

Some Issues addressed in *Lumen Gentium*

Source: Aidan Nichols, OP. *Conciliar Octet* A concise commentary of the Eight Key Texts on the Second Vatican Council, Ignatius Press 2019 (Cf. pp50-57)

1. The opening 'mystery' chapter of LG describes the plan of God to create, via the mission of the Son and the Spirit, a holy Church "the seed and the beginning" on earth of the Father's Kingdom (LG1-2). Biblical texts were drawn up to illustrate this - sheepfold, vineyard, vine, house of God etc., (LG 6)
Some Fathers thought these were not enough and added others (all from St Paul's Letters) which would later come to be called 'models' of the Church: the bride (Eph 5: 25-32) and the body of Christ (Rom 6:3-5; 12:4-5; 1 Cor 10:16-17).
Pope Pius 1943 Encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (MCC) had privileged the image of the Church as the *Mystical Body of Christ* – an image picked up and singled out in LG 7. "For LG, 'Mystical Body' thinking remains the principal form of Catholic ecclesiology, serving as a summation of the meaning of the many biblical images taken over all" (Nichols, p 51).
However, there's a difference with MCC on one crucial point: "The Council Fathers declared that the 'sole Church of Christ' which the Creed professes to be one, holy, Catholic and apostolic 'SUBSISTS IN', but is not in every sense identical with, 'the Catholic Church... governed by the Successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him' (*ibid*). Why this change, and what does the term mean?
 - i. The Council wished to be 'ecumenical';
 - ii. The 'is the Catholic Church' of MCC appeared to deny any 'ecclesiality' or 'church value' to non-Catholic Christian communities – even to the Eastern Orthodox with its undeniable apostolic succession.
 - iii. '*Subsistit in*' is nevertheless a strong formula: "(it) means that the being (the 'subsistence') of the Mystical Body is found in the being of the Catholic Church, but that being '... derived from that being' (as Joseph Ratzinger later put it) could be found in other bodies as well" – but not in its fulness. (*ibid* pg 52)
2. "Chapter 2 of LG introduces the idea that the inner life of the earthly Church is best described by the language of *communion – koinonia* (Grk) –... denoting a sharing or interchange of spiritual goods. This language was later taken up and used to justify an '*ecclesiology of communion*', developed in the post-conciliar period in notably bilateral ecumenical dialogues with the Orthodox. However, the most popular vocabulary to speak of the Church in Vatican II is '*sacrament*' (*ibid* pg 53).
3. This raised the question of *membership* of the Church. LG described non-Catholic Christians as being "on several grounds conjoined" with the Catholic Church; later ecumenical dialogue would describe this as being in "imperfect communion" with her. What were the implications of this regarding salvation in and through the Church? The Council Fathers returned to the ancient notion of "desire" for baptism – conscious in Catechumens; unconscious in the righteous non-religious. The language of 'ordering' was eventually adopted: "There belong to ('this Catholic unity of the people of God') or are ordered to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind for all human beings are called by the grace of God to salvation" (LG 13; Nichols pg 55). It was in this 'ordering' that their hope of salvation lay.
4. LG then warns of a too-facile *hope for salvation* due to "the activity of the Evil One". The chapter therefore restates the need for the missionary activity of the Church.
5. Another issue surrounded the *collegiality* debate (Chapter 3): Would the pope lose his prerogatives? It was stated repeatedly that he would not (and Pope Paul agreed to a request to issue a 'note' to state this again). Then, as the session drew to a close, of his own volition, the pope gave a new title to Mary, that of "Mother of the Church" (*ibid* pg 57).

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