. She was present and devoted to Jesus as his mother and supported him in his ministry from Cana to Calvary. After his death she remained present in prayer and faith. Our devotion to Mary is out of love and respect to God and His plan. It does not and is not intended to diminish the truth that Christ alone is our mediator. Mary is a great helper to us as we seek the road to holiness. She was human and as such was forced to face temptation. She did not cave in to temptation but endured in all things. She is the model of virtue. By meditating on her, we grow more like her Son. We honor and have piety toward Mary for no other reason than to better know Christ and to open the whole world up to receiving the graces of Christ. The Second Vatican Council encouraged people to cultivate a loving devotion to Mary and strongly urged theologians and pastors to abstain from gross exaggerations and or neglectful omission in considering the dignity of Mary. Mary's place is with God in heaven. Christians are called to understand as Mary did, that in the end truth will prevail, as all things are restored in Christ.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council provide us with a great challenge. The challenge is whether we will get fully engaged in trying to become the best we can become. The best is possible when we engage God, when we become united in Christ, and are fed together by him. What we need to understand and accept is that the holiness of the Church flows from Christ despite the sinful nature of the People of God. You see the Church itself is *Lumen Gentium* – which means: *Light of the Nations*. It is through oneness to Christ and his Church that we will achieve perfection one day in the glory of God's presence.