

GAUDET MATER ECCLESIA AND LUMEN GENTIUM

Sr. Sara Marie Kowal, SCTJM

The goal of the Second Vatican Council was to address the Church so that it could better accomplish its mission of bringing all men to Christ. Pope John XXIII states this in his opening address, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, when he cites St. Paul: "God wishes all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (GME, CN, 59). *Lumen gentium* states this goal as well in its opening paragraph: "this sacred synod...eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15), to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible in the countenance of the Church" (1). GME states this goal throughout the address and more emphatically at the end: "Such, venerable brethren, is the aim of the Second Vatican Council. It musters the Church's best energies and studies with all earnestness how to have the message of salvation more readily welcomed by men" (GME, CN, 60). Realistically, this is the mission of the Church in general, of all councils in the past, and it follows, the mission of this council as well. The primary document of the council, *Lumen gentium* (LG), and the opening address of the council (GME) both address similar paths that will bring forth the realization of this goal in the modern world.



First, in order to bring more men to the fullness of life in Christ, the council fathers made this council pastoral in nature. Instead of following the treads of past councils, where the main purpose was usually to define and clarify doctrine, this council wished to restate old doctrine in a fresh way that could be better understood by modern man. "What is needed...is that this doctrine shall be more widely known, more deeply understood, and more penetrating in its effects on men's moral lives. What is needed is that this certain and immutable doctrine...be studied afresh and reformulated in contemporary terms" (GME, CN, 58). *Lumen gentium* also states this goal of the council: "[I]t desires *now* to unfold *more fully* to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission" (1, *italics added*). The general nature of LG is pastoral, in that it does not state new doctrine, but instead explains old doctrine for modern man. The general organization shows this. First, the document explains to the faithful the mystery and mission of the Church. It then describes in detail the various states of life in the Church (the hierarchy of the Church, the laity, and religious) and their various roles within the body, in order that they can all better carry out their mission in Christ.

Next, "[A]ll the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father himself is holy" (LG, 11). Linking all the states of life in the Church is the universal call to holiness, and this call is emphasized in both GME and LG. This call to holiness by all men of good will is the *means* by which the Church accomplishes its ultimate goal of the salvation of men; it is also the *end*, in that holiness is our final destiny. Both documents make it very clear that the best way to propagate this holiness among men is by the living *witness* of the faithful, by a daily example of the Christian life. "[T]he contemporary Christian approach to life is to strive with all zeal for evangelical perfection...It is from the living example and charitable enterprise of such Christians as these that all that is highest and noblest in human society takes its strength and growth" (GME, CN, 57). This call to holiness and faithful witness is highlighted in Chapter V of LG, but it is also the underlying current of the entire document. The Church is described as the "spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb" (LG, 6). The people of God exercise universal priesthood "in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity" (LG, 10). Bishops, "by the example of their way of life...must be an influence for good to those whom they preside" (LG, 26). Priests must "remember that by their daily life and interests they are showing the face of a truly sacerdotal and pastoral ministry to the faithful and the infidel, to Catholics and non-Catholics, and that to all they bear witness to the truth and life" (LG, 28). The laity should show the "same vocation to perfection" (LG, 32) when they announce Christ "by a living testimony as well as by spoken word," which "takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world" (LG, 35). Finally, the religious, "tending toward holiness by a narrower path, stimulate their brethren by example" (LG, 13), and as well, the "Church presents Christ to believers and non-believers alike in a striking manner daily through them" (LG, 46).

Lastly, through the path of holiness, the promulgation of full doctrinal truth, and with the grace of God, the

unity of all the faithful will be brought about. This goal of a unified Church is another major aim of the council, and it is expressed throughout LG as well as the opening address. The goal of unity also follows the council's and Church's mission of bringing all men to Christ. GME states that "the Catholic Church considers it her duty to work actively for the fulfillment of the great mystery of unity for which Christ prayed so earnestly to His heavenly Father on the eve of His great sacrifice" (CN, 59). Though not directly addressed as a specific section in LG, it is mentioned often and is also an consistent theme throughout the document. The opening paragraph states that it is the work of the Church "that all men...might also attain fuller unity in Christ" (1). In order to bring about unity in the world, there must first be unity within the Catholic faithful: "The entire body of the faithful...cannot err in matters of belief" (LG, 12). In other words, the Catholic faithful must commit themselves to knowing and understanding the truths of their faith before they are effectively able to bring about the unification of non-Catholics. The Supreme Pontiff, bishops and priests are charged with the duty to "wipe out every kind of separateness, so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of the family of God" (LG, 28). The laity, in their diversity, are called to "bear witness to the wonderful unity in the body of Christ" (LG, 32).

These various themes that are present in both the opening address of the Second Vatican Council and the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church are all tied together to serve the sole purpose of the salvation of all men. The pastoral nature of the council allows the faithful to understand how to do this. The witness of a holy life, lived according to the truth, in unity with all the faithful is the means by which the salvation of the world will be carried out. Ironically enough, holiness, truth and unification in Christ are also the ends to which we are called. The council sees this and has these means and ends as their focus. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church is set up as an informational instruction manual on how to accomplish these goals. It can be said that the writing of *Lumen gentium* then is a successful first step of the council in meeting its goal of the salvation of all men.

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