

Lumen Gentium
The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
(21 Nov 1964)

Question 3 Why is the Church?

Answer 1: For the Universal Call to Holiness

The Word became flesh to make us “partakers of the divine nature”
(2 Peter 1:4)

*“By the mystery of this water and wine,
may we come to share the divinity of Christ
who humbled himself to share in our humanity”*
(The Eucharistic Liturgy)

“The Son of God became Man so that we might become God”
(St Athanasius)

CHAPTER V THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS IN THE CHURCH #39-42

- The indefectible holiness of the Church comes to her directly from Christ
- It is Christological (Christ-centred) and is his will for and his gift to her
- All her members share in the holiness of Christ through the sacraments
- They thereby share in God’s divine nature
- This ‘holiness of being’ is essentially the same for all: Union with the Blessed Trinity
- It calls for a ‘holiness of behaviour’, which takes many forms

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37. The Church, whose mystery is being set forth by this Sacred Synod, is believed to be indefectibly holy.

Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as “uniquely holy,” loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her.

He did this that He might sanctify her.

He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God’s glory.

Therefore, in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification”.

However, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful;

it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life,

tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others;

in a very special way this (holiness) appears in the practice of the counsels, customarily called “evangelical.” This practice...undertaken by many Christians, either privately or in a Church gives... an outstanding witness and example of this same holiness in the world.

38. The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: “Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect”. Indeed, He sent the Holy Spirit upon all that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength and that they might love each other as Christ loves them.

The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in **the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature.** In this way they are really made holy.

Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received.

They are warned by the Apostle to *live "as becomes saints"*, and to put on "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience", and to possess the fruit of the Spirit in holiness. Since truly we all offend in many things we all need God's mercies continually and we all must daily pray: "Forgive us our debts".

Thus... **all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity;** by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as **a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things.**

They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbour. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.

39. **The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—
that sanctity which is cultivated
by all who are moved by the Spirit of God,
who obey the voice of the Father
and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth.**

These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity.

In the first place, **(Bishops) the shepherds of Christ's flock** must holily and eagerly, humbly and courageously carry out their ministry, in imitation of the eternal high Priest, the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. They ought to fulfil this duty in such a way that it will be the principal means also of their own sanctification. Those chosen for the fullness of the priesthood are granted the ability of exercising the perfect duty of pastoral charity by the grace of the sacrament of Orders. This perfect duty of pastoral charity is exercised in every form of episcopal care and service, prayer, sacrifice and preaching. By this same sacramental grace, they are given the courage necessary to lay down their lives for their sheep, and the ability of promoting greater holiness in the Church by their daily example, having become a pattern for their flock.

Priests, who resemble bishops to a certain degree in their participation of the sacrament of Orders, form the spiritual crown of the bishops. They participate in the grace of their office and they should grow daily in their love of God and their neighbour by the exercise of their office through Christ, the eternal and unique Mediator. They should preserve the bond of priestly communion, and they should abound in every spiritual good and thus present to all men a living witness to God. All this they should do in emulation of those priests who often, down through the course of the centuries, left an outstanding example of the holiness of humble and hidden service. Their praise lives on in the Church of God. By their very office of praying and offering sacrifice for their own people and the entire people of God, they should rise to greater holiness. Keeping in mind what they are doing and imitating what they are handling, these priests, in their apostolic labours, rather than being ensnared by perils and hardships, should rather rise to greater holiness through these perils and hardships. They should ever nourish and strengthen their action from an abundance of contemplation, doing all this for the comfort of the entire Church of God. All priests, and especially those who are called "diocesan priests," due to the special title of their ordination, should keep continually before their minds the fact that their faithful loyalty toward and their generous cooperation with their bishop is of the greatest value in their growth in holiness.

Ministers of lesser rank are also sharers in the mission and grace of the Supreme Priest. In the first place among these ministers are **deacons**, who, in as much as they are dispensers of Christ's mysteries and servants of the Church, should keep themselves free from every vice and stand before men as personifications of goodness and friends of God. Clerics, who are called by the Lord and are set aside as His portion in order to prepare themselves for the various ministerial offices under the watchful eye of spiritual

shepherds, are bound to bring their hearts and minds into accord with this special election (which is theirs). They will accomplish this by their constancy in prayer, by their burning love, and by their unremitting recollection of whatever is true, just and of good repute. They will accomplish all this for the glory and honour of God. Besides these already named, there are also laymen, chosen of God and called by the bishop. These laymen spend themselves completely in apostolic labours, working the Lord's field with much success.

Furthermore, **married couples and Christian parents** should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by faithful love. They should sustain one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives. They should train their offspring, lovingly welcomed as God's gift, with Christian doctrine and the evangelical virtues. In this manner, they offer all men the example of tireless and generous love; in this way they build up the brotherhood of charity; in so doing, they stand as the witnesses and co-operators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church; by such lives, they are a sign and a participation in that very love, with which Christ loved His Bride and for which He delivered Himself up for her.

A like example, but one given in a different way, is that offered by **widows and single people**, who are able to make great contributions toward holiness and apostolic endeavour in the Church.

Finally, those who **engage in labour...** should better themselves by their human labours. They should be of aid to their fellow citizens. **They should raise all of society, and even creation itself, to a better mode of existence**. Indeed, they should imitate by their lively charity, in their joyous hope and by their voluntary sharing of each other's burdens, the very Christ who plied His hands with carpenter's tools and Who in union with His Father, is continually working for the salvation of all men. **In this, then, their daily work they should climb to the heights of holiness and apostolic activity**.

May all those who are weighed down with poverty, infirmity and sickness, as well as those who must bear various hardships or who suffer persecution for justice sake—may they all know they are united with the suffering Christ in a special way for the salvation of the world. The Lord called them blessed in His Gospel and they are those whom "the God of all graces, who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will Himself, after we have suffered a little while, perfect, strengthen and establish".

**Finally, all Christ's faithful,
whatever be the conditions, duties and circumstances of their lives
and, indeed, through all these, will daily increase in holiness,
if they receive all things with faith from the hand of their heavenly Father
and if they cooperate with the divine will in this temporal service,
they will manifest to all the love with which God loved the world.**

40. "God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God and God in Him". But, God pours out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us; thus, **the first and most necessary gift is love, by which we love God above all things and our neighbour because of God**.

Indeed, in order that love, as good seed may grow and bring forth fruit in the soul, each one of the faithful must willingly hear the Word of God and accept His Will, and must complete what God has begun by their own actions with the help of God's grace. These actions consist in the use of the sacraments and in a special way the Eucharist, frequent participation in the sacred action of the Liturgy, application of oneself to prayer, self-abnegation, lively fraternal service and the constant exercise of all the virtues.

For charity, as the bond of perfection and the fullness of the law, rules over all the means of attaining holiness and gives life to these same means. **It is charity which guides us to our final end. It is the love of God and the love of one's neighbour which points out the true disciple of Christ**.

Since Jesus, the Son of God, manifested His charity by laying down His life for us, so too no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for Christ and His brothers. From the earliest times, then, some Christians have been called upon—and some will always be called upon—to give the supreme testimony of this love to all men, but especially to persecutors. The Church, then, considers **martyrdom** as an exceptional gift and as the fullest proof of love. By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master by freely accepting death for the salvation of the world—as well as his conformity to Christ in the shedding of his blood. Though few are presented such an opportunity, nevertheless all must be prepared to confess Christ before men. They must be prepared to make this profession of faith even in the midst of persecutions, which will never be lacking to the Church, in following the way of the cross.

41. Likewise, the holiness of the Church is fostered in a special way by the observance of the counsels proposed in the Gospel by Our Lord to His disciples. An eminent position among these is held by virginity or the celibate state. This is a precious gift of divine grace given by the Father to certain souls, whereby they may devote themselves to God alone the more easily, due to an undivided heart. This perfect continency, out of desire for the kingdom of heaven, has always been held in particular honour in the Church and is certainly a particular source of spiritual fecundity in the world.

The Church continually keeps before it the warning of the Apostle which moved the faithful to charity, exhorting them to experience personally what Christ Jesus had known within Himself. This was the same Christ Jesus, who *“emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave... becoming obedient to death”,* and because of us *“being rich, he became poor”*.

Because the disciples must always offer an imitation of and a testimony to the charity and humility of Christ, Mother Church rejoices at finding within her bosom men and women who very closely follow their Saviour who debased Himself to our comprehension. There are some who, in their freedom as sons of God, renounce their own wills and take upon themselves the state of poverty. Still further, some become subject of their own accord to another man, in the matter of perfection for love of God. This is beyond the measure of the commandments, but is done in order to become more fully like the obedient Christ.

Therefore, all the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state. Indeed, they have an obligation to so strive.

42. Let all then have care that they guide aright their own deepest sentiments of soul. Let neither the use of the things of this world nor attachment to riches, which is against the spirit of evangelical poverty, hinder them in their quest for perfect love **Let them heed the admonition of the Apostle to those who use this world; let them not come to terms with this world; for this world, as we see it, is passing away (1 Cor 7:31).**

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Question 3: Why is the Church? Answer 2: Some of Christ's disciples are called to live holiness under vows

*"I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.
Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.
O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant....
I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD.
I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people" (Psalm 116)*

CHAPTER VI

RELIGIOUS

#43-47

- Some baptised persons live out the call to holiness in and through the evangelical councils
- This is not "an intermediate state between the hierarchy and the laity"
- The councils are a gift of God to the Church as a sign and encouragement for others
- It is of "some advantage to the salvific mission of the Church"
- For the good of all, the Church regulates the forms this commitment takes, according to their respective charisms
- Through them, it is Christ who contemplates, evangelises, reaches out the poor, the sick, youth...

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43. **The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based upon the words and examples of the Lord.** 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. Various forms of solidarity and community life, and various religious families have branched out in a marvellous and multiple way from this divinely given seed. These religious families give their members the support of a more firm stability in their way of life and a proven doctrine of acquiring perfection. They further offer their members the support of fraternal association in the militia of Christ and of liberty strengthened by obedience. Thus, these religious are able to tranquilly fulfil and faithfully observe their religious profession and so spiritually rejoicing make progress on the road of charity.

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.

44. **The faithful of Christ** bind themselves to the three aforesaid counsels either by vows, or by other sacred bonds, which are like vows in their purpose. By such a bond, a person is totally dedicated to God, loved beyond all things. In this way, that person is ordained to the honour and service of God under a new and special title. Indeed, through Baptism a person dies to sin and is consecrated to God. However, in order that he may be capable of deriving more abundant fruit from this baptismal grace, he intends, by the profession of the evangelical counsels in the Church, to free himself from those obstacles, which might draw him away from the fervour of charity and the perfection of divine worship. By his profession of the evangelical counsels, then, he is more intimately consecrated to divine service....

The evangelical counsels which lead to charity join their followers to the Church and its mystery in a special way. Since this is so, the spiritual life of these people should then be devoted to the welfare of the whole Church. From this arises their duty of working to implant and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that Kingdom to every clime. This duty is to be undertaken to the extent of their capacities and in keeping with the proper type of their own vocation. This can be realized through prayer or active works of the apostolate. It is for this reason that the Church preserves and fosters the special character of her various religious institutes.

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 fulfilment 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. Furthermore, it not only witnesses to the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ, but it foretells the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom. Christ proposed to His disciples this form of life, which He, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world to do the will of the Father. This same state of life is accurately exemplified and perpetually made present in the Church. The religious state clearly manifests that the Kingdom of God and its needs, in a very special way, are raised above all earthly considerations. Finally, it clearly shows all men both the unsurpassed breadth of the strength of Christ the King and the infinite power of the Holy Spirit marvellously working in the Church.

Thus, the state which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, though it is not the hierarchical structure of the Church, nevertheless, undeniably belongs to its life and holiness.

45. It is the duty of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to regulate the practice of the evangelical counsels by law, since it is the duty of the same hierarchy to care for the People of God and to lead them to most fruitful pastures. The importance of the profession of the evangelical counsels is seen in the fact that it fosters the perfection of love of God and love of neighbour in an outstanding manner and that this profession is strengthened by vows... The Church not only raises the religious profession to the dignity of a canonical state by her approval, but even manifests that this profession is a state consecrated to God by the liturgical setting of that profession. The Church itself, by the authority given to it by God, accepts the vows of the newly professed. It begs aid and grace from God for them by its public prayer. It commends them to God, imparts a spiritual blessing on them and accompanies their self-offering by the Eucharistic sacrifice.

46. 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.

All should take note that the profession of the evangelical counsels... 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. They continually stir up the fervour of charity. But especially they are able to more fully mould the Christian to that type of chaste and detached life, which Christ the Lord chose for Himself and which His Mother also embraced. This is clearly proven by the example of so many holy founders.

Let no one think that religious have become strangers to their fellowmen or useless citizens of this earthly city by their consecration. For even though it sometimes happens that religious do not directly mingle with their contemporaries, yet in a more profound sense these same religious are united with them in the heart of Christ and spiritually cooperate with them. In this way the building up of the earthly city may have its foundation in the Lord and may tend toward Him, lest perhaps those who build this city shall have laboured in vain.

Therefore, this Sacred Synod encourages and praises the men and women, Brothers and Sisters, who in monasteries, or in schools and hospitals, or in the missions, adorn the Bride of Christ by their unswerving and humble faithfulness in their chosen consecration and render generous services of all kinds to mankind.

47. Let each of the faithful called to the profession of the evangelical counsels, therefore, carefully see to it that he or she perseveres and ever grows in that vocation God has given them.

**Let them do this for the increased holiness of the Church,
for the greater glory of the one and undivided Trinity,
which in and through Christ is the fount and the source of all holiness.**

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