

*IN CELEBRATION OF THE YEAR OF FAITH  
October 11, 2012 – November 24, 2013*

*AT THE CATHEDRAL PARISH OF SAINT RAPHAEL  
in Madison, Wisconsin*

## **DOCUMENTS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL**

### ***LUMEN GENTIUM IV – CALLED TO HOLINESS***

*This fourth document on Lumen Gentium was not preached as a homily at the Cathedral Parish because of a lack of available Sundays in February and March 2013.*

A traditional treatment of the Church would have included a description of the three states in which the Church currently exists – the Church Militant (on earth), the Church Suffering (in purgatory) and the Church Triumphant (in heaven)

*Lumen Gentium* is not organized around these “states” or categories, but mentions them in the context of the Christian vocation to holiness.

This provides an organic connection among the three “states,” as well as holding up a high ideal for the Church on earth.

### **A. THE CHURCH ON EARTH**

#### **1. The Pilgrim Church**

The Church on earth would usually have been called “the Church Militant” – the Church that is fighting or struggling in the midst of this world.

*Lumen Gentium* does not use this expression, despite its venerable pedigree – ultimately the Pauline formulation, “I have fought the good fight.”

This document uses instead the expression “the Pilgrim Church” – most prominently in the title of Chapter 7: “The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and its Union with the Church in Heaven.”

Why? There is a struggle against sin and evil that must always take place within ourselves. But to speak of the Church as “fighting” also suggests an external enemy. If the Catholic Church is fighting, and I am not a Catholic . . . is it fighting against me?

Cf. Jihad. Some Moslems claim that “jihad” is primarily their personal struggle to submit to God. That may be true. But having seen a couple of airplanes fly into buildings, I really don’t care. I just object to the word.

The expression “Pilgrim Church” also has some positive advantages.  
Strong Biblical resonance from the Exodus (and even the call of Abram)  
Strong resonance in Christian piety – the tradition of pilgrimage  
Strongly eschatological – we are on our way to something better  
Expresses humility – the Church is not yet where/what she should be.

## 2. Call to Holiness

The Church is indefectibly holy – albeit yet to attain her full perfection.

*The Church, whose mystery is being set forth by this Sacred Synod, is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as "uniquely holy," loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her. He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God's glory. (LG 39)*

*The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things. (LG 48)*

All Christians, each in his or her own state of life, are called to holiness.

*. . . [I]n the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." However, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others . . . (LG 39)*

This is very Catholic idea – in distinction from the Protestant attitude that sanctification is not possible.

But it also sets a tone different from Jansenistic attitudes that would have emphasized the fear (and likelihood) of damnation.

Authentic holiness is not an otherworldly piety, but is ordered toward bringing the whole world closer to God.

*Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. . . [The faithful] must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history. (LG 40)*

Note that in both the foregoing passages (as in many other places), holiness is described as the “perfection of charity.”

Again, this seems intended as a counterweight to a certain “pietism” in mid-century Catholicism.

On both the foregoing points –

the emphasis on striving for holiness instead of fear of hell;

the identification of holiness with charity instead of piety

*Lumen Gentium* offered a very helpful enrichment of pre-conciliar attitudes.

BUT those who interpreted and implemented the Council sometimes “threw the baby out with the bath water”:

eliminating a sense of sin and expectation of judgment,

reducing the Christian life to “social action.”

## **B. THE CHURCH IN PURGATORY**

Again, a traditional treatment of the Church would have given a proportionate attention to the “one-third” of the Church constituted by the souls in purgatory.

*Lumen Gentium* reaffirms the doctrine of purgatory, but treats it very briefly (and in conjunction with speaking about the saints in heaven).

*Until the Lord shall come in His majesty, and all the angels with Him and death being destroyed, all things are subject to Him, some of His disciples are exiles on earth, some having died are purified, and others are in glory beholding "clearly God Himself triune and one, as He is" . . . (LG 49)*

*. . . [T]he pilgrim Church from the very first ages of the Christian religion has cultivated with great piety the memory of the dead, and "because it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins," also offers suffrages for them. (LG 50)*

*This Sacred Council accepts with great devotion this venerable faith of our ancestors regarding this vital fellowship with our brethren who are in heavenly glory or who having died are still being purified; and it proposes again the decrees of the Second Council of Nicea, the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent. And at the same time, in conformity with our own pastoral interests, we urge all concerned, if any abuses, excesses or defects have crept in here or there, to do what is in their power to remove or correct them, and to restore all things to a fuller praise of Christ and of God. (LG 51)*

In treating purgatory so briefly, and in saying that “any abuses, excesses or defects” should be corrected, *Lumen Gentium* seems to reflect an attitude that the doctrine of purgatory loomed too large in pre-conciliar devotion.

That may well have been true. And it may have been that less emphasis on purgatory was considered ecumenically expedient.

But the regrettable fact is that, again in interpretation and implementation, many Catholics were left (sincerely) wondering “whether we still believe in purgatory.”

There was certainly no theological error in the treatment of purgatory in *Lumen Gentium*, but there was perhaps a prudential one.

## **C. THE CHURCH IN HEAVEN**

### **1. The Saints**

*Lumen Gentium* is clearly interested in “the Church Triumphant” as the goal of the Pilgrim Church.

The lines quoted above about “any abuses, excesses or defects” in reference to purgatory were also meant to apply to devotion to the saints.

Again, the Council Fathers seem to have been wary of some aspects of pre-conciliar piety; and a certain reserve with regard to the cult of the saints might have been seen as ecumenically advantageous.

*Lumen Gentium* is unreservedly enthusiastic (rightly so) about the saints as offering us example and inspiration.

*When we look at the lives of those who have faithfully followed Christ, we are inspired with a new reason for seeking the City that is to come and at the same time we are shown a most safe path by which among the vicissitudes of this world, in keeping with the state in life and condition*

*proper to each of us, we will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ, that is, perfect holiness. In the lives of those who, sharing in our humanity, are however more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ, God vividly manifests His presence and His face to men. He speaks to us in them, and gives us a sign of His Kingdom, to which we are strongly drawn, having so great a cloud of witnesses over us and such a witness to the truth of the Gospel. (LG 50)*

## **2. The Blessed Virgin Mary**

The eighth and final chapter of *Lumen Gentium* offers a substantial treatment of the Blessed Mother.

The document admits that it is not an exhaustive treatment of Mariology, nor does it aspire to resolve remaining theological controversies in the field

The forgoing discussion of the Church Triumphant suggests that this chapter is placed where it is because Mary is the greatest of the saints.

In recounting the role of Mary in the history of salvation, *Lumen Gentium* describes her virtues, attitudes and actions as worthy of imitation.

And a parallel is drawn between the Blessed Mother and Mother Church.

*The Church indeed, contemplating her hidden sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By her preaching she brings forth to a new and immortal life the sons who are born to her in baptism, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God. She herself is a virgin, who keeps the faith given to her by her Spouse whole and entire. Imitating the mother of her Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she keeps with virginal purity an entire faith, a firm hope and a sincere charity. (LG 64)*