

*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* III – STATES OF LIFE**

#### **A. THE CLERGY**

The title of the third chapter of *Lumen Gentium* is “On The Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular on the Episcopate.”

This chapter treats the clergy and (as the title says) particularly bishops.

#### **1. Emphasis on Bishops**

The First Vatican Council gave great attention to the papacy.

It was at Vatican I, e.g., that the manner in which the infallible teaching authority of the pope is understood and exercised was precisely defined.

There was the intention at the time of Vatican I to describe the ministry of bishops as well, but the Council was cut short because of the political problems of the day.

Napoleon III had been defending the Papal States against the rising tide of Italian nationalism that sought to unite Italy into a single state. On account of the Franco-Prussian War, the French troops were withdrawn for the war effort at home and Rome was about to fall to the nationalists.

The treatment of office of bishop was meant to “finish the work” of the First Vatican Council.

#### **2. The Pope**

*Lumen Gentium* really says relatively little about the papacy – again, that subject had been thoroughly treated at Vatican I.

*Lumen Gentium* does endorse the teaching of the prior Council:

*This Sacred Council, following closely in the footsteps of the First Vatican Council, with that Council teaches and declares that Jesus Christ, the eternal Shepherd, established His holy Church, having sent forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father; and He 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. (LG 18)*

Apart from that, most mentions of the pope are in reference to the necessity of the college of bishops acting in communion with him.

*But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head. The pope's power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful, remains whole and intact. In virtue of his office, that is as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he is always free to exercise this power. The order of bishops, which succeeds to the college of apostles and gives this apostolic body continued existence, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church, provided we understand this body together with its head the Roman Pontiff and never without this head. (LG 22)*

### **3. The Bishops**

#### **a. College of Bishops**

*Lumen Gentium* speaks of the body of bishops as a “college” – a stable group.

Contrary to the impression that some people have, there is no “chain of command” among bishops of different rank (the bishop in Madison reports to the archbishop in Milwaukee, who reports to the cardinal in Chicago); each bishop throughout the world is immediately subject to the Holy Father.

But there is a relationship – fraternal and cooperative – among those who belong to the college of bishops. This is the origin of the famous word “collegiality,” which became popular after the Council.

*[Christ] formed [the Apostles] after the manner of a college or a stable group, over which He placed Peter chosen from among them. (LG 19)*

The Council applied this concept only to bishops. After the Council, it became rather indiscriminately extended to virtually all relationships in the Church – so that there was to be a “collegial” relationship between the bishop and his priests, for example. There is no indication that this was the intent of the Council.

Collegiality is really a matter of communion – the *communio* that is at the heart of the Church’s life.

*But Episcopal consecration . . ., of its very nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college. (LG 21)*

This aspect of the episcopate is evident in the history of the Church – beginning with the apostles themselves and notable in the practice of convening councils.

*St. Peter and the other apostles constitute[d] one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are joined together. Indeed, the very ancient practice whereby bishops duly established in all parts of the world were in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome in a bond of unity, charity and peace, and also the councils assembled together, in which more profound issues were settled in common, the opinion of the many having been prudently considered, both of these factors are already an indication of the collegiate character and aspect of the Episcopal order; and the ecumenical councils held in the course of centuries are also manifest proof of that same character. And it is intimated also in the practice, introduced in ancient times, of summoning several bishops to take part in the elevation of the newly elected to the ministry of the high priesthood. Hence, one is constituted a member of the Episcopal body in virtue of sacramental consecration and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the body. (LG 22)*

While directly responsible for his own diocese, each bishop also has the duty to be “solicitous for the whole Church.”

*The individual bishops, who are placed in charge of particular churches, exercise their pastoral government over the portion of the People of God*

*committed to their care, and not over other churches nor over the universal Church. But each of them, as a member of the episcopal college and legitimate successor of the apostles, is obliged by Christ's institution and command to be solicitous for the whole Church, and this solicitude, though it is not exercised by an act of jurisdiction, contributes greatly to the advantage of the universal Church. (LG 23)*

Bishops have an obligation to collaborate with one another and with the Holy See to promote the spread of the Faith throughout the world.

*The task of proclaiming the Gospel everywhere on earth pertains to the body of pastors . . . From this it follows that the individual bishops, insofar as their own discharge of their duty permits, are obliged to enter into a community of work among themselves and with the successor of Peter, upon whom was imposed in a special way the great duty of spreading the Christian name. (LG 23)*

This was the impetus for American dioceses taking the responsibility to staff particular parishes in the Third World in the 1960's.

#### **b. Bishop as “*alter Christus*”**

The ministry of bishops is described as one of service, and as participation in the three-fold identity of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King.

*Bishops . . . have taken up the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing. (LG 20)*

The last phrase, describing the three elements of the bishop's work, is footnoted to four of the earliest Fathers of the Church: St Clement of Rome (fourth pope), St. Ignatius Martyr, St. Justin Martyr, and St. Cyprian. This represents a very high level of authority.

It is Christ who is present and acting in the bishops.

*In the bishops . . . Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of those who believe. . . . He is preaching the word of God to all nations, and constantly administering the sacraments of faith to those who believe . . . and finally by their wisdom and prudence He directs and guides the People of the New Testament in their pilgrimage toward eternal happiness. (LG 21)*

The pope is regularly called “the Vicar of Christ,” but this dignity is not absent in the episcopacy either.

The Apostles were equipped to do this through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This same Spirit is imparted through episcopal consecration, which confers the fullness of Holy Orders – which necessarily includes not only the power to sanctify but also the authority to teach and guide.

*For the discharging of such great duties, the apostles were enriched by Christ with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit coming upon them and they passed on this spiritual gift to their helpers by the imposition of hands, and it has been transmitted down to us in Episcopal consecration. And the Sacred Council teaches that by Episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred, that fullness of power, namely, which both in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry. But Episcopal consecration, together with the office of sanctifying, also confers the office of teaching and of governing, which, however, of its very nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college. (LG 21)*

There was a long tradition affirming the bishop's fullness of sacramental power – so that was a settled question. But the First Vatican Council, while asserting the direct authority of the bishop to govern, so emphasized papal authority as to make the bishop's authority appear delegated.

*2. Wherefore we teach and declare that, by divine ordinance, the Roman church possesses a pre-eminence of ordinary power over every other church, and that this jurisdictional power of the Roman pontiff is both episcopal and immediate. Both clergy and faithful, of whatever rite and dignity, both singly and collectively, are bound to submit to this power by the duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, and this not only in matters concerning faith and morals, but also in those which regard the discipline and government of the church throughout the world. . . . 5. This power of the supreme pontiff by no means detracts from that ordinary and immediate power of episcopal jurisdiction, by which bishops, who have succeeded to the place of the apostles by appointment of the holy Spirit, tend and govern individually the particular flocks which have been assigned to them. . . (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, First Vatican Council)*

*Lumen Gentium* certainly does not encourage a bishop to “go rogue” – his authority must always be exercised in communion. And that brings us back to the “college of bishops” as described above (citation from LG 21).

The arrangement of the text of *Lumen Gentium* is somewhat “circular” – the college of bishops is mentioned prior to the passage emphasizing the dignity of bishops, which is then situated in the context of the college.

*Lumen Gentium* avoids a “linear” arrangement could have made the individual bishop either prior to the college or its delegate.

## i) Teaching Office

Departing from the traditional order (priest-prophet-king), *Lumen Gentium* mentions the prophetic/teaching office first.

The document no longer presumes a thoroughly Christian society in which the most sublime task (sanctifying) is mentioned first. *Lumen Gentium* follows a “chronological order,” if you will: evangelization must precede the celebration of the Sacraments.

The teaching of bishops is to be received as authoritative.

*Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent. (LG 25)*

Though not infallible in themselves, bishops teach infallibly when they do so in communion with the pope and the college of bishops throughout the world.

*Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held. (LG 25)*

(The pope and bishops have the responsibility of inquiring into alleged private revelation, but their infallible teaching is in regard only to the deposit of faith – the public revelation of God in Christ [which ends with the death of the last Apostle] and the conclusions that necessarily flow from it.)

## ii) Sanctifying Office

The bishop’s sanctifying function is most strongly identified not with what is reserved to him, but what is most excellent in itself – the Eucharist.

*A bishop marked with the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, is "the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood" especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered, and by which the Church continually lives and grows. (LG 26)*

While the bishop actually offers a tiny fraction of the Masses in his diocese, he is involved in each of them, and is responsible for regulating them. Only in this way is the Mass an authentic expression of the communion of the Church.

*In any community of the altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, there is exhibited a symbol of that charity and "unity of the mystical Body, without which there can be no salvation." . . . Every legitimate celebration of the Eucharist is regulated by the bishop . . . (LG 26)*

*. . . [T]hrough [all] the sacraments, the regular and fruitful distribution of which [bishops] regulate by their authority, they sanctify the faithful. (LG 26)*

The bishop's relationship to each of the Sacraments is described.

### **iii) Governing Office**

The great authority given to the bishop is given for the sake of the flock, and is exercised with gentleness and in service.

*Bishops, as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, govern the particular churches entrusted to them by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power, which indeed they use only for the edification of their flock in truth and holiness, remembering that he who is greater should become as the lesser and he who is the chief become as the servant. . . . In virtue of this power, bishops have the sacred right and the duty before the Lord to make laws for their subjects, to pass judgment on them and to moderate everything pertaining to the ordering of worship and the apostolate. (LG 27)*

*A bishop, since he is sent by the Father to govern his family, must keep before his eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to lay down his life for his sheep. (ibid)*

*Being taken from among men, and himself beset with weakness, he is able to have compassion on the ignorant and erring. (ibid)*

*Let him not refuse to listen to his subjects, whom he cherishes as his true sons and exhorts to cooperate readily with him. (ibid)*

The people have a reciprocal responsibility to “cling to their bishop.”

*But the faithful must cling to their bishop, as the Church does to Christ, and Jesus Christ to the Father, so that all may be of one mind through unity, and abound to the glory of God. (LG 27)*

Again it is explicitly stated that the bishop is not the vicar of the pope.

*This power, which they personally exercise in Christ's name, is proper, ordinary and immediate, although its exercise is ultimately regulated by the supreme authority of the Church, and can be circumscribed by certain limits, for the advantage of the Church or of the faithful. (ibid)*

*The pastoral office or the habitual and daily care of their sheep is entrusted to them completely; nor are they to be regarded as vicars of the Roman Pontiffs, for they exercise an authority that is proper to them . . . (ibid)*

#### **4. Priests**

Priests participate in the mission of the bishop, and constitute one priesthood with him.

*Priests . . . constitute one priesthood with their bishop although bound by a diversity of duties. Associated with their bishop in a spirit of trust and generosity, they make him present in a certain sense in the individual local congregations, and take upon themselves, as far as they are able, his duties and the burden of his care, and discharge them with a daily interest. And as they sanctify and govern under the bishop's authority, that part of the Lord's flock entrusted to them they make the universal Church visible in their own locality and bring an efficacious assistance to the building up of the whole body of Christ. . . . [T]hey must strive to lend their effort to the pastoral work of the whole diocese, and even of the entire Church. (LG 28)*

Priests are called “helpers” (#20), “assistants” (#21) and “prudent cooperators” (#28) with the bishop.

This aspect of the Council’s teaching is not easily appreciated by the faithful, whose practical experience is of the parish priest. The bishop is easily seen as a distant and bureaucratic figure, primarily a business manager and disciplinarian. Nowhere is the “disconnect” greater than in the Military Ordinariate – where the office of bishop is an almost complete abstraction.

There is a premium placed on the reciprocal relationship of bishop to priests;

*. . . [L]et priests sincerely look upon the bishop as their father and reverently obey him. And let the bishop regard his priests as his co-workers and as sons and friends, just as Christ called His disciples now not servants but friends. (LG 28)*

and on the fraternity among priests themselves.

*In virtue of their common sacred ordination and mission, all priests are bound together in intimate brotherhood, which naturally and freely manifests itself in mutual aid, spiritual as well as material, pastoral as well as personal, in their meetings and in communion of life, of labor and charity. (ibid)*

The well-known responsibilities of a priest are enumerated, and priests are exhorted to fulfill them with a paternal spirit and by giving good example.

*Let them, as fathers in Christ, take care of the faithful whom they have begotten by baptism and their teaching. Becoming from the heart a pattern to the flock, let them so lead and serve their local community that it may worthily be called by that name, by which the one and entire people of God is signed, namely, the Church of God. (ibid)*

## **5. Deacons**

The duties of a deacon are enumerated.

*. . . to administer baptism solemnly, to be custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, to officiate at funeral and burial services.*

And then, very significantly, the restoration of the permanent diaconate is envisioned.

*Since these duties, so very necessary to the life of the Church, can be fulfilled only with difficulty in many regions in accordance with the discipline of the Latin Church as it exists today, the diaconate can in the future be restored as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy. . . With the consent of the Roman Pontiff, this diaconate can, in the future, be conferred upon men of more mature age, even upon those living in the married state. It may also be conferred upon suitable young men, for whom the law of celibacy must remain intact.*

## **B. THE LAY FAITHFUL**

This is Chapter 4 in *Lumen Gentium*. This precedes the discussion of Religious. This is a departure from the traditional order (clergy-Religious-laity), but is really more juridically precise.

Everyone in the church belongs either to the clergy or the laity. Religious can be either. Though its organization reflects the precision, *Lumen Gentium* immediately says that it will use “laity” to mean those who are neither clergy nor Religious.

In *Lumen Gentium*, the two categories are described; then the universal call to holiness is described; and finally, Religious are discussed as an outstanding example of responding to that call.

*This practice of the [evangelical] counsels [of poverty, chastity and obedience], under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, undertaken by many Christians, either privately or in a Church-approved condition or state of life, gives and must give in the world an outstanding witness and example of this same holiness. (LG 39)*

### **1. Sharing in the identity of Christ – Priest, Prophet and King**

The lay faithful share in the three-fold identity of Christ and in the mission of the Church.

*[The lay faithful] are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ . . . (LG 31)*

#### **a. Priest**

Christ is the Great High Priest who offered the infinite and perfect sacrifice of Himself on the Cross. The clergy share in this priesthood by offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The lay faithful offer spiritual sacrifices.

*He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men. . . . For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God. (LG 34)*

Luther had insisted on the “priesthood of all believers,” but did not really give that phrase much content. His interest was to deny that the priest had any special character/power/authority that makes him uniquely able to offer sacrifice when celebrating the Mass. While using the phrase “priesthood of all believers,” those who followed Luther really believed that no Christian offered sacrifice – all Christians simply benefitted from the One Sacrifice offered by Christ on the Cross. Protestantism really lacked any notion of a participation in the Mystical Body of Christ and his work.

*Lumen Gentium* takes an entirely different approach. While reaffirming that the ability to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice makes the ordained priesthood unique, the document also says that the faithful offer true sacrifice in their secular lives – and this too should be offered to God in the action of the Mass.

## **b. Prophet**

Christ is the Word made flesh – the fullness of what the Father wants to say to the world. The clergy share in His prophetic identity by their liturgical preaching and authoritative teaching. The lay faithful are called to proclaim the Faith in word and deed in their daily lives.

*[T]he laity go forth as powerful proclaimers of a faith in things to be hoped for, when they courageously join to their profession of faith a life springing from faith. This evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world. (LG 35)*

Married people have a special mission to teach the Faith to each other and to their children.

*[H]usbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. (ibid)*

## **c. King**

Christ is the universal and eternal King. The clergy share in this identity by taking responsibility for the spiritual and temporal life of the parish (or diocese) entrusted to their care. The lay faithful share in the kingly identity of Christ in several ways.

*(1) Christ has communicated this royal power to His disciples that they might be constituted in royal freedom and that by true penance and a holy life they might conquer the reign of sin in themselves.*

*(2) Further, He has shared this power so that serving Christ in their fellow men they might by humility and patience lead their brethren to that King for whom to serve is to reign.*

*(3) But the Lord wishes to spread His kingdom also by means of the laity, namely, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace. In this kingdom creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God. . . The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God. They must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ and it may more effectively fulfill its purpose in justice, charity and peace. The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfillment of this duty. Therefore, by their competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word. May the goods of this world be more equitably distributed among all men, and may they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and Christian freedom. In this manner, through the members of the Church, will Christ progressively illumine the whole of human society with His saving light. (LG 36)*

## **2. Sharing in the mission of the Church**

The lay faithful are called to witness to the Faith precisely in their lives in the secular world.

*What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. . . . [T]he laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer. (LG 31)*

There is also provision for the laity to cooperate in the work of the clergy.

This is significant, but involves a relatively small number of people and is certainly not the most significant aspect of the mission of the laity.

Note that this is mentioned after the importance of lay witness in the secular world is discussed.

*Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself "according to the measure of Christ's bestowal." Besides this apostolate which certainly pertains to all Christians, the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy. (LG 33)*

### **3. "Church and state"**

In accord with all that is said above, *Lumen Gentium* recognizes that the secular world has a certain autonomy, but that a Christian conscience must shape our participation in temporal affairs.

*. . . [T]he faithful should learn how to distinguish carefully between those rights and duties which are theirs as members of the Church, and those which they have as members of human society. Let them strive to reconcile the two, remembering that in every temporal affair they must be guided by a Christian conscience, since even in secular business there is no human activity which can be withdrawn from God's dominion. In our own time, however, it is most urgent that this distinction and also this harmony should shine forth more clearly than ever in the lives of the faithful, so that the mission of the Church may correspond more fully to the special conditions of the world today. For it must be admitted that the temporal sphere is governed by its own principles, since it is rightly concerned with the interests of this world. But that ominous doctrine which attempts to build a society with no regard whatever for religion, and which attacks and destroys the religious liberty of its citizens, is rightly to be rejected. (LG 36)*

This passage really speaks quite directly to the misunderstanding of the "separation of Church and state" in our culture.

### **4. Rights and duties of the lay faithful**

These are (again) presented in non-adversarial terms, with a spirit of *communio* between the pastors and the faithful.

There is a vision of pastors and the faithful collaborating in a spirit of mutual trust.

*The laity should, as all Christians, promptly accept in Christian obedience decisions of their spiritual shepherds, since they are representatives of Christ as well as teachers and rulers in the Church. Let them follow the example of Christ, who by His obedience even unto death, opened to all men the blessed way of the liberty of the children of God. . . . Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative. Attentively in Christ, let them consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity. However, let the shepherds respectfully acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city. (LG 37)*

There is great optimism about the fruit of this collaboration.

*A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfill its mission for the life of the world. (ibid)*

While we never live up to an ideal perfectly, it seems fair to say that we have seen progress toward this ideal since the Council.

An adversarial spirit can creep into relationships in the Church, and (at worst) an “alternative magisterium” can be proposed. Clearly, this is completely antithetical to the intention of the Council.

## **C. RELIGIOUS LIFE**

### **1. Origin and regulation**

Religious life is founded on the words and example of Christ, but are regulated by the authority of the Church for the common good.

*The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based upon the words and examples of the Lord. They were further commanded by the apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls. The counsels are a divine gift, which the Church received from its Lord and which it always safeguards with the help of His grace. Church authority has the duty, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of interpreting these evangelical counsels, of regulating their practice and finally to build on them stable forms of living. (LG 43)*

## **2. Relationship to clergy and laity**

Religious Life is not part of the hierarchical order of the Church.

*From the point of view of the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious state of life is not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states. But, rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both these states of life so that they might enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and thus each in one's own way, may be of some advantage to the salvific mission of the Church. (ibid)*

This explains why *Lumen Gentium* is ordered as it is, with the advantage that the lay faithful are not mentioned last.

## **3. Witness of Religious Life**

Religious Life is meant to be a powerful sign to believers and non-believers alike of our hope for heaven. (This perspective is lost when Religious secularize their lives and focus only on meeting material needs.)

*The profession of the evangelical counsels, then, appears as a sign which can and ought to attract all the members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfillment of the duties of their Christian vocation. The people of God have no lasting city here below, but look forward to one that is to come. Since this is so, the religious state, whose purpose is to free its members from earthly cares, more fully manifests to all believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed here below. (LG 44)*

*Religious should carefully keep before their minds the fact that the Church presents Christ to believers and non-believers alike in a striking manner daily through them. The Church thus portrays Christ in contemplation on the mountain, in His proclamation of the kingdom of God to the multitudes, in His healing of the sick and maimed, in His work of converting sinners to a better life, in His solicitude for youth and His goodness to all men, always obedient to the will of the Father who sent Him. (LG 46)*

#### 4. Reform of Religious Life

In one passage, *Lumen Gentium* suggests (rather subtly) an awareness of a criticism of mid-twentieth century Religious Life, viz., that it perpetuates a certain immaturity.

*All men should take note that the profession of the evangelical counsels, though entailing the renunciation of certain values which are to be undoubtedly esteemed, does not detract from a genuine development of the human persons, but rather by its very nature is most beneficial to that development. Indeed the counsels, voluntarily undertaken according to each one's personal vocation, contribute a great deal to the purification of heart and spiritual liberty. (LG 46)*

In addition to this brief section of *Lumen Gentium*, the Council devoted a whole document (*Perfectae Caritatis*) to the renewal of Religious Life. Libraries could be written on the way in which this document was interpreted and implemented.

Suffice it to say, on the point raised above in *Lumen Gentium*: in reaction against any pre-conciliar fault of a lack of attention to human maturity, there was (especially in communities with an active apostolate) an ill-conceived overreaction that proved disastrous.

Psychological fads exalting the self were indiscriminately embraced. The many communities that made that mistake wounded themselves mortally.