

# What the Council says about THE CHURCH

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## INTRODUCTION

'Lumen Gentium', the Light of the Nations, is the title of Vatican II's Constitution on the Church. It is now widely recognized as one of the most important documents of the recent Council and indeed of the Church's history. It did not set out to be a definition, and is a much fuller statement of her faith in herself than any definition would have been. It could hardly have come much earlier in the history of Catholic thought, for it is only as a result of present-day researches into theology that it has been possible. Not that it is in any way out of harmony with Catholic tradition. But it is the result of scriptural and patristic studies that the meaning and implications of that tradition have been seen with a new depth and wealth of understanding. This is a great and welcome surprise to anyone conversant with the sense of frustration felt by our scholars as a result of the modernist crisis in the first and second decades of our era.

This revival reflected an end of the siege mentality of the nineteenth century. In the textbooks of the time the Church was an institution under attack, and there was more concern to defend it and attack its attackers than to discover its inner meaning. The monographs of the revival were not concerned about Apologetics. They were mainly scripture and patristic studies concerning the Church's nature. The image of the Church they first discovered was that of a body. The desire to give a unified and clear scripture image led to the neglect of other scripture images.

But it was a great step forward when Pope Pius XII accepted the new outlook and produced two encyclicals, on the Mystical Body and on Christ the Mediator. The development of ecclesial theology, having once begun, did not stop short with those encyclicals. The biblical, liturgical and ecumenical movements were gaining ground. In the period after the second world war, Mgr Cerfaux made it clear that the image of the Church as Christ's Body was neither the first nor perhaps the most important even in the writings of St Paul. For St Paul the Church was first of all the new People of God, the new Israel. It was only afterwards, when St Paul wanted to explain how this new People of God differed from the old People of God in its union with Christ, that he developed the idea of a Body of Christ, the Mystical Body, as we call it today.

A still further description of the Church, in word rather of patristic than biblical tradition, was that she was the first sacrament, the sacrament of unity and salvation for all mankind.

The liturgical and ecumenical movements also made their contribution. It needs no emphasis to show the relation between liturgy and the Church. It supposes as its background a living and dynamic concept of the Church, such as is found in the image of a people marching through history under Christ's guidance. The ecumenical movement gave rise to an urge to define our position with regard to the separated brethren. Pius XII has tried to satisfy this urge by referring to the 'unconscious yearning' that all non-Catholic Christians have towards the Catholic Church. Various attempts were made to interpret this unconscious yearning. Clearly it was not a case of belonging to the Church by conscious desire. Did he perhaps mean that by their baptism and possession of many elements of the true Church, they were already, without realizing it, tending towards full communion with ourselves? In his later life, Pius XII became somewhat alarmed by certain interpretations of his words. In *Humani Generis* he made a statement to the effect that the Mystical Body and the Roman Catholic Church were to be identified. But the earlier view of the connection with us by 'unconscious yearning' still remained and was confirmed by the condemnation of Father Feeney's view that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church.

All this formed a background to Vatican II. But there was another point of view. The great

advance in theology did not come about without a certain exaggeration on the part of the new theologians, nor without exaggerated fears on the part of the conservative. One must say that, when Vatican II was summoned, the two schools of thought exerted considerable influence on the Catholic world. The new theology, with its biblical, patristic, ecumenical and liturgical movements, still flourished with unabated vigour. On the other hand, the fears of the more conservative theologians were not quieted. To anyone acquainted with the situation, it was clear that there would be a struggle between the two attitudes. This was to affect the genesis and progress of the Constitution on the Church.

The document underwent several revisions before it reached its final state. With each revision it came more under the influence of the new movements in theology. Indeed, if one looks back to the first draft, it is unbelievable how conservative and cautious it was. It still followed the line of the old text-books. Its emphasis was chiefly on the 'militant Church', on the need to belong to it, of its authority. The document came in for much criticism in St Peter's during the first session. It was too clerical, too triumphalist, too juridical, and not sufficiently ecumenical. It spoke too exclusively of the Church's rights, not sufficiently of her duties. It did not speak enough of the Church's sanctity, and of the Good News it was sent to deliver. It took too static a view of the Church, and not enough of the mystery. The final draft was the fourth one, and the attempt was made to remedy these defects.

## **THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH**

The title of this section is important. It does not mean 'mystery' in the sense of 'incomprehensible', but in the biblical sense as part of God's hidden plan to save mankind. It was God's will to do this not through some mere doctrine or philosophy, but through certain characters and events in history. This is why this document is very considerably historical in its character —perhaps for the first time in conciliar history. There occurs another word on the first page besides 'mystery', which recurs several times through the document, i.e. 'sacrament'. It is said to be a 'sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God, and of unity for the whole human race.' The Church, like the sacraments in general, not only indicates the union of God with his people, and the unity of the whole race, but tends effectively to bring this about. The Church therefore, is a sign lifted up for the nations.

The document begins by describing the origins of the Church in trinitarian terms. The eternal Father in his wisdom and goodness decided to raise men to the divine life. He chose us before time began, and resolved to assemble us in Christ through his Church. It is not God's intention to save us individually, but only through his Son's Church.

And so the Father sent his Son, and introduced the kingdom of God upon earth. The Church is the kingdom of Christ now present in a mystery. Its introduction and growth are seen symbolically in the blood and water that flowed from the side of Christ on the cross. It is symbolized today by the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity.

God's final purpose is finally wrought by the Holy Spirit. He gives life individually to us in our souls and bodies, as well as corporately in the Church, where he witnesses, teaches, unites, and endues with gifts.

It is the Church's work to proclaim the kingdom. 'The supreme manifestation of the kingdom is in the very person of Christ, Son of God and Son of man' (n. 5). This is the truth that is more developed in the Constitution on Divine Revelation, where the supreme source of revelation is said to be 'Jesus present in his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, his death and resurrection, as well as in the sending of the Holy Spirit'. In other words, revelation is not a series of propositions; it is Christ, the Word of God. Since Christ's death and resurrection, it is the Church that has the mission to proclaim the kingdom of Christ and God and to establish it among all nations.

The next section of the document follows Pope Paul VI in his opening address, telling the Fathers to search the Scriptures, where they would find many images of the Church. These are gathered together and roughly classified as they proceed from the life of a shepherd, from

agriculture, from building, and from the family and marriage. Two images are left out which are treated separately.

Special attention is paid first to the image of a body, which had formed the whole of Pope Pius XII's encyclical. The idea of the People of God is left to have a whole chapter for itself. The idea of the body is treated more liturgically, and less technically theologically than in the encyclical. The role of baptism and the Eucharist is especially underlined. The whole section is entirely biblical with a careful use of St Paul's texts.

Finally the difficult subject of the relation of the Mystical Body to the Catholic is tackled. The complexity of the Church is fully recognized, which, on the analogy of the incarnation, contains a visible human element joined to an invisible divine element. The unique importance of the visible element is underlined in the paragraph dealing with 'Christ's only Church', and giving its four traditional marks. But it is fully admitted that there exist outside its framework many elements of holiness and truth, gifts which belong by right to God's Church, and tend towards unity with her. It is in this section, dealing with the mystery of the union between the human and divine, that the Church is said to be called to tread with Christ the path of poverty and persecution. This is because the Church recognizes in the poor the likeness of her founder.

Not only poverty, but also sin has unfortunately found its way into the Church under its human aspect. At the end of this section we read: 'The Church, however, with sinners clasped to her bosom, is at once holy and in constant need of cleansing; thus she pursues a ceaseless course of penance and renewal' (n. 8).

This is new. The theologians of the Church had always declared that, as the Body of Christ, the Church must in herself be sinless. But they recognized that she was in continual need of reform. They now felt that the Church could not be dissociated entirely from her human members, as though it were some kind of edifice containing human members, but not fully identified with them. The Constitution on the Church now feels that we can never forget that all we who were baptized are the Church, imperfect though we undoubtedly are. And so, taking its cue from Pope Paul VI's opening address to the Council, when he begged pardon for any wrong we had inflicted on the separated brethren, the documents of Vatican II in several places admit that the Church is at the same time Sinner and Just. The effect of this was electric on many Protestants, particularly of the continental variety. For the phrase 'a sinner, yet just' was a Lutheran phrase to describe the Just Man. It seemed to show a new humility on the part of Catholics, an antidote to what they were inclined to regard as ecclesiastical triumphalism. Indeed on these lines Pope John XXIII's appeal for a Council had set out. Precisely because the Church was holy, yet in constant need of cleansing, we had set out to set our house in order, as a preliminary to inviting Protestants to seek with us for unity.

## **THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

The first thing to rejoice about is the title and position of this chapter. In an earlier draft it had come after the chapter on the hierarchy, and it had been treated together with the laity. As soon as it was pointed out by one of the bishops that it should be divided, and the People of God should be treated before the hierarchy, it was seen to be obvious.

This had the advantage of making quite clear that both hierarchy and laity were equally the People of God. At the same time it removed completely that idea of an unreal distinction between clergy and laity which is suggested by the still surviving manner of speech by which we speak of a boy 'going on for the Church', as though he were not fully in the Church already. It also helps us to understand that the common priesthood of the faithful includes the clergy. It is not a priesthood of the laity, but of all the faithful, laity and clergy alike.

The second noteworthy feature of this second chapter is that its whole approach is dynamic and historical, and less institutional and juridical than previous documents treating of the Church.

This springs from its full application of the image of a people. It is not easy to think of a People in terms of an institution, at least if one retains the full meaning of People.

The chapter falls naturally into two parts. The first treats of the People of God as it is in itself, with its qualities as a People. The second deals with what in a general way might be termed 'membership' of this People. An attempt is made in the second part to deal with those who though falling short of full incorporation into the People as the Catholic Church understands it, yet are not fully cut off from its faith and communion. It deals also with all men of goodwill outside Christianity, and with the Church's attitude towards them.

### **The People of God in itself**

This part begins by putting the People of God in its historical setting as the New Israel, the New Covenant. It places the Church in the middle of time, anticipated in the people of the Old Testament, but not fully perfected until the end, the *eschaton*, the final consummation of all things in Christ. Section 9 touches upon those stages in Jewish history which were a preparation and foreshadowing of the new and perfect covenant, i.e. the complete revelation through the Word of God made flesh. This new covenant, uniting Jew and Gentile, was not to be according to the flesh, but in the Spirit. 'It was to be the new People of God.' It is called for this reason a 'messianic People', with the rank of son, and the new law of love. While recalling that this People has had more than once the appearance of a tiny flock, it is nevertheless destined to be a sign of hope and an instrument of salvation to all mankind.

The emphasis on the new Israel leads to a consideration of what distinguishes the Church from the ancient Israel. This is the fact that it is bound up in a new and special way with Christ and his priestly office.

The sections 10 and 11 which deal with the universal priesthood of the faithful, though they appeared in the second draft of the document, were a surprise to many. The theology of the common priesthood, based as it is on Scripture, had always been part of the Church's theological currency. But in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation periods, many Catholics were nervous of it, fearing that too much insistence on it would lead to the denial, characteristic of much Protestantism, of the priesthood of orders. But it has been a subject of special development during the theological revival of the present century. In the first of these two sections, the universal priesthood is applied in a general way to the spiritual sacrifices which form the whole of the Christian life. It was the deliberate desire of the composers of this document not to confine Christian priesthood to the Mass or even the sacraments. We are not merely priests by associating ourselves with Christ's sacramental representation of Calvary. We are priests associated with the spiritual sacrifice of the whole of Christ's life and death, co-victims there as well as co-priests.

The other section, 11, shows how the faithful live their common priesthood in and through the various sacraments. This is of course an application of the well-known doctrine of St Thomas, which explains all the worship of God in the sacraments as dependent on our share in Christ's priesthood.

Section 12 is another startling section, throwing new light on two aspects of the common priesthood, both of which have all along been accepted in the Church's life, but have not found much expression in classical theology. One is the sense of faith of the whole faithful, who, as a body, are 'infallible in believing'. When all the faithful agree in believing a certain doctrine we may be certain of the truth. The second is the charismatic channel through which the Holy Spirit occasionally brings new inspiration or guidance to the Church. The first of these was defended in a famous article of Cardinal Newman, 'On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine'. The second is written into the very life and belief of the Church. Evidences of this charismatic guidance is clear from the life and work of a St Francis of Assisi, a St Catherine or a St Teresa. Who would pretend that they do not form an important part of the Holy Spirit's guidance of the Church? Yet many of these are not among the clergy. Many are women.

Section 13 deals with the catholicity of the Church. God 'founded human nature originally as

a unity, and he has resolved to gather into one, God's children who are scattered far and wide' (cf. Jn 11:52). 'The Church...encourages all the good that there is in the resources, wealth and customs of the nations; she takes it over and purifies it, strengthens and elevates it' (n. 13). Consequently there is the greatest variety in the Church's members and their duties. There are many different traditions within the Catholic Church. Over the whole loving assembly the Chair of Peter presides as the safeguard of legitimate variety. Unity here is carefully distinguished from uniformity. This was what Maximus IV, Patriarch of Antioch, was continually fighting for in the Council. The Roman or Western Rite, he would insist, has no right to special privileges over the many Eastern Rites.

### **Membership of the Church**

For some years now there have been controversies as to whether a person outside the Roman Catholic Church could be in any sense a member of it or of the Mystical Body. It was however agreed by the Fathers of the Council that the term 'member' raised more problems than it solved, and it was deliberately avoided. Instead of using this term, the attempt was made to describe the actual situation. The only word adopted to help this was the word 'incorporation'.

Section 14 dealt with Catholics in the sense in which a member of the Roman Catholic Church uses that word. The necessity of belonging to it is expressed obliquely in the words: 'It relies on sacred Scripture and Tradition in teaching that this pilgrim~ Church is necessary for salvation' (n. 14). There is further asserted the necessity of baptism for anyone aware of this fact.

But the privileged position of the Catholic is understood in terms of incorporation. Catholics, baptized, in possession of the Holy Spirit, living in its visible framework, living as Catholics fully incorporated, are fully in the society of the Church. Even for these it is asserted that the Catholic is not saved if he fails to persevere in charity, and does not remain in the bosom of the Church with his heart as well as with his body. The old theological idea of membership by desire is only applied to catechumens, whose desire is of course explicit. The Church does not take up again the concept of 'unconscious yearning', which had been used by Pope Pius XII.

Section 15 is one that was eagerly awaited by ecumenists and by the separated brethren. What was Vatican II going to say of their relationship to the true Church? They had often complained that the blanket term 'non-Catholic' did not even explicitly grant them the name of Christian. Further, even when Catholics had granted the authentic Christianity of individuals outside the Church, Catholic theologians had always seemed incapable of granting any Christian significance to communities. The recognition of a Christian significance to western communities of Christians was mainly left to the Decree on Ecumenism, where for the first time it is admitted that 'Christ's Spirit has not refused to employ them as means of salvation. Their strength derives from the very fulness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.' The present document refers to Christians out of communion with Peter's successor in a general way, without distinguishing between individuals and communities. It avoids the term 'non-Catholic'. Nor does it enter into the question of their possibility of salvation or non-salvation. Their distinction from ourselves is mainly that they do not profess the faith in its entirety, and do not maintain union in fellowship under Peter's successor. Apart from this the document lists a large number of ecclesial elements which they have in common with ourselves, from their name, their baptism, their respect for Scripture to numerous other elements possessed variously in the different groups.

In section 16, there is a- recognition of the various non-Christians. In the first place stand the Jewish people, from whom Christ took his origin according to the flesh, who obviously stand in a special relation to Christians. Next to them stand the Moslems, who avow that they hold Abraham's faith, and who join us in worshipping the one God. Then there are the men who are seeking the God they do not know. There are men who seek God under the influence of his grace, while ignorant of Christ's gospel and his Church. They can attain everlasting salvation. There lastly include those who make no express acknowledgment of God, yet strive with the help of divine grace to attain an upright life. 'Any good or any truth found among them has value in

the Church's eyes as a preparation for the gospel.'

In the last section the duty of the Church to carry the name and gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world is proclaimed. 'The burden of spreading the faith according to his ability weighs on every disciple of Christ.' 'It is the purpose of the Church's prayer and work that the fulness of the whole world should pass over to join the People of God, the Lord's Body and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and that all honour and glory be paid in Christ, the Head of all, to the Creator and Father of all.'

## **THE HIERARCHICAL CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH**

The Third chapter of the Constitution on the Church contains the material most awaited from this Council, and which aroused the most controversy. It is this chapter people have in mind when they say that Vatican II is the completion of Vatican I. Catholics, Orthodox, and Anglicans have agreed in asking of the Council that it would in Vatican II do for the bishops what Vatican I had done for the pope.

It came appropriately after the chapter on the People of God. From the midst of that People, Christ has chosen out certain individuals to serve in the matter of preserving and preaching the gospel, giving the sacraments, and preserving order in the things of God. 'They are aimed at the good of the whole body. The ministers, invested with sacred power, are' at the service of their brethren' (n. 18). When Christ appointed St Peter and the twelve apostles, he arranged that his presence should be continued among men through those whom Peter and the apostles appointed to be their successors. It is by means of the bishops that he sits in their assembly. It is by means of them he preaches the word, and administers the sacraments. It is by their fatherly office that he incorporates people into his body. By their wisdom and prudence he gives direction and order to the pilgrimage of the People of the New Testament. In order that the bishops might be prepared for this work, he gave special graces to his apostles, and now he give them through episcopal consecration to his bishops.

The temptation of bishops has always been towards domination and self-interest. To guard against this, the bishop's office must be a fatherly, but also a brotherly one. The pope and bishops are raised above the People of God as father and teachers, but if they wish to avoid paternalism, they must remember that in their personal capacity they are also brothers. Fathers they are as representing the teaching church, brothers as subject like all members to the power of the keys. Even the pope must remember that this applies to himself as to all other members of God's flock. 'As a result of God's goodness, the laity have Christ for their brother: for, though he is Lord of all, he did not come to be served, but to serve (cf. Mt 20:28). Just so, they have for brothers too the men who are appointed to the sacred ministry, the men who exercise such pastoral care that the new commandment of charity is carried out by all; this they do by teaching, sanctifying, governing the household of God with Christ's authorization. St Augustine has a splendid comment on this relationship: "If my belonging to you frightens me, my being with you brings consolation. I belong to you as bishop, I am with you as a Christian. The first title represents a duty, the second a favour; the first represents a risk, the second, salvation"' (n. 32)

The gifts they possess for their fatherly work come by episcopal consecration. They come under the triple head of teaching, sanctifying, and leading. Of these the most distinctive of the bishop are those of teaching and guiding.

First of all they have a common responsibility for the universal Church. When they act together for this purpose they form a college. By the Lord's establishment St Peter and the other apostles constituted an apostolic college. In like manner the successors of the apostles, under the headship of the successor of Peter, form an episcopal college. Vatican I had placed a strong emphasis on the pope's primacy and on the occasion and circumstance when he can speak infallibly. It is for Vatican II to place emphasis on the bishops. Not only does the pope enjoy the personal gift of infallibility, but the college of bishops when gathered together under the pope, likewise enjoy infallibility. The chief occasion when it is used is when the bishops are all gathered together in an Ecumenical Council.

## **The Office of a Bishop**

So the common episcopate of the Church is not only the sum of individual pastors, each in his own diocese. It is a body, founded by Christ as a college. In history this collegiate character has been shown by the way in which bishops have always maintained unity in a bond of unity, charity and peace. It is shown also by their meeting together to decide matters of importance, and lastly it is reflected in the custom of inviting several bishops to take part in an ordination.

One becomes a member of this college by consecration and communion between the head of the college and its members. So truly consecrated bishops who are out of communion with the pope are excluded from the college.

This college expresses the variety and unity of the Church of God by its multiple composition. It expresses the unity of that People by its being gathered together under one head. It expresses catholicity by the variety of its members. The tendency of recent years has been to stress the unity of the Church, at the expense of its catholicity. But the tendency now is to stress the catholicity.

The pope has spread the responsibility in the Church by making several moves towards decentralization. This will affect especially the centre of government, the Curia. The erection of a Senate of Bishops is a still further indication of the pope's serious intention of arousing this sense of responsibility among the bishops. At the same time, the references to Vatican I and papal supremacy have been due to the desire to prevent this catholicity tending too far towards a break in the Church's unity.

The college is not of mere ecclesiastical right. The bishops can do nothing without the pope. But the pope is the head of the bishops, and it is legitimate to say that he always acts as head, even when acting without any reference to them. It is true that there is a certain clarification of the pope's power in the explanatory note which is attached to Chapter 3; 'It is for his judgment to determine according to the needs of the Church (and they vary during the course of the ages) the appropriate manner, whether personal or collegiate, of exercising this care. The Roman Pontiff uses his discretion in proceeding to arrangements for the exercise of collegiate activity, to promoting it or giving it approval, in view of the needs of the Church.' Pessimists see in this the removal of the whole collegiate power. But it is simply the assertion of the primacy, that the pope must decide all questions to be discussed by the bishops. To assert the contrary would be to assert that the bishops could meet to discuss any matter without the approval of the head, and that is precisely what the Council never claims anywhere. That the present is a time when there is need of collegiate activity is recognized by the pope.

The local Church has the bishop as the principle of unity, just as the pope is the principle of unity for the whole Church. Bishops are set over particular Churches, and have to preserve the unity and discipline of the faith which is common to the Church. They have to educate the faithful in the love of the Mystical Body, especially of its poor members, the suffering and the persecuted.

They also have to preach the gospel in their particular Church. They are the authentic teachers of the faithful committed to them. They also, having the fullness of the sacrament of order, must provide in their locality for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. 'Bishops rule the particular Churches entrusted to them as vicars and legates of Christ, by counsel, persuasion, example; and also by authority and sacred power, which they only employ for the purpose of building up their flock in truth and holiness' (n. 27).

## **Priests and Deacons**

Very little was said about priests in the early drafts. Eventually, for the sake of completeness and because the bishop could never govern his diocese without them they were included. Their

priestly ordination makes them like Christ, and they are empowered to proclaim the gospel and celebrate the liturgy. Their greatest honour is when, in the person of Christ, they offer Mass. It is their privilege to carry out the ministry of reconciliation and relief. In the midst of their flock, they have the duty of worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth.

Their special function is to represent the bishop. Under his authority they sanctify and govern that part of the flock assigned to them. They thus enable the universal Church to be seen in their locality, and they make a strong contribution to the building up of the body of the Church.

But their responsibility must extend beyond the parish to the diocese, and beyond the diocese to the universal Church. They must bear witness to unbelievers as well as believers, to those who have fallen away as well as the devout. 'The human race is uniting more and more nowadays on a civic, economic and social basis. It is all the more necessary, therefore, that priests combine their responsibility and their resources, under the guidance of the bishops and the Supreme Pontiff, to eliminate every form of separation, so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of God's family' (n. 28).

The functions of the deacon are outlined, and are extended as far as possible. They are given the power to reserve and distribute the Eucharist, without any reservation regarding a case of necessity. They are given the power to be present in the Church's name and give the blessing at matrimony. They are given the power of taking the viaticum to the dying, of reading the Scripture to the faithful, giving the people instruction and exhortation, the administration of sacramentals, and taking charge of funeral and burial rites.

Power is also given to the Church, where necessary, to introduce the permanent diaconate. The power is given, with the pope's consent, to confer the permanent diaconate on older men, even if they are living in matrimony, and to younger men, but in their case the law of celibacy remains in force.

## THE LAITY

In the chapter on the laity, there is a desire to define them in a positive way. 'The title of layfolk in this context embraces all of Christ's faithful apart from members of the sacred order and those in the Religious state which has the Church's approval. It embraces the members of Christ's faithful who are engaged, in the Church and in the world, in their allotted role in the mission of the whole Christian people, because they have been incorporated in Christ by baptism, established in the People of God and have their own way of sharing the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ' (n. 31).

Everything which applies to the People of God in general applies to the laity. But within this vocation of all Christians, there is a special vocation of the laity. They have their own field of action, their own special context of (their) existence. 'The duty of the laity ... is to seek the kingdom of God in the transaction of worldly business and the godly arrangement they give it' (n. 31).

They have the dignity of a son, which is given equally to all; for 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). Certain individuals are separated out from among the laity to be the clergy, to act as teachers, stewards of the mysteries and pastors. But all are on an equal footing when it comes to the dignity of the Sons of God. The clergy must follow our Lord's example and render services to each other and all the faithful. The laity have the specific task of service throughout society as a leaven.

The apostolate of the laity is a share in the Church's mission of salvation. It is the Lord himself who assigns this apostolate to the laity in baptism and confirmation. It is their task to make the Church actively present in those places and situations where the very salt of the earth can only be spread by their efforts. It is the concern of every layman, by the mere fact of being a layman. Besides this fundamental call which no one can take from them, there is a special call from the hierarchy for a more direct co-operation with the hierarchy's apostolate.

Christ is the supreme Priest, who gives to each of the laity a share in his special priestly

functions. He gives them a share in his priestly office, by inviting them to offer all their 'apostolic works, prayers and undertakings, their married life, their family life, their daily work, their mental and physical recreation' (n. 34) to him.

Christ uses the laity for his prophetic ministry, appointing them 'as witnesses' and equipping them with 'the discernment of faith and the grace of speech' (n. 35). They are heralds of the faith, pronouncing Christ's message 'by life's witness and speech' (n. 35). It is especially through the graces of marriage that they bear witness to their family.

Christ wants his kingdom also to spread by the efforts of his faithful laity. The laity have the duty of recognizing the inner nature of the whole of creation, its value, its orientation to the praise of God. The layman is called to be father, mother, worker, peasant, technologist, doctor, nurse, teacher, politician, economist and official in a Christian way. They must learn to make a distinction between the rights and duties they have undertaken as Christians and those which belong to them as members of human society. They must try to harmonize the two, so that they are in all things guided by the Christian conscience.

The need for the layman has never perhaps been realized before as it is today. There are numerous provinces in which only the layman has competence. But in all cases the co-operation of the priest is necessary. Laity and clergy need to work together. The first contribution to this mutual harmony will consist of the clergy preparing the laity for their task. It often happens in our parishes that the laity have been so little called upon in the past that they are quite unprepared. They have the right to make their needs known to the clergy. And they in their turn should be prompt to welcome in a spirit of Christian obedience the decisions of their Pastors. Pastors in their turn must acknowledge the dignity and sense of responsibility of the laity. The Mystical Body will only be in a healthy condition when all sides co-operate together.

## **THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS**

All the faithful, Christians of every status and vocation, priests, secular and regular, and layfolk, are called to holiness. That means they all have the obligation of reaching the perfect love of God. 'They must follow Christ's footsteps, be moulded to his likeness, be attentive to the will of the Father in all things, be whole-heartedly devoted to the glory of God and the service of their neighbour' (n. 40).

It is the same holiness which all cultivate, and yet there are different ways of life and different duties.

First there is an obvious and special call for holiness in the bishop. He has been specially chosen for his gifts. He must not be afraid to give an example to his flock. And he must be ready to lay down his life for his flock.

Priests, like bishops, must daily grow in love of God and their neighbour. They must be bound in fellowship together. They must pray for the whole of God's People, and must offer sacrifice with an awareness of the duty they are about. They must all, and particularly diocesan priests, work in generous co-operation with their bishop.

Deacons and all those in a lower order of ministry must keep free from every vice as servants of the mysteries of Christ and the Church. In close union with these is the select body of layfolk who help the bishop in his apostolic activity.

But the pursuit of perfection not only belongs to bishops, priests and ministers. It is also demanded of married people. This is relatively new in the Church. We have always known that in theory all people are called to holiness, but it was not demanded in practice of people engaged in a non-spiritual calling. It was thought that anyone wishing to follow the evangelical counsels would take up the Religious life. Today the worldly occupations of the laity are valued more highly. The sacrament of marriage opens up for man an ideal of Christlikeness in difficult circumstances. The Council considered it its duty to lay the foundation for a lay spiritual life.

In all cases the most necessary gift is to love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves. Charity controls all the means of sanctification. Jesus showed love by laying down his life for us. Among Christians martyrdom is still the highest test of charity.

The Church still calls a certain number to the practice of the evangelical counsels. There is still a special place for the gift of an undivided heart to God alone in the state of virginity or celibacy. Finally there are many people who still accept poverty with that freedom which belongs to the sons of God. And there are people who in the pursuit of perfection submit to man for the love of God so that their modelling of themselves on Christ in his obedience may be more perfect.

## RELIGIOUS

Religious orders from their origins have lived according to definite rules of life to enable them best to live in community according to the evangelical counsels. They get support in this way to enable them to live according to greater stability in their way of life, well-tested teaching in the way of perfection, fraternal fellowship and the strength that comes from obedience.

They thus perform a service to the People of God. 'Religious by their state of life bear a glorious and remarkable witness to the truth that it is impossible for the world to be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes' (n. 31). They imitate the way of life of the Son of God. It brings home to the whole Christian community how superior is the kingdom of heaven to all earthly good. It shows to men the supreme dominance of Christ's rule, and the unlimited nature of the Holy Spirit's power at work.

The Church accepts their vows and rules of life laid down by their founders. It sanctions exemption from the local Ordinaries, and subjects them to the Holy Father alone, except in so far as they fulfil duties for the good of the Church within the local bishop's authority.

'Religious must make it their careful aim that their efforts improve the Church's real and daily presentation, to believers and non-believers, of Christ as he meditated on the hillside, proclaimed to the crowds the kingdom of God, healed the sick and the injured, turning sinners to repentance, blessing children, doing good to all, and continually obeying the will of the Father who sent him' (n. 46).

It must be clearly understood that the profession of the evangelical counsels is in no way a hindrance to the development of the personality. On the contrary, the voluntary acceptance of the counsels cleanses the heart and leads to spiritual freedom.

## THE PILGRIM CHURCH

The Church is at the present time only a pilgrim Church. The Church on earth is already marked by a genuine, if imperfect, holiness. She looks forward to the coming of a new heaven and a new earth. In glory we shall be like God, for we shall see him as he is. But while still on earth we are but pilgrims. At the end of the world we shall be divided, some to the resurrection of life, others to the resurrection of judgment.

Until the Lord comes again in glory, some of his disciples are still on earth, some are undergoing purification in another world, others are already in glory. We all make up one Church. There is intercommunion between them all.

In special recognition of the communion of the whole Mystical Body, the Church remembers her dead, and prays for them. She implores the intercession of the apostles and martyrs of Christ. To their *number* she adds those who modelled themselves more closely on Christ's virginity and poverty, and finally all those whom the Church recommends to the imitation of the faithful.

A greater motive for thinking of them is that strength may be given to the unity of the Church by the practice of brotherly love. 'Every genuine show of love on our part for those in heaven has of its nature Christ for its aim, and reaches its conclusion in Christ who is "the crown of all the saints"; through him it reaches God, who is to be marvelled at in the saints and is called great among them' (n. 50). In our liturgy, and especially in the Eucharist, we are united to the saints in heaven.

There is finally an appeal against abuses. True worship of the saints in heaven, it is pointed out, consists not so much in the multiplication of external acts, as in the activity of our love, and in following their example.

## **THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

The Blessed Virgin's place in the economy of salvation is traced back to the Old Testament history of salvation. She is prophesied as the woman who is to bear a son, named Emmanuel. She stands out among the lowly and the Lord's poor who are confident of salvation and receive it.

Her acceptance at the Annunciation was all important. She had been enriched with a unique, resplendent holiness from the first moment of her conception. She co-operated in the redemption, when by her faith and obedience she undid the work of the first Eve.

Her union with her Son in the work of salvation could be seen from the time of his virginal conception to his death. This union is traced out until the final words when Jesus gave her as mother to his disciple with the words: 'Woman, behold your son'. Finally we see Mary too at prayer beseeching the gift of the Spirit who had already overshadowed her at the Annunciation. At the end of her earthly course, she was raised up, body and soul, into heaven.

The Constitution stakes that Mary's function as mother of men makes for no dimming or diminution of Christ's unique mediation, but rather demonstrates its power. Her wholly unique co-operation in the Saviour's work was performed in obedience, faith, hope and burning charity. Raised up to heaven, she still continues her work of motherhood. She persists, with many pleas, in winning us the gifts of divine salvation. 'For this reason the Blessed Virgin is called upon in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, Mediatrix. Yet this practice is so understood that it represents no derogation from the dignity and efficacy of Christ, the sole mediator, nor any addition' (n. 62).

These are the words in which the Council admits the expression 'Mediatrix', in a context that removes all doubt from the minds of the separated brethren.

It is then shown how Mary is the type of the Church, because of the pre-eminence and uniqueness of the example that she offers as virgin and mother.

In the Blessed Virgin the Church already attains the perfection in which she is without stain or wrinkle. We, in our imperfections, look to Mary as the pattern. 'While she is the subject of preaching and cult, she is calling believers to her Son, to his sacrifice, and to the Father's love' (n. 65).

'Since the Council of Ephesus there has been a remarkable growth in the cult of the People of God for Mary, by way of respect and love, invocation and imitation.' The devotion to her is unique, and yet does not interfere with the recognition, love and glory paid to the Son. All the Church's children should give encouragement to this devotion, especially to the liturgical cult. At the same time the Council warns theologians 'to refrain from falsehood by way of superlatives as from narrow-mindedness'. They must refrain from anything which might lead the separated brethren and others into error over the Church's true teaching. They should remember that true devotion does not consist in emotion, but in true faith.

'Jesus' mother, in the glory of body and soul she has attained already in heaven, is the image for the Church's attainment of glory in the age that is to come; she is the beginning of that attainment.' Meanwhile, on earth, she is the great sign of hope for the People on their pilgrimage.

In conclusion, the Council rejoices in the devotion of our Lady among the separated brethren, especially Eastern Christians. All Christ's faithful must appeal to the Mother of God and Men. She assisted the Church when on earth. Now, in glory before her Son, in the communion of all the saints, she will continue her prayers until all mankind, Christians and non-Christians, are united in one People of God to the glory of the Trinity.