



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 3: "ELEMENTS OF ECCLESIOLOGY & THE THE-
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sheet 1

I. The Church According to the Second Vatican Council

(I) Origin & Goal of the Church

Q. What is 'ecclesiology'?

A. The science of the Church

[ekklesia = Greek for church + -ology = science/study] - ecclesiology = what it means to be 'the called out people' or 'the Church'



But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. [1 Pet 2.9]

The New Testament shows us that the structure and constitution of the Church is one of relation - on the one hand a relation to God who speaks, convokes, and to the people who listen and respond; on the other hand a relation of communion among the members.

How did Vatican II define the Church & its role in society?

Four Dogmatic Constitutions of Vatican II define the Church's self— understanding:

Lumen Gentium [on the Church]

Dei Verbum [on Divine Revelation]

Sacrosanctum Concilium [on the Sacred Liturgy]

Gaudium et Spes [on the Church in the Modern World]

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- passed from *juridical ecclesiology* [about its authority] to an
- *ecclesiology of mission* [about its task], which includes:
 - role of Holy Spirit
 - charisms [gifts] Spirit inspires
 - Scripture & its link with Sacraments
 - human values & individual apostolates

Lumen Gentium defines the nature and mission of the Church as "communion" [koinonia]; "witness" [martyria]; "service" [diakonia]

(a) Church: as Sacrament of Communion



Describing the Church as 'sacrament' underlies the close connection with Christ - the source of all grace, of which the 'sacraments' are both the sign and the means of grace. Describing the Church herself as 'sacrament' means that the whole body of believers is a 'sign' of 'vertical communion' [union with God] and 'horizontal communion' [union with the human race, where each person is made in the image and likeness of God—Gen 1.26]. In the church people experience the mystery of God's love; God wishes to meet every person, in the unity of each of its members raising them to the sharing of his divine life.

Since the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men—she here purposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the world, to set forth as clearly as possible, and in the tradition laid down by earlier Councils, her own nature and universal mission. [LG, 1]

He determined to call together in a holy Church, those who should believe in Christ. Already present in figure at the beginning of the world, this Church was prepared in marvellous fashion in the history of the people of Israel... Established in this last age of the world was made manifest in the outpouring of the Spirit, it will be brought to glorious completion at the end of time. At that moment,...all will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church. [LG, 2]

(b) Church: as Sign of the Trinitarian Communion



To the Christological emphasis is added a Trinitarian one—the Church is a group of people gathered in the unity of Father, Son and Spirit. The Church is not just 'communion', therefore, but also 'institution' which gives birth to this communion. The Church is the place where, and means by which, God encounters his creation in human history; God fashioning a people for himself in human history as new history unfolds when the gospel is proclaimed and man, separated by sin, is brought back to God in Christ. [II Cor 5.18-20]

When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church, and that, consequently, those who believe might have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father. ..To men, dead in sin, the Father gives life through him,...The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful...In them he prays and bears witness to their adoptive sonship. Guiding the Church in the way of all truth and unifying her in communion and in the works of ministry, he bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her; and he adorns her with fruits. By the power of the gospel he permits the Church to keep the freshness of youth. Constantly he renews her and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse...Hence the universal Church is seen to be 'a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'. [LG, 4]