



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 3: "ELEMENTS OF ECCLESIOLOGY & THE THE-
OLOGY OF THE LAITY"

Sheet 2

I. The Church According to the Second Vatican Council
(II) Mission of the Church



The Church does not proclaim her-
self but the gift received from on
high—

The Church on earth is by its
very nature missionary since,
according to the plan of the
Father, it has its origin in the
mission of the Son and the
Holy Spirit. This plan flows
from...the love of God the Fa-
ther. [AG, 2]

That is to say, 'the Church...both prays and la-
bours in order that the whole world may become
the people of God, the Body of the Lord and the
Temple of the Holy Spirit; and that in Christ, the
Head of all, all honour and glory may be ren-
dered to the Creator and Father of the uni-
verse.' [LG, 17]

The basis of mission is Christ's parting words to the disciples [Matt 28.19f]:

'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.'

The ground-plan for mission given by Christ before his ascension is realised in the ac-
count of apostolic mission given by Luke [Acts 1.8]:

'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in
Jerusalem



and in all *Judaea* {2-8; 10}



and *Samaria* {8}



and to the *end of the earth* {11-28}.'



Mission strategy in Acts—from centre [Jerusalem] moving outwards in ever widening circles in accordance with the ground-plan of Acts 1.8. In Paul's missionary journeys we see him establishing local centres of evangelism 'answering' to the Church in Jerusalem, later Rome, as the primary seat of ecclesiastical authority. Hence, St Paul reports back after each mission is completed, and keeps in touch with the churches he founded by correspondence—I, II Cor; Gal; Eph; Phil; Col; I, II Thes et al. His authority is 'apostolic', that is, from Jesus himself [Gal 1.1]; the Church's authority is apostolic, in fulfilment of Jesus' mandate to evangelise [Matt 28.19f].



What is the content of this mission?

What is the subject of this mission?

GOOD NEWS
John 3.16 'God so loved the world...'



THE CHURCH
[a plural subject made up of personal subjects]
I Cor 12.12 '...the body is one and has many members...'

That messianic people has as its head Christ, 'who was delivered up for our sins and rose again for our justification' [Rom 4.25], and now, having acquired the name which is above all names, reigns gloriously in heaven. The state of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us [cf Jn 13.34]. Its destiny is the kingdom of God which has been begun by God himself on earth and which must be further extended until it is brought to perfection by him at the end of time when Christ our life [cf Col 3.4], will appear and 'creation itself also will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God' [Rom 8.21]. Hence that messianic people, although it does not actually include all men [persons], and at times may appear as a small flock, is, however, a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all; as the light of the world and the salt of the earth [cf Matt 5.13-16] it is sent forth into the whole world. [LG, 9]

Present in history, the Church shares the road with humanity throughout the centuries. It is the travelling companion of humanity, no longer with an attitude of conquest or defensiveness, but with affection and admiration towards people it offers itself as leaven to lead to the fullness of the good that God has sown in her. The Church is the experience of people who journey, conscious that in the mystery of love this people shares in the glory of God and declares this glory in the world, as surely as 'the heavens are telling the glory of God' [Ps 19.1], so that in the fullness of time all people everywhere will be no longer think of themselves as 'no people', but as 'God's people' [I Pet 2.10], acknowledging him in truth and serving him in holiness.