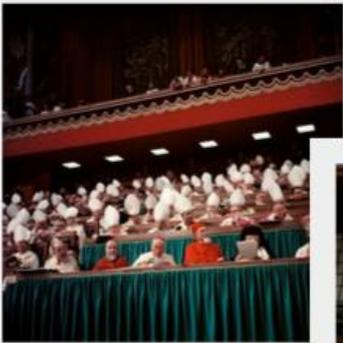


# Year of Faith Sermons



## PART FIVE

# Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council

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# Dei Verbum

## The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation

### Summary

#### Divine Revelation

From the very first moments of human history human beings have been 'religious'. Because God has created everything there is, including the human person, we can see evidence of His existence and providence in those good things which surround us. However, the limitations of our human reason and our sinfulness mean our ability to come to know God is clouded and often mistaken. Because God loves us and wants us to come to knowledge of the truth, He reaches down to us and reveals Himself to us. This reaching down of God is Revelation.

#### Jesus Christ

Unlike other religions, Christianity teaches that this Revelation is not a collection of information or a philosophy of life, but rather a Person, Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's complete and full self-revelation, His final and all encompassing Word to human beings, after which He has nothing more to add. Until the end of time the Church, continues to grasp and fully understand the beauty and completeness of this Revelation. For this reason, she continues to reflect on, and transmit to each generation, this fullness of God's self-revelation by means of the Apostolic Tradition, the passing on of the Faith by the Apostles to their successors the Bishops.

#### The transmission of the divine revelation

This Apostolic Faith is handed on as authentically today as it was two thousand years ago in complete fidelity to Christ by means of the *Sacred triad of Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium*.

#### The Scriptures

The Scriptures are the Word of God and teach us the truth for our salvation. Whilst God is the author of the Sacred Scriptures, he inspired human authors to write them, not

as passive instruments by dictation, but using their creativity, intelligence and human genius, culture and skills. The Bible is undoubtedly the Church's book because, whilst the entire New Testament was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in and by the Early Church, the Canon of Scripture, consisting of 46 books of the Old Testament and 27 in the New, was fixed by the Catholic Church in the first centuries of the Faith. It is precisely because the Scriptures are proclaimed, interpreted and understood from the heart of the same Church in which they were developed and written that they are a living word, not a dead letter or an historical curiosity.

#### Tradition

The Christian faith is thus not a religion of the Book but a religion of a living and breathing word because of the Church which is Christ's Body. The Apostles transmitted to their successors, the Bishops, not only the Sacred Scriptures but also the whole of their life in Christ, including oral teachings, preaching, institutions and new forms of worship. These, taken alongside the Sacred Scriptures, form the Church's Sacred Tradition.

#### Magisterium

The third leg of the triad, the Magisterium, is the living teaching Authority of the Church, by which, the Pope as Successor of St Peter, and the Bishops in communion with him as successors of the Apostles, continue to teach with the authority of Jesus Christ. It is the Sacred Magisterium which ensures that the Catholic Faith, taught by the Apostles, is safeguarded from any corruption or falsehood but at the same time is a living and dynamic Faith with the power to convert and change lives even in our own day and to the end of time.

### Questions for reflection

Do I understand that Revelation, the reaching down of God to us, takes the form of a triad including Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium, and that these can never be taken in isolation or opposed to each other?

How does the interplay of these three elements of Revelation ensure that the Catholic Faith is not a 'religion of the Book' but rather the religion of a living word which is still dynamic and has the power to transform lives today?

# Lumen Gentium

## The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

### Summary

#### The Eucharist

Like the Sacraments, the Church is made up of a human and a divine reality which cannot be separated or changed. Just as when we celebrate the Sacrament of the Eucharist, it is necessary for us to have the visible elements of bread and wine because Our Lord willed it, so too for the Church to be present, it is necessary for us to have those visible elements which the Lord also willed to endure, so that the light of Christ, the light of salvation, may shine out visibly for the whole human race.

#### God's Church on earth

Our understanding of the nature of the Church flows directly from our understanding of the Person of Jesus Christ who is both fully God and fully man. Just as in the mystery of the Incarnate Word we see a single reality, a Person who is both human and divine, so too the Church is compared to this Mystery. This necessary visible reality is seen most clearly in the hierarchical nature of the Church, with the Pope, the Successor of Peter, as the visible sign and foundation of our unity in Christ, and the Bishops, always in communion with the Successor of Peter, called to teach with authority, to make holy through the Sacraments, and to govern with charity, the People of God, assisted by Priests and Deacons through the laying on of hands and sacramental ordination. Just as the Pope is the authentic successor of St Peter, so too the Bishops in communion with him are authentic successors of the apostles.

#### The hierarchy

Whereas the make-up and organisation of social and political bodies can be changed according to the wishes of the members who make them the Church cannot. It is Christ himself who has willed that the Church should exist

hierarchically for the service of the whole so that, in the midst of the shifting fashions of each age, she endures as sign and the seed of the Kingdom of God, drawing all people to communion with God and each other.

#### The Laity

Within this hierarchy, which exists always for service, the Laity have their own distinct role, making the Christ present in those secular environments which are proper to them, such as the work place, the home, the family and civil society. Whilst the priesthood of all the faithful, given through Baptism, differs to the Ordained Priesthood, not simply in degree but also in its very essence, and whilst each have their own unique role which cannot be confused or conflated, nonetheless, both are ordered to each other in mutual charity.

#### The mission of the Church

The Church is missionary because all people are called to this one Church of Christ, which is necessary for salvation and which subsists in the Catholic Church. Our Lord tells us in St John's Gospel, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself." It is on the Cross, in the Blood and Water flowing from Our Lord's side, that the Church is born, so that the salvation won for us in that Sacrifice is not made distant from us by the passage of time, but is made present to us in the mystery of the Church. Therefore, all peoples are related to the Church to a greater or lesser degree, including those who do not yet share full visible communion with her. As she journeys throughout human history towards her Lord, the Church finds a type, model and mother in the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary who, through the Annunciation, became the first temple and tabernacle of the Incarnate Word and brought Him forth for the salvation of the world.

### Questions for reflection

Do I always appreciate that my understanding of and love for the Church is inseparable from my understanding of and love for the Person of Jesus Christ, and how do I express and deepen that love and understanding?

Given that the Church is always missionary, how do I seek to draw others into the full Catholic unity which Christ wills, whether that be in the home or in my workplace?

# Sacrosanctum Concilium

## The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

### Summary

#### The Liturgy

The whole of the Church's Liturgy, her worship of God, is founded and flows from the Person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. By uniting our human nature to his divine nature, Jesus' humanity becomes the instrument of our salvation. Just as the humanity of Christ is so essential to us being saved, so the Liturgical forms and patterns of worship handed down to us in the Church are the essential means by which this salvation is communicated and applied to us in our own day. For this reason, Catholic Liturgy always engages the whole human person in the worship of God, the heart and mind, but also the other human senses of voice, sight, touch, taste and smell – all of these are taken up and become a means for the worship of God and our own sanctification.

#### The Sacraments

The Liturgy of the Church, and most especially the Sacraments, are not primarily our work but rather the action of Jesus Christ the High Priest who, through the Sacraments and above all through the Holy Eucharist, continues to make present his Passion, Death and Resurrection. It is above all in the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrifice of the Mass, that Jesus Christ really encounters each of us, not simply as an historical figure, but as a

living Presence still saving, redeeming and loving us through His Sacrifice on Calvary. This Sacrifice is given again for us wherever and whenever the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered by an Ordained Priest. For this reason, **the Holy Mass is both the source and summit of our Christian life.**

#### The Holy Mass

No other action can equal the Sacrifice of the Mass, the understanding of which led the holy parish priest of Ars, St John Vianney to say that all the good works performed, from the beginning to the end of time, cannot equal one single Mass, because the Mass is the act of God made man, Jesus Christ. The Second Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, calls on the Faithful to be engaged in full, conscious and active participation during the Sacred Liturgy. This does not mean that everyone has to have a specific role, still less that the Faithful should assume any of the functions proper to the Priest, but rather that they should take the time to be properly disposed in heart and mind and that along with the gifts offered on the altar, each should offer their own lives as a living sacrifice united to the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

### Questions for reflection

How well do I prepare to receive the Sacraments, particularly Holy Communion, taking the time to speak to the Lord before Holy Mass rather than others?

How do I ensure that the Mass is the 'source and summit' of my own life?

# *Gaudium et Spes*

## *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*

### *Summary*

#### **Church at the service of humanity**

Because the Church, instituted by Our Lord, is the universal sacrament of salvation, she seeks with her Lord the salvation, true development and well-being of the whole human race. As servant of the whole of humanity, the Church, as an expert in humanity, responds to the signs of the times and engages with every culture she encounters, proclaiming the Catholic Faith handed on by the Apostles.

#### **Church's response to technological progress**

In reading the signs of the times in our own day, the Church recognises the advances made by societies in modernity, particularly in the scientific and technological realms. However, she also recognises that these advances have not always meant a similar progress in the moral life or of an understanding of what is truly good for the human race. In fact, man appears more uncertain of himself and his place in the world than at any other time in human history. To understand what is truly best for man and what constitutes true progress, it is necessary to look again at what it means to be a human person.

#### **The Natural Law**

The Council re-affirms that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God, who created him. As a result of being created as a unity of body and soul, with an intellect and the capacity for true freedom, the human person finds himself called to communion – communion with the God who made him and communion with other human persons. He also finds that deep within his conscience, there is law written which he must obey if he is to be true to his own nature and at the same time really free. This the Church calls the Natural Law.

#### **Freedom**

True freedom does not mean autonomy from God or from the moral law, but rather the capacity to choose good. Atheism can never be of benefit to the human person or to the progress of society and culture because it cuts man off from his very roots and damages his nature. One of the keys to true progress is a new recognition of the dignity of married life and the life of the family, with a corresponding respect for human life from the moment of conception to natural death. There can be no true progress without this key. It is only by advancing in the ways of justice and fidelity to the moral law implanted in each one of us that human societies can find true harmony and peace.

### *Questions for reflection*

Do I ensure that my own conscience is properly informed on the many issues which face society today, particularly in the realm of medicine and technological advances, by becoming informed of what the Church teaches?

Following the Council's assertion that the progress of humanity as a whole can only come about through a renewed recognition of the human person in all his dimensions, do I ensure that in my own life, as well as looking after my career, physical health and the things I own, I also take the time to progress in the spiritual and moral life and make this a priority?