

**TEAMS OF OUR LADY**

**INTERNATIONAL LEADING TEAM - ERI**

**HOSTEL ON ECCLESIOLOGY**

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## HOSTEL / FORMATION ON ECCLESIOLOGY

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*"The visible Church is based on the invisible; it is marked, formed and dominated by the invisible. Therefore the Church is, in essence, more than what visibly appears: it is not only a people or a population but a chosen people; not only a body, but a mysterious body; not just an ordinary building but a spiritual building".<sup>1</sup>*

As we begin this study / formation, the following words from the Second Vatican Council come to mind. They are specifically quoted from *Lumen Gentium*, one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council about the Church. *Lumen Gentium* (LG 9), says:

*"At all times and in every race, God has welcomed whoever fears Him and does what is right. (cf. Acts 10:35). God, however, does not make men holy by saving them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather it has pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people who acknowledge Him in truth and serves Him in holiness".*

The experience we have in our intimate relationship with God, allows us to turn our eyes towards God, as we do not feel isolated from Him. It helps us realise that our experiences within the Church need to be embraced and understood more thoroughly, especially in the circumstances that the Church faces today. Some of her members feel accommodated, while others suffer in some way or the other, by not fully understanding the Church's role.

We are a people who walk along the path of history to understand and realize the mission of Jesus. However, the reality is that many individuals claim to be Christian

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<sup>1</sup> KÜNG, Hans. **A igreja**. Lisboa: Moraes Editores, 1970, p. 59; KÜNG, Hans. **O que deve permanecer na Igreja**. Petrópolis: E. Vozes. 1976.

yet disregard or ignore the teachings of the Church. They do so based on undiscerned or immature experience, and we invite them to rediscover the identity of the true Church and acknowledge the importance of belonging to it.

Together with Pope Francis, we are aware of a new zeal for evangelization that is occurring within the Church, and the role that the Church plays in this evangelisation. This has opened the door to a new period in Church history, bringing with it challenges and demands, characterized by widespread confusion caused by current social and political turmoil and changes. The spread of a culture that is distant and hostile to the Christian tradition, and the emergence of various religious beliefs, each claiming to address and respond to humanity's thirst for God in their own specific ways, adds to these issues that the Church is facing.

The Church – consisting of us as believers – is called to engage in profound self-reflection and renew its approach to missionary work with fidelity and courage, in light of the challenging circumstances that humanity faces today.

This study / formation is an opportunity for each couple to reflect upon our Church that has been on a long path since its inception, entrusted with the task of the evangelisation of all mankind through the means of discernment.

This long path or process has brought with it many obstacles and tensions along the way, due to the different interpretations of what it means to be the Church. This has influenced the formation of the ecclesial conscience of many Christians. It has certainly played a part in the formation of the consciences of each and every one of us in particular.

The content covered in this study is very wide and therefore requires us to focus on the more fundamental aspects of the Church. It is essential for us to establish the basic premises behind the selection of the aspects of the Church that we will be covering in this study. This may also be useful for those couples who wish to increasingly discern and participate in the mission of our Church.

By basing this study on the premise that we do not fully understand what ecclesiology means, we can take on the role of students who are eager to learn. We will proceed to go back to the biblical origins of the Church and thus understand her role better. We will see how her teachings have evolved, and how they were understood and put into practice through the different councils held over the

centuries. Finally, we will return to the present day and discover the role the Church plays and its importance in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.

This course is intended for couples wishing to develop and grow their faith, hope and charity in the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Church is described in *Lumen Gentium* (LG, 8) as a sign and sacrament of salvation, or in other words, it becomes a visible sign of an invisible reality: the intimate union with God and the unity of all mankind.

The classic definition of the Church is: "The congregation of all baptized persons united in the same true faith, the same sacrifice, and the same sacraments, under the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff and the bishops in communion with him". This consideration is from an external, legalistic point of view that actually does not reveal the Church's true meaning and reality.

Man's essence goes beyond the physical body, and in the same way, the Church is infinitely more than just an external and visible organization. What makes a person a human being is their soul, and it is the soul of the Church that makes her a living organism and a mystery.

Just as sanctifying grace gives the soul supernatural life, the Holy Spirit gives the Church its perennial vitality -"What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church".

The study of the Church invites us to delve deeper and obtain a more profound understanding of evangelization to foster more effective pastoral activities i.e. to DARE TO EVANGELIZE THE GOSPEL MESSAGE. In other words, we are called to "believe with our hands" and through our actions.

However, in this pastoral endeavour, we encounter many difficulties. These are mainly related to the acceptance of the Church, together with her hierarchy and laws. Among the several obstacles that exist, the following stand out the most:

- Some claim that the Church is failing to 'toe the line' with regards to the changes occurring in the modern world, because the Church's message is outdated. They accused her of moralism, legalism, etc.
- Others confuse "the Church" with the "Church establishment" and criticize it based on the personal and individual attitudes of certain members of the

clergy or the laity, who form part of different pastoral areas within the Church.

- We are living in the era of mass communication. The perceived inability of the Church to effectively disseminate its message and values is seen in contrast to the ease at which its 'counter values' are being propagated and adopted through the means of mass communication.
- In the attempt to spread and / or keep its message relevant to the modern world, the "Church establishment" often weakens or misrepresents the evangelical aspects of the Church established by Christ.
- The role of the laity in the Church, although widely promoted and emphasized at Vatican II, is still ambiguous. Nowadays, the laity are valued as clerical assistants and their formation is encouraged. They play an increasingly important role in their local parishes by helping the priest.
- In view of the various problems arising on all sides, we are called to better understand of the reality of the Church established by Christ.
- The Church is the realization of the eternal plan of God the Father, established on earth by God the Son, and continually sanctified by God the Holy Spirit.
- The Church represents the People of God, and is the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit.
- The Church is both human and divine, heavenly and earthly, visible and invisible, for the present and for the future.
- The Holy Church was established on earth for all sinners.
- The visible Church is the seed and the beginning of the Kingdom of God, which will come to its fruition at the "end times."
- The Church continues the mission of the Word made Flesh.
- The Church is the universal sacrament for the salvation of all mankind.
- The Church is hierarchically structured, headed by the Roman Pontiff (the Pope) and the bishops; made up of clergy and laity, the "New People of God."
- The Church is for both "saints and sinners".

All these aspects constitute the one true Church of Jesus Christ, the mystery of the communion of saints and of man's relationship with God, who in His infinite goodness, freely offered us this instrument of salvation.

This is the Church: Christ present among us; God who has come to mankind to save us, calling upon the Church through His revelation, sanctifying her with His grace, supporting her with His constant help in both the small and great battles of everyday life.

As we have seen, studying the Church and the role she plays encompasses many issues. Some of these aspects require a thorough analysis and in-depth study, especially, meditation and reflection, to develop our understanding and knowledge of these important aspects of the Church.

This course is not merely a study of the history of the Church, of its hierarchy or of its temporal power. It is fundamentally a mystery that must be explored in the light of faith.

We therefore chose to organize this study / formation around eight themes, namely:

1. Ecclesiology: its meaning and how it has evolved
2. The people of God in the Old Testament
3. The people of God in the New Testament
4. The Church and the Councils
5. *Lumen Gentium*
6. The Imagery used to symbolise the Church
7. Mary, Mother of the Church
8. The Church today: The ecclesiology of Pope Francis

## TABLE 1 - ECCLESIOLOGY: ITS MEANING AND HOW IT HAS EVOLVED

We begin with a study on ecclesiology. But why study ecclesiology?

The Church did not randomly arise by chance, nor was it a creation by man. The Church is a Trinitarian endeavour, meaning that it was already thought of and planned from the beginning for all eternity, by the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The loving plan of the Eternal Father was inaugurated in history and time through Jesus Christ, and is constantly enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

For us human beings, the development of this great and divine plan constitutes Salvation History - "*Historia Salutis*" - the fruit of God's mercy. God offers mankind a means of liberation from the effects of sin so that we can all obtain eternal bliss in communion with God.

Salvation History began from the moment of Adam and Eve's Fall (Original Sin), and continued with the election of Israel as God's Chosen People, reaching its climax in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, and continues its course up to the present day. Salvation History will reach its completion at the end of time, with the final establishment of the Kingdom of God - "that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15: 22-28).

By divine will, the Church plays a major role in Salvation History. The period of time - from the Church's foundation by Christ (at Pentecost) up to the present day and the future consummation at the end of the world - is known as 'the Age of the Church'.

### 1.1- The word "Church"

Etymologically, the word "church" is a term derived from the Greek - "ekklesia," which in turn translates to the Hebrew word "qahal", meaning either a "convened assembly" or "gathered assembly." In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (the version of the Seventy or Septuagint), this word is often used to designate an assembly of people elected in the presence of God, specifically referring to the congregation of God's Chosen people at Sinai. The word was used in the Old Testament to mark Israel as a holy community, and as the Chosen People of God (Exodus 19: 3-6).

The New Testament adopts the original double meaning of the word, and gives the term its definitive meaning. The word "church" identifies a new community of saints, where God's Chosen People are those individuals who are redeemed by Christ, as an assembly who respond to the universal call of God for His Kingdom and His glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

When the first Christian community identified itself with the name "**ekklesia**", these Christians recognized that they were heirs to that assembly of the Old Testament.

The early Christians also used the word "church" to designate the different local communities (Jerusalem, Corinth, Ephesus, etc.), and the word also describes all the Christians spread around the world.

"The Church is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical and above all, a Eucharistic assembly".

The specific study of the Church is a recent development in Church History. This discipline was not found among the theological matters discussed in centuries past, nor was it found among the writings of the great theologians of antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Today, we can define Ecclesiology (from the Greek 'ekklesia' and 'logos') as the branch of Christian theology that deals with the nature and structure of the Church: her role in salvation and origin; her discipline and means of relating to the world; the Church's social role as society has changed over the ages; the crises she has faced; Church doctrines; the relationship with other denominations and the Church's structures and form of government.

The treatise "*De regimine christiano*" by James Viterbo (1301-1302) can be considered as a precursor to Ecclesiology as we know it today. However, due to the issues raised by the Lutheran Reformation, it was only from the sixteenth century onwards where several written works arose to defend the Catholic Church as the one true Church. In general, these studies are based on three types of arguments:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> PIÉ-NINOT, Salvador. **Introdução à Eclesiologia**. São Paulo: Loyola, 4<sup>a</sup> ed., 2008.

**a) History:** The Catholic Church is the only Church that appears throughout history as a continuously unified, visible, hierarchical structure with its head, the Pope, as the only legitimate successor of Peter.

**b) Attributes:** only the Catholic Church can legitimately claim the four major distinguishing attributes or marks of the Church, as given by Jesus Christ Himself: one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

**c) Empirical:** the very existence of the Church is a miracle in itself, because in spite of all her faults, the Church has survived throughout history, thus proving its divine support and approval.

However, it was only after the First Vatican Council in 1870, where Ecclesiology was definitely established as a specific discipline within theology. This Council defined the primacy and infallibility of the Pope as dogma, which raised a number of issues (including divisions) within the Church. These issues and divisions are perhaps why theologians were compelled to rethink and define the role of the Church.

It is evident that the conception of the Church, as a centralized hierarchy, prevailed, and this is evident up to the present day, whenever we hear for example: "The Church defends this position or stance ...". The word "Church" in this sense refers to the hierarchy - the Pope, bishops, and vicars. This idea is not new and was already found in 1601, as articulated in the writings of Robert Bellarmine.<sup>3</sup>

*"The one true Church is the community of humans brought together by the profession of the true faith and communion in the same sacraments, under the rule of recognized pastors and especially of the sole vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman Pontiff (...)"*

For anyone to be a part of the true Church that Scripture speaks about, no specific internal virtues are required, but only external profession of the faith, and communion of the sacraments, which are perceived by the senses. For the Church is an assembly of men, as visible and palpable as is the assembly of the people of Rome, or the kingdom of France, or the Republic of Venice.

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<sup>3</sup> BELLARMINO, R. **De controversis Christianae fidei adversus nostri temporis haereticos, tIII: Prima controvérsia generalis.** Livro III: De Ecclesia militante, caput II: De Definicione de Ecclesia, p. 137-138.

Another example is this famous statement by Pope Pius X in 1906:

*"In the hierarchy alone resides the power and authority necessary to move and direct all the members of the society to its end. As to the many (the laity) they have no other right than to let themselves be guided and so follow their pastors in docility".*

## 1.2- Biblical Foundations

The Father's plan to save all mankind by the means of the Church (through Christ, in the Holy Spirit) has its development in these historical stages:

- a) **At the beginning of the world:** the foreshadowing of the Church;
- b) **In Israel's history:** the preparation of the Church;
- c) **In the time of Christ:** the inauguration or birth of the Church;
- d) **At the end of time:** the consummation of the Church.

The most important preparatory marks of the Church were the two Covenants made by God with Abraham and Moses. In the first Covenant, established around 1850 B.C, the Lord promised to make Abraham the father of a great people and they would be blessed among the nations (Genesis 12: 1-3; 17:1-8); in the second Covenant that occurred between God and Moses at Sinai about 600 years later, Israel became the "people of God" (Ex 19: 3-8).

In these two episodes, we see clearly the prefiguration or foreshadowing of the mystery of the Church. St Paul says that the true descendants of Abraham are those who imitate the Patriarch by their faith, therefore becoming heirs to the blessings promised in the Covenant, and that constitute the Church, with Jesus Christ as its Head (Rom 9: 6-8). In the thirteenth century B.C, the people of Abraham, held captive in Egypt, were liberated by God through Moses. This event prefigured the great exodus that would be fulfilled in the fullness of time through Jesus Christ, who would free the captive people of God from the shackles of sin and death, and lead them into the Kingdom of God – a kingdom of love and life.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ laid the foundation for the inauguration of the Church, which would occur during the "end times". The series of actions and

events, when taken together, give us the full picture and allow us to glimpse Jesus Christ's clear intention in establishing his Church.

Among these actions, the most notable were: the vocation of the Twelve Apostles, the granting of the primacy of Peter as Head of the Church and the institution of the Eucharist. However, we mustn't forget that the Church did not exist in its proper form until Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles.

The following steps were undertaken by Jesus as He structured and formed His Church:

- Firstly, out of all His disciples, Jesus only called "those He wanted" (Mark 3: 13-15). He then gave them His power and sent them (Luke 9: 1-6) to act in the name of Jesus Christ (Mark 6: 35-44). Jesus established a hierarchy among the Apostles, appointing Peter as the "Head" (Matthew 16: 13-20), then anointing and giving the Apostles the power and strength necessary (John 20: 19-23) to enable them to continue their mission until the end of the ages (Matthew 28: 18-20). The Holy Spirit helped them carry out their mission to the whole world (Mark 16: 15-20).
- At the Ascension, Jesus promised the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 1-8) that He sent to His Apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-4). They went out into the world to preach in the name of Jesus, and the Church was born (Acts 2: 40-47). The Apostles worked wonders and miracles, just as Jesus did (Acts 3).

Therefore, it is undeniable that the will of Jesus Christ was to establish His Church to continue His mission over time.

### **1.3- The Church's mission on earth**

The proper significance of the term "mission" means "to be sent out"; but, in popular parlance, it refers to something which is done by a particular person or institution. The mission of the Church was born from the mission of Christ and the Spirit, sent by the Father. Therefore this mission, in essence, is to proclaim the salvation of Jesus Christ to the whole world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, it will enable a better understanding of the words of Christ that will propel and enhance ecclesial (pastoral) actions through charisms. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church, in

each and every member of the faithful (1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Peter 2:5), bestowing each person with gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1). The Spirit itself is the gift of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ for the edification of the ecclesial community (1 Corinthians 10:8; 12:19; Ephesians 4:12).

*Ad gentes*, the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (AG 1) states that "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father". The Church is sent by God to all people to be a universal sacrament of salvation, driven by the inner necessity of her own catholicity, and obeying the mandate of her Founder. The Church therefore seeks to tirelessly proclaim the Gospel to all men, like the Apostles did after Pentecost, as they preached the word of truth and established churches.

The Decree continues by affirming that the Apostles' successors would continue to perpetually carry out this work of evangelisation; that the Word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified, and the Kingdom of God be proclaimed and established throughout the earth.

"The mission of the Church, therefore, is fulfilled by that activity which defines her, obeying the command of Christ and, influenced by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit, fully present to all men or nations, in order that, by the example of her life and by her preaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace, she may lead them to the faith, the freedom and the peace of Christ; that thus there may lie open before them a firm and free road to full participation in the mystery of Christ" (AG, 5).

A wide variety of Christian churches exist in the world today. Given this reality, many people question whether Jesus Christ truly founded a one, true Church and, if so, how to recognize this Church? To answer this question, we can resort to the Gospel, where Jesus Christ's intention and His will to establish only one true Church, is clearly laid out in Matthew 16:18.

With its authority as an Ecumenical Council, Vatican II, in its Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (LG, 8) states:

"This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd (John 21:17); and together with Peter and the other apostles, to extend and direct with authority (Matthew 28:18), that which was established as "the pillar and

mainstay of the truth" for all ages (1 Timothy 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity".

#### **1.4 - The 4 Marks of the Church**

**One, holy, catholic and apostolic.** These Four Marks of the Church were present at the First Council of Constantinople, held in 381 A.D. An early description of what these 'Four Marks of the Church' signified, was attributed to St. Cyril of Alexandria. Inherent to the Church's essence, they are inseparable and intrinsically linked to each other. These attributes reflect the Church's essential features and mission, revealing its close relationship with the mystery of Christ.

##### **1.4.1- Oneness**

It is useful to distinguish the differences between the two concepts: oneness and uniqueness. Oneness signifies cohesion and a "lack of internal division." Uniqueness is the quality of having no like or equal; and of being unparalleled and incomparable.

The true Church is the one and only true Church because God is one and unique in Himself. Faith is the basis upon which unity exists among people in the Church. This is because the faithful all believe in the same thing - it is the principle of unity. The sacraments express this unity, especially in the Eucharist and Baptism which are fundamental to the true Church. Therefore, according to the early Church Fathers, "the Church draws her life from the Eucharist", the Eucharistic body forms the ecclesial body. All of this is rooted in service to our brothers and sisters, in *diakonia*.

The Church's oneness is also expressed by the word "communion" ("*koinonia*"), which signifies fellowship and the flow of life of the faithful among themselves (1 John 1:3-6). This unity will only be eschatologically consummated "when God will be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). This consummation is prepared and initiated by the people of God while they are still pilgrims on earth: the true God we possess and who possesses us perfectly. This marks the beginning of a common fellowship found between all believers.

This earthly condition can be characterized by the words "already" and "not yet", as both these words are true and relevant to the Church. The Church is "already" the reality that she has been called to be - where her sons and daughters are regarded as being the children of God (1 John 3:1; Romans 8: 14-17). But these children of God do "not yet" enjoy the glorious freedom that characterizes the eternal kingdom, free from the bondage of sin, death and decay (Romans 8:21). We have the first fruits of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:14), but this is only the beginning of a reality not yet fully realized.

This unity should not be confused with "uniformity" as Christ willed for his Church to contain a complex interweaving of "unity" and "diversity" called "communion". This was well-illustrated by St. Paul in his example of how the human body has many parts with different functions, but the many different parts and functions make up one whole. A broad spectrum of people, each with different cultures and rituals, are therefore gathered under the fold of the Church "to maintain the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4: 3-5; LG, 8).

#### **1.4.2- Holiness**

The word "holy" originally signifies that "which is separated or reserved". In a theological context, holiness signifies whatever is "separated or reserved for God." On the basis of this definition, it follows that a person who is reserved and separated for God should lead a morally holy life compatible to God's goodness (1 Peter 1:15; Romans 12:1).

The term "holy", when used in reference to the Church, arose in the second century A.D by St. Ignatius of Antioch. The importance of defining the Church as "holy" is seen in light of the communion of saints; the communion of holy saints can refer to both those who are already glorified in Heaven and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Therefore, the Church in this earth is marked with the characteristic of true holiness, though imperfect (LG, 48).

The Second Vatican Council, with this same train of thought, presents the Church as being holy, but at the same time, mindful of the necessity of being cleansed and purified. This reflects the pilgrim character of the Church.

The qualification of what is holy can only be attributed to a reality based on the measure of its relation to God's holiness (the Holy of Holies). All holiness originates,

belongs to and is consecrated to God. In fact, the People of God are regarded as "a holy nation" (Ex 19:6) because they are a people from God and for God. In general, anything that is related to worship is also regarded as being holy; therefore, those individuals who are consecrated to God become even more holy when they are summoned and gathered to worship the one True God in a holy assembly (ecclesiae).

The Church is a place where God is worshipped in a manner that He wills and desires, "in spirit and truth." The sanctification of mankind is the ultimate purpose of the Church, and this would be impossible to achieve if the Church were not holy, and if it didn't have the means of sanctification.

Despite being composed of sinners on earth, the Church is originally holy, that being, without spot or imperfection, because of the presence of God in the depths of her core. The Church proves to be holy because of the abundant fruits of holiness that she has borne since her inception- the saints and especially the Blessed Virgin.

The Church is not only holy in the form of how it is personified, as the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:26); but it is also the Church of the saints, that is, individuals who strive to live out their baptismal consecration to God and their status as members of the Body of Christ.

#### **1.4.3- Catholicity**

The term "**katholikos**" was used by Greek philosophers to signify "universal" or "according to the whole", and this was a term first applied to the Church by St. Ignatius of Antioch.

The Church is catholic. This takes on a double meaning: universality and authenticity. The Church asserts her authority on everyone (in the positive sense) based on her truthfulness that she has disseminated throughout the world because of her universality.

Over the ages, there were two forms through which catholicity expressed itself and was experienced. During the first century, the fellowship and communion of local churches predominated, and this remains a characteristic of Orthodox ecclesiology. In the second century, a unitary system of government and organization emerged within the Church, and it became one body with a visible structure to it, as a group of believers united by their faith and subject to the pope. In fact, a kind of "osmosis"

existed between the local Churches and the universal Church, which was the process of gradual or unconscious assimilation of ideas and knowledge between the two.

The Church has been catholic (universal) since the public manifestation at Pentecost marked its beginning. In a fundamental and invisible sense, the Church is catholic because "United with Christ, the Church is sanctified by Him. Through Him and with Him, she becomes sanctifying. It is in the Church that is the fullness of the means of salvation". In its visible facet, the Church is catholic because Christ's redemption is universal (Matthew 16:15; Acts 1:8).

The universal and authentic aspect of the one true Church has been commonly accepted since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D, carrying with it the fullness of the means of salvation instituted by Christ.

From the third century A.D, the term 'catholic' was used to designate the one true Church throughout the world, and those communities that were in communion with this Church.

From the fourth century A.D, the Church's sacred elements and symbols of catholicity were officially defined in the Nicene Creed, as approved in amplified form at the Council of Constantinople.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (LG, 13 and 17) reaffirmed the catholicity of the Church in light of her mission:

"All men are called to be part of this catholic unity that prefigures and promotes universal peace. Though there are many nations, there is but one People of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly, rather than of an earthly nature, for all men are called by the grace of God to salvation".

Thus, the Church prays and endeavours to ensure that the whole world enters the fold of the People of God, the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. And in Christ as the Head, may all honour and glory be given to the Creator and Father of all things".

Therefore, the Church is catholic on a visible dimension, due to the universal characteristic bestowed upon her by Christ. This signifies that the Church is capable of integrating, in its oneness, true riches from all different cultures, by purifying them in light of the Truth, and to respond to the deepest aspirations of all men, whatever their race, language, culture or social status.

Just as its oneness and uniqueness is preserved, catholicity is in no way diminished; rather, it is enriched by the existence of a plurality of traditions, as long as they remain in communion with the Pope.

#### **1.4.4 -Apostolicity**

The idea of apostolicity was first developed by St. Irenaeus, as he adopted the tradition that came from the time of the Apostles, and was conserved in the churches through the successions of priests. This is an essential dimension of the Church, and its true criterion. Apostolic succession aspires to perpetuate the mandate given by Christ to the Apostles, involving a participation in the powers that Christ entrusted to his Apostles, for the continuation of His mission for the world.

Apostolicity therefore coincides with authenticity, and various aspects of it exist: doctrinal, existential, missionary and ministerial, which are all characteristics of the one true Church since its inception.

The present day Catholic Church is identifiable to the original Church of the Apostles. This is proven by the Church's verifiable claim of a long history of unbroken, legitimate apostolic succession from the time of Peter (Matthew 28: 18-20; Acts 2:42). This was the will of Christ, who instituted the sacrament of Holy Orders as a tool to perpetuate the Church that was built upon the foundation of the Apostles. The essential elements of the Church that Christ entrusted to them, were preserved over the centuries: doctrines, the means of sanctification, government and evangelisation.

The word "apostle" is derived from Greek, and means "sent." Jesus chose twelve apostles so that they could live their lives more united to Him and be His messengers (Mark 3:14; Matthew 10:40; Revelations 21:14; Acts 1:21). Consequently, an Apostle refers to someone who accompanied Jesus and was a witness to the Resurrection - the culmination of Jesus' redemptive work in the world. Paul, who did not live with Jesus during His earthly life, had a particular vision of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, and was directly sent by Him (Acts 9: 3-6; 15).

True apostolic teachings are linked to the Word of God. No action or teaching of the Church escapes apostolic mediation. This is because the apostles fulfilled a double mission: to be special witnesses of the Resurrection, and to be founders of churches. This mission was unique and non-transferable, and the apostles were tasked to be teachers and pastors of the churches they founded. This mission would continue

through their successors - the bishops. In this sense, both the apostolate ministry and the bishops have a common mission: to promote the living presence of the physically absent Lord.

When we refer to the apostolicity of the one true Church, the question of primacy comes to mind. The passages from Matthew 16:16-19 were probably written post-Pentecost, and are very important. They recall the primacy of Peter. These texts reveal the mystery of the Church's nature and foundation in its earthly form. When referring to its nature, the Church was built for Jesus Christ. Regarding its foundation, it was built upon Peter, confessor of the faith. In its earthly state the Church is exposed to attacks from hell, but Jesus assures us that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church.

St. Leo the Great is helpful in enabling us to understand and answer the question about Peter's primacy. He stated that Peter perpetuates the exercise of his authority in the Church. "[...] From Heaven, Peter continues to pray for the Church and rule it through his vicar, the Bishop of Rome."

In the sixteenth century, the Protestant reformers also raised the issue concerning Peter's primacy. A cardinal called Catejan, in one of his writings titled *De divina institutione pontificatus romani pontificis*, presented three issues that became the core of the theological discussion challenging the Church's claim of Peter's primacy: Peter's true primacy within the apostolic college, Petrine succession (the bishops as the inheritors of Peter's mission) and the Roman Petrine ministry (the bishop of Rome as the legitimate successor of Peter).

These four aspects of the Church - one, holy, catholic and apostolic – should always be associated together because they are the essential traits of the one true Church. It is not enough for only one of these aspects, or any additional aspects, to be used as the criteria of distinguishing what the one true Church is. The one true Church simultaneously possesses these characteristics or markers that are inseparably united.

Thus, it is only in the Catholic Church where we find these four markers of the one true Church established by Christ and their full meaning: **oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity**. It should be reiterated that these essential elements of the one true Church have always been confessed in the Creed, and are present and visible right up to the present day.

Moreover, without neglecting the fact that "many elements of holiness and truth," are also found in other non-Catholic Christian churches, it must be said that some of them have preserved their particular beliefs at the expense of a genuine experience of catholicity in missionary work. In their evangelisation, by exposing certain national or ethnic groups to progressive, doctrinal ambiguity that are lacking in solid fundamentals, this undoes the chain of legitimate apostolic succession. This leads many people to abandon a vitally important means of sanctification.

**Reflection:**

- 1) How do you understand the Trinitarian origin of the Church?
- 2) In what ways did Christ command His Church to fulfil its mission?
- 3) How do you understand the four aspects of the one true Church: oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity?
- 4) Does belonging to the Church signify becoming an active part of the Mystical Body of Christ? Do you make full use of your gifts in favour of the Church?
- 5) Do you consider yourself a missionary disciple of Christ, especially in the strengthening of your marriage and Christian family life?

## TABLE 2 - THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, as in the whole Bible, an authentic religious experience is recognized as the source of its origins. God revealed Himself to the people of Israel in the reality and context of their history, and manifested Himself as the one true God, Creator and Lord of the universe and of history. This religious experience did not resemble any other human experience, nor did God identify Himself with any image made by man.

God is the Author of life, the Creator of all creatures and human beings that exist, and is a saviour God who is always on the side of His people. God is not manipulated nor bribed by His people, and He imposes moral and social obligations that protect the weak and promotes justice.

He is a God who draws near to the people, especially in worship; He is a God who forgives and who wants all sinners to live and break free from sin. God therefore judges righteously and punishes evil.

The ideas and the language of the Old Testament are apparent in the writings of the New Testament, and the God of the Old Testament is always present in the background - the Father of Jesus Christ who, though His Son, definitely revealed His love and saving will for everyone who receive Him with faith.

The Old Testament pays special attention to the relationship between God and Israel, His chosen people. One of the most important aspects of this relationship was the Covenant with Israel, whereby Yahweh committed Himself to be the God of the people regarded as being His special possession. God required the religious observance of the Commandments and the divine laws that guided the people.

Therefore a common faith, worship practices and the observance of the law, were the elements that maintained the unity of Israel. This was a unity that broke down when the people became unfaithful to the God they belonged to.

The history of Israel, as the Chosen People, reveals how important it was for the Israelites to maintain their religious identity amid the world around them. It was a necessary step to be taken towards proclaiming a universal message that would be revealed in the form of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

The literal expression 'the people of God' is rarely used in both the Old and the New Testament. However, the term "people" is used numerous times in both Testaments (360 times in the Old Testament and 104 times in the New Testament), with several equivalents, such as "my people," when God spoke to Israel; or, "we are one people," when Israel acknowledged themselves belonging to God.

In the Old Testament, the expression 'people of God' is found in: Numbers 11:29; 17:6; Judges 5:11; 1 Samuel 1:12; 6:21; 14:13; 2 Kings 9:6; Wisdom 2:10.

In the New Testament, this expression is found only once, in the passage 1 Peter 2:10, and in this context, it is referring to the whole Church. In the New Testament, the expression "people of God" appears 140 times when not directly referring to the Christian Church.

We therefore see how the reality and notion of the people of God did not appear in the New Testament as it did in the Old Testament. The Church was revealed in the form of different manifestations, indicative of how the Church was known from the New Testament onwards.

The category 'People of God' was one of these manifestations, which allows us to discover a deeper meaning: "the Church is placed under the sign of vocation and divine call."

It pleased God to take the initiative and establish a people to sanctify and save them. This enabled His people to get to know Him in Truth and serve Him in holiness.

God "chose Israel as His people and set up a covenant with them, instructing them step by step and making them holy" (LG 9). Besides choosing His people and establishing a covenant with them to instruct them, God manifested Himself and the designs of his will, sanctifying the people unto Himself.

Therefore, the Lord was the God of Israel and Israel were the people of Yahweh. Israel, as a people of God, belonged to God and to God alone (cf. Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 26:18). They were a holy people to serve their God (cf. Deuteronomy 7:6), in the specific sense of divine election (cf. Deuteronomy 7: 7-8).

Consequently, the formal element of Israel as God's people, was the Covenant (**berit**), in which God engaged Himself with His creation, as in the creation event. However this was now read in the light of liberation and in the context of the Word (cf. Genesis 1). God, through the Covenant, became the unifying element of the people.

It was a Covenant expressed in the form of divine love and loyalty. Thus, the people of Israel were invited to respond to this love and faithfulness by living solely for God.

However their vocation of being the chosen people of God was not a motive for the Israelites to feel pompous or brag about. It was not an exclusive election, but one that made Israel a sign for all people and nations.

God's covenant with His people "can be described as *hesed*, a term that describes divine love as love that is loyal and can be trusted. Therefore, God was the Father of Israel (cf. Deuteronomy 32:6; Hosea 11:1-3), who was His Son (Hosea 11:1) His firstborn (cf. Exodus 4:22), and the first fruits of his harvest". (cf. Deuteronomy 1:31; Jeremiah 2:3)

Called to be faithful to the Covenant, the people of Israel were guilty of constant infidelities. In light of these infidelities, God promised a new, definitive and universal Covenant (cf. Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 37:26; Isaiah 53:10).

The First Vatican Council declared that Christ decided to establish His holy Church while He was still living in this world. This Church was instituted immediately and directly by Christ Himself – the one, true and historical Church.

Expressions began to emerge that described the relationship between Christ and the Church: established, founded, instituted.

The principle actions that Jesus undertook in establishing His Church were reaffirmed: the vocation and mission of the twelve Apostles, the primacy of Peter, the power and authority given by Christ to His Apostles, and the Eucharist.

In *Lumen Gentium* paragraphs 2-5, the terms "foundation" and "founder" are used for the first and only time.

In this regard, the Second Vatican Council proclaimed in *Lumen Gentium* (LG 9) that:

"All these things, however, were done by way of preparation and as a figure of that new and perfect covenant, which was to be ratified in Christ, and of that fuller revelation which was to be given through the Word of God Himself made flesh".

Therefore, the New Testament reveals how the disciples understood themselves as being the true Israel, the new People of God.

The New Testament affirms that it was Christ who instituted this new Covenant "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:25). '[Christ] called a people together made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and it would be the new people of God' (LG 9). So whoever participates in the new Covenant instituted by Jesus Christ, becomes a member of God's new Chosen People.

Thus, the relationship between Christ and the People of God is essential for the establishment of the new People of God. Just as the law and the prophecies of the prophets were fulfilled in Christ, the God of Israel is revealed by all those who become a new creation through Him. (Galatians 6:6; 1 Corinthians 10:18; Romans 9:6). Being the seed of Abraham now depends on belonging to Christ (Galatians 3:29); the Christian Church is seen as the people among whom God dwells (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ezekiel 37:27).

**Reflection:**

- 1) How do you understand the People of God in the Old Testament?
- 2) What were the first fruits of the Church, as contained in the Old Testament?
- 3) How do we understand the role of Abraham and Moses towards the people of Israel?
- 4) Read paragraph 6, of *Lumen Gentium*, that reveals an important aspect of the Church found in the Old Testament.

### TABLE 3 - THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Not all aspects of the Old Testament hold equal validity for the Christian. The Old Testament needs to be interpreted in light of its ultimate objective, which was Jesus Christ. The historical and prophetic actions of the people of Israel in the Old Testament were a precursor and steps on the path to a full, divine revelation in the form of Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2).

On the other hand, the New Testament bears testimony that the promises made by God to Israel were fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah (cf., e.g., Matthew 1:23; Luke 3:4-6; Acts 2:16 -21; Romans 15: 9-12).

Therefore, certain instructions that were absolutely valid and applicable to the Jewish people cease to be equally valid and applicable for the new people of God, which is the Church (cf. Acts 15; Galatians 3: 23-29; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 7:11; Hebrews 10:18). Some of the aspects contained in the Law of Moses, Old Testament worship practices and the doctrine on the destiny of man – both personally and collectively - must be interpreted in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The new Covenant, instituted by Jesus Christ that gave rise to the new People of God, contains three essential and inseparable elements:

- The roots of the Church in the Old Testament;
- The Church's radical newness in the form of Jesus Christ; and
- The Church's openness to all people, both Jews and pagans.

Therefore, the definition 'People of God' is no longer restricted or limited only to Israel, but is open to all people (Ephesians 2:14), since Jesus died "not for that nation only, but that He should also gather together, in one, the children of God that were scattered abroad". (John 11:52)

Thus, the holy people, "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16), would now be made up of people of "all tribes, nations and languages" (Revelation 5:9), including Israel, because "God did not reject His people, whom He chose from the beginning "(Romans 11:2).

At the end times, only one people will serve the true God (Revelations 21:3). The new People of God no longer refers to just a race (Jewish ethnicity), but as a

choice for anyone who chooses Jesus Christ as Saviour by faith, which leads to the reception of baptism, corresponding to the reality of what constitutes the "Church".

As a result, "the Church now manifests herself in the spiritual realm. She never opposes other people, but only those individuals or communities who expressly and wilfully reject a salvific relationship with Jesus Christ."

The early Church used the expression 'ekklesia' (Greek) and 'ecclesia' (Latin) to refer to God's new Chosen People, that is, the "Church" which was a reminder of that assembly from ancient Israel. Paul spoke of the "ekklesia of God" to indicate a community called by God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 10:32).

In general, this term is quite common in the New Testament: in the synoptic Gospels, it appears only once in Matthew 16:18; 18:17, but in Acts, the term appears 23 times, and Paul refers to it 61 times.

The New Testament texts reveal fundamental and constant themes contained in them, but also a plurality of situations that involved a re-reading and interpretation of the Old Testament. The Church was born at Pentecost: God who raised Jesus Christ unites, through the Holy Spirit, all those who are outcasts, downtrodden and lost.

The canonical approach to the establishment of the Church utilizes the concept of "*jus divinum*" which signifies that the Church is permanently linked to the Gospel that was entrusted to the church in an inalienable way.

Although the issue surrounding the foundation of the one true Church has caused numerous controversies in the past and up to the present day, current scholarly research states that the Church only began after the glorification of Jesus and Pentecost. However, it is noteworthy that the manifestation of the Church after the Resurrection and Pentecost was a continuation of Jesus Christ's words and the wonders He performed.

It has been suggested that an implicit ecclesiology is evident in relation to how God brought forth the Kingdom initiated by Jesus, by entrusting and establishing a Church for believers who were encouraged to remain faithful to it. Christ would be understood as the saviour of Israel, not as the founder, who would unite the true Israel being the Church.

The Second Vatican Council speaks of all people gathered together in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (LG, 2-5). The mystery of the Church's foundation is linked to the actions of Christ before the Resurrection and Pentecost that led to the foundation of the Church.

Thus, the foundation of the Church must be understood in terms of a historical process, just as the Church owes its existence to the history of revelation. It is important to affirm that Jesus intended to establish the Church, on the basis of implicit ecclesiology.

Consequently, the relationship between Jesus and the Church is revealed in these different ways:

- a) The Church was established by Jesus: this is linked to those issues related to the person and consciousness of Jesus, and to implicit and procedural ecclesiology;
- b) The outward sign: an analogy can be made to the Incarnate Word;
- c) The internal effect of grace: Jesus Christ as the foundation of the Church.

In the Gospels, the notion of 'Church' is mentioned twice: Matthew 18:17 and Matthew 16:18. The first passage refers to the local Church and the role it plays in offering fraternal guidance and correction. The second passage refers to what Jesus clearly spoke about when He said: "On this rock I will build my Church". In Ephesians 5:25, it also mentions the Church from the point of view of Christ's love for the Church.

The Church was described and defined by many terms and names throughout her history: the disciples, the saints, the Christians, and finally, the Church. The model of this community that emerged in Acts 2:42 revolved around prayer, the breaking of bread, the apostles' teaching and a sharing of gifts.

According to how they understood Jesus, early Christian communities proclaimed His Word, announced the Kingdom of God and established Jesus as Mediator in the divine plan of salvation. These communities also became increasingly missionary and went out and approached the neighbouring populations, referred to as the Gentiles. St Paul, for example, insisted on the triad: the People of God; the Body of Christ; and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The importance of the implicit ecclesiology (that appears in the New Testament) was the role it played in fostering and encouraging the development of

communities or communion of believers. In other words, it was an ecclesiology based on communion with the mission to establish the Kingdom of God in the world. Groups consisting of local churches, where people would meet at each other's homes, were given the mission of sowing the seeds and proclaiming the signs of this Kingdom of God.

Right from the beginning, some risks of deviation occurred as each community accentuated those aspects of the faith that they considered most important. For example, the insulation of pastoral services in certain communities could lead to a very rigid conservatism. The striking events found in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Letters to the Colossians and Ephesians exalted the triumphalism of the Church; the Gospel of John contained aspects of gnostic individualism; the Gospel of Matthew emphasized juridical concerns; and the Corinthian communities exaggerated some charismatic beliefs.

However, by considering all the texts of the New Testament and taking them as a whole, this allowed for a uniform image of the Church to be formed, especially around some basic points:<sup>4</sup>

- Faith was the result of community life: people experienced the identity of the Triune God in their community life;
- Understanding the Church's unity: As the people of God, this now depended on baptism, and no longer on social status; privileges or riches.
- A fair distribution of duties and services occurred among communities as charisms ensured their success: these communities were not controlled by hierarchical groups or anarchy;
- Communities were established in their local settings and in foreign contexts, amidst different cultures. These communities saw themselves as pilgrims wherever they settled because they felt responsible for proclaiming and promoting the Kingdom of God in those environments;
- The Church was based around Jesus, who was regarded as the head of the community;

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<sup>4</sup> See: <http://padrejoaoinacio.blogspot.com.br/2013/10/eclesiologia.html>. Accessed in March 2015.

- Communities acknowledged that by following Christ, this would entail them having to be poor, humble and taking up their crosses of everyday life, for the Spirit of God would make them grow;
- The Church was not regarded as being the literal Kingdom of God, but rather a group of believers compelled to proclaim it and live out their lives as if it were the Kingdom of God on earth;
- Great care and attention was given to the poor, the oppressed and the rejected, so that they would feel welcomed and be active participants in the Church.

The first Christian communities saw the Church as representing the "People of God of the New Covenant."

Taking into account Jesus Christ's relationship with the Church, it is possible to see why the apostolic Church is regarded as being the standard and foundation of the one true Church for all time. This is because of the finality of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Church was born at Pentecost and grew with the missionary work carried out by the principle apostles, Peter and Paul. They were bearers of the Gospel message and led the development of the early church and her formation.

But it was only during the age of the early Church Fathers that the issues surrounding the foundation of the one true Church began to generate theological questions.

Referred to as the "Church Fathers" (the Patristic Age), these great men of the Church lived from around the second century A.D to the seventh century A.D. They were regarded as being the "Fathers" of the Church in both the Eastern and Western Church, in the sense that they affirmed the true concepts of the faith. The Fathers of the Church encountered many heresies along the way and fought against them. These Church Fathers were, in a way, responsible for what we now call the Tradition of the Church. These individuals were undoubtedly one of the richest sources where Church Traditions were emphasized and affirmed.

Cardinal Henri de Lubac once said:

“Each time that a Christian renewal has flourished in this West of ours, in the order of thought as in that of life (and the two orders are always linked), it has flourished under the sign of the Fathers”.

The Patristic Age was responsible for providing a gradual illumination and clarification of those Christian dogmas, today referred to as Catholic Tradition. The writers of the early centuries allow us to return to the origins of Christianity, or its original source.

Patristics is the name given to Christian philosophy developed by the early Church Fathers, and it is the bridge that links Apostolic Tradition to later Christian generations. It was these Church Fathers who were responsible for confirming and defending the faith, liturgy and Church authority and discipline. They encouraged and emphasized the importance of Catholic Traditions and played a major role in the direction of the Church during the first seven centuries of Christianity.

There is no denying the importance of the Church Fathers in the development of the Christian Church. During this period, many persecutions and heresies arose and threatened Christianity, but thanks to the efforts undertaken by many Christians, from simple men and anonymous figures to the great bishops and theologians, the Christian faith not only triumphed over the persecutors, but also preserved itself from being contaminated with the poison of heresies.

As new members joined the faith, Christianity emerged as a new religion and its followers were expelled from the synagogue. Spreading the Gospel message defined the faith. And the Church started taking shape, evident in the Pauline letters that reveal the beginnings of a certain institutionalization that built, stabilized and definitely protected the community.

Over time, the Church evolved from being mainly a missionary apostolate to becoming more centred on a local episcopate. One of the final writings of the New Testament (2 Peter) closed the Apostolic era of the Early Church.

By the fourth century A.D, the term "God's people" was being used by the Apostolic Fathers of the Church, although not existing yet as an ecclesiological theme in itself. During this period, ecclesiology focused on the Christological dimension and aspects. Thus, the notion of defining "God's people" was not reflected upon as much.

However this notion evolved, from a historical concept to one that was theological and salvific in meaning. Therefore, the righteous of the Old Testament were regarded as being pre-Christians. These individuals were justified and saved thanks to their faith, and not through the means of Israel, according to the Church Fathers Origen, Athanasius and Augustine.

From the time of Augustine, the concept of *populous*, which was a juridical criteria inherited from Roman law, replaced the historical-salvific concept of the People of God: the Church became the Church of all people recognized by the Roman Empire. Thus, already in the fourth century A.D, the concept 'people of God' was inextricably linked to laypeople and their relationship with their bishops.

By the fifth century A.D, there was no longer that pressing concern to relate the Christian community to the Chosen People of the Old Testament. The Augustinian concept of *congregatio fidelium* progressively took its place.

The idea of the Mystical Body of Christ was only developed by the theological schools of Tübingen and Rome in the nineteenth century A.D. The idea of the Church as representing the People of God began to reappear. Added to this was the idea of the universal priesthood of the baptized, which helped overcome the excessively clerical image associated with the Church.

Theologians are again emphasizing the relevance of that historical connection between the People of God from the Old Testament with those of the New Testament.

A new understanding of the historical dimension of God's People gradually occurred. This lay the foundations for the historical-saving concept of the People of God, which would be decisive for the Church Document *Lumen Gentium*, which appeared with a historical-salvific ecclesial dimension.

### **The Church built upon the Sacraments**

In the patristic interpretation of John 19:34, this passage was traditionally interpreted as representing the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, upon which the Church would be built.

From this perspective, the sacramental status of individuals, as seen in the context of *ecclesia*, refers to those who become members of the Church from the time they are baptised. They are participants of the common baptismal priesthood.

Therefore, those who are already baptised possess three elements that constitute the laity:

- a) The fundamental element: those belonging to the Church through baptism;
- b) The negative element: the fact that they do not form part of the clergy; and
- c) The positive and distinctive element: their unique and distinctive relation to the secular world.

Therefore, the protagonists of the mission are the people of God. They all participate in this mission in different ways of course, but all perform a role: the first role is the **priesthood**, and the laity participate in it according to the common priesthood. The second is the **prophetic** role, which deals with the supernatural sense of faith and charisms. And the third role is the participation of the laity, by virtue of their **kingly** mission.

The laity are no longer passive participants but play an active role in the apostolic mission, and that leads them to become key members of the ecclesial community.

A principal document from the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* portrays the beautiful relationship between the common priesthood of the faithful by linking it to the ministerial priesthood.

In addition to the priests and laity, bishops play a prominent role in the Church based on a hierarchical point of view in ecclesiology. There are three dimensions in the episcopal ministry of bishops:

- a) The bishop acts as the shepherd, guide and teacher of the people; and this sacred ministry is centred on charity;
- b) The bishop a member of the episcopal college, which was mandated to protect and govern the Church; and
- c) The bishop is a legitimate successor of Peter.

Some of 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, in each one's own way, they may be of some advantage to the salvific mission of the Church (LG, 43).

The First Vatican Council, in turn, defined the power and nature of papal primacy. The Pontiff has full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the universal

Church and her infallible Magisterium when speaking as universal head of the Church "ex cathedra" with the full authority as the papal office (implying Papal Infallibility).

The Second Vatican Council repeated the statements of the previous Council in relation to the Petrine ministry, emphasizing the relevance between the episcopal college and its Head.

**Reflection:**

- 1) How do you understand the term 'People of God' from the point of view of the New Testament?
- 2) What important role did the Church Fathers play in the development of ecclesiology?
- 3) Do we value the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist in our journey within the Church, as we build the kingdom of God?
- 4) What does the concept "the Church that is simultaneously visible and invisible" signify? (See paragraph 8 of *Lumen Gentium*)
- 5) Do you believe that all people are called to salvation, or just the Catholic faithful? Why is this call to salvation a gift of God's grace?

#### TABLE 4 - THE CHURCH AND THE COUNCILS

The Church Councils "are key milestones in Christian history". From the first Church Council in Jerusalem to Vatican II, about two dozen councils were convened to resolve theological difficulties and proclaim the faith of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council was held to bring about a renewal of the Church. This renewal was seen as necessary and a 'coming of age' of the Church. According to Trentin, "history testifies that in the Church, there existed a desire to respond to new pastoral challenges." Vatican II would become a "catalyst" of change and exchange of ideas that were bubbling up at the time. It would become a type of confirmation of the many reforms that had already been initiated in a number of churches. By the fruits of the Second Vatican Council, it is evident to see that Vatican II adapted the traditional Christian message to modern times. "It was the council of self-consciousness, of clarification, understanding and dialogue."

Therefore, in reviewing the decisions of all the different councils throughout the Church's history, we chose to consider four councils, because of the importance that they had in the development of ecclesiology: Jerusalem, Trent, Vatican I and Vatican II.

##### **4.1- The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15: 1-35)**

From Jesus Christ's mission and His death and Resurrection, to the testimony of the Apostles, many different forms of approaching and following the teachings of Christ appeared, and these elements formed the Christian faith.

The early Christian Church, which later became known as the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, was established as an institutional support base responsible for the structure and organization of this lifestyle known as Christianity.

Whenever the opportunity arises, where it becomes necessary to discuss certain matters and issues within a particular group or community, there are various ways this can be done. However this often forms a breeding ground for exploitation, contradictions, controversies, misunderstandings and disputes.

Our Church has not remained unscathed to this very human reality. The early Christians did not quite understand the meaning of what had happened or was going

on around them. As a result, many did not know how to behave appropriately in light of the truths of the faith or know what to do.

From the time of the first evangelists, there already existed different understandings of Christianity. When the Acts of the Apostles was written, there already arose a need to mitigate and resolve disputes and controversies that increasingly gained force. Such disputes led to the first church council that took place in Jerusalem.

The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15: 1-35) crowns Luke's narrative, and is also recorded in the book of Acts. It is an account of the experiences that Paul and Barnabas faced when they officially began their mission of evangelisation among the Gentiles. A whole narrative was created that revolved around the several missionary journeys of Paul.

The conflict that such missions would have generated in the early Church, brought about the need to reconcile these two points of view, identified back then as Pauline and Petrine.

#### **4.1.1- The missions of Paul and Barnabas**

The fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is a narrative of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13-14). The author of the Acts of the Apostles recounts Paul's mission in the form of several different trips. Among these trips in this chapter, the author records the trip where Paul returned from Antioch to Jerusalem, to the council which would take the name of the city it took place in (Acts 15: 2-5).

What we know is that problems already arose during the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. The most explicit problem was how those pagans who had embraced the faith, were supposed to live.

Some of those individuals coming from Jerusalem were more radical, and at Antioch, they spread the idea that everyone who converted should be circumcised and observe the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1). This signified that before a Gentile could become Christian, he needed to be Jewish and belong to the people of Israel. This problem caused Paul and Barnabas to consult the Mother Church of Jerusalem, where the apostles were still alive, along with the elders or presbyters, including James, who seemed to have an important role in this Church (Acts 15: 2,6,13). As a result of this

dispute, it was deemed necessary for a meeting to be convened in Jerusalem to address such issues that were encountered in the missionary work with the Gentiles. This meeting required that an agreement be set out between Antioch and Jerusalem with regard to their customs, traditions and laws. This had generated clashes between self-righteous Jews and Hellenists Gentiles.

It seemed clear to Paul that God would allow everyone to partake in His plan of salvation: both Jews and Gentiles. But since this point of view generated confusion and discord among many people, it required Paul to return to Jerusalem to take a definitive stance or position - declared by the assembly of the Church.

Based on the vehemence of the conflict that broke out, it is evident that the missionary work being carried out by Paul and Barnabas was successful. The number of pagans who were converting would not have been small. This phenomenon would have been very visible to the Jewish Christians or Judaizers who were not willing to give up any aspect of Moses' Law and the sacred traditions of Israel (Acts 15:1-2). This explained their reaction and the necessity of having convened the council to discuss these pertinent issues.

Anybody who studies a bit of biblical history knows that the people of Israel had a long, painful but victorious path to walk, as they tried to remain faithful to the Law. Therefore it shouldn't surprise us that Paul and Barnabas' mission caused great alarm among many people as they saw these new teachings as a break from the Law they were so used to.

Paul and Barnabas were accepting the conversion of Gentiles without them needing to adopt Jewish law, which would unquestionably entail circumcision. For the Jews, no rite or ritual existed to replace circumcision. So they insisted that for Gentiles to embrace the Gospel, they needed to be circumcised. Circumcision, as a ritual rooted in faithful compliance with the law, seemed inseparable. In other words, in order to follow the Gospel, it was necessary for a Gentile to become a Jew first. Paul, free from these legalistic impositions, insisted that the Law had been overcome by the grace of God and by faith. According to Paul, he affirmed that Christ brought about a new means of salvation (Ephesians 2:15). Paul did this without dismissing the importance of the Old Testament.

This therefore highlights the significance and importance of Paul and Barnabas' walk from Antioch back to Jerusalem. This proved that they recognized the authority of the Apostolic Church and were willing to engage in dialogue to resolve the dispute.

Another issue that surfaced was the question of whether Jewish Christians and Gentiles could eat together and participate in the same celebration of the Eucharist. Mixed communities consisting of Jews and Gentiles had emerged in Antioch. The notion of Jew and Gentile eating together, and participating in the same celebration of the Eucharist, was well accepted in Antioch. But it would have sounded absurd for those Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem, to the point where they wouldn't have resisted interfering or taking the matter into their own hands (Acts 15: 1-2).

From what we can see, were it not for Paul's interference and firmness, the community of Antioch would have remained divided between those who agreed and complied with the Law, and those newly converted Gentiles who would have been considered as outsiders in relation to the Law, customs and traditions that reigned in Jerusalem.

The approval that allowed for Jewish Christians and Gentiles to sit at the same table together (Acts 15:27), was very important for the process of acceptance and inclusion of the converted pagans into the early Christian communities.

#### **4.1.2- The Jerusalem Conference**

This meeting was also referred to as a Council, which normally involved the assembly of all the key figures of the whole Church. However, the meeting in Jerusalem only involved the churches of Antioch and Jerusalem. But the meeting involving these two churches marked one of the most important events in the first century of Christianity, and merited to be declared a council. To avoid confusion, the term most commonly used to refer to this meeting was the Jerusalem Conference.

Even without mentioning the term conference, this important event in Jerusalem was also portrayed by Paul himself in his Letter to the Galatians 2: 1-10. This letter specifically addressed the issue of circumcision.

This conference established the unity between the mission of Paul and the Church of the Apostles in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Conference placed Paul's mission in continuity with the history of Israel, the history of Jesus and the sending of the Twelve Apostles to proclaim the Gospel to the world. If Paul had not recognised the

authority of the Church and decided not to go to Jerusalem to participate and enter into an accord with the Apostolic Church, it is likely that he would have established a new church. The authority of the true Apostolic Church would have been undermined, and it may have been consigned as a small sect within Judaism.

**a) Peter's declaration (Acts 15: 7-11)**

As we have seen, the Church needed to gather together to formulate an official solution to the problem between the Judaizers and those who had converted from paganism.

According to Luke, it was Peter who resolved the issue by finding a solution that satisfied the conflicting parties on both sides. Peter attributed to God the order to receive the Gentiles into the Church.

**b) James' Speech (Acts 15: 13-21)**

The author of Acts does not describe the words of Paul and Barnabas, but says that they explained to the gathered assembly the fruits of the mission that God had performed through them (Acts 15:4). The author emphasized that it was God who worked miracles and wonders through them.

James was still quite attached to the Jewish regime. This certainly would have given him a privileged place among the most conservative Jewish Christians or Judaizers. This could be the reason why Luke made the point of mentioning James' speech – to emphasize that even those who were quite rigid and legalistic in their views were nevertheless approving the mission to the Gentiles and their admission into the faith. James, the defender of the doctrine of the Church of Jerusalem, accepted the arguments of Peter and added that one should not "harass the heathen who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19).

**c) Resolution of the Assembly**

The Jerusalem Church addressed the communities of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:23). The Judaizers who were present at the meeting didn't appear to have been very successful. Nor is it known whether they came to vote because the text says that the decision was taken by mutual agreement.

In Luke's account, Barnabas and Paul are the victors. The assembly overrides the Jewish laws. Two more companions from the Church of Jerusalem joined Barnabas and Paul on their mission.

The decision of the "council" was intended to be more than just a legal decision. It was primarily attributed to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. By placing the authority of decision under the power of the Holy Spirit, it gained meaning and supernatural significance.

**d) The Decree was delivered to Antioch (Acts 15: 22-33)**

This meeting seems to have marked the end of tensions between the two centres of the early Church. The delivery of the letter by Judas and Silas, who were representatives of Jerusalem, was the communion seal between the two Churches so that they would be one. The letter also confirmed and allowed Paul and Barnabas to continue their mission, as it had not been approved prior to the meeting.

The most radical Judaizers must have pestered Paul and Barnabas for some time, but now they had ecclesiastical and legal support to continue their mission.

#### **4.2- The Council of Trent (1545-1563)**

The Council of Trent was proposed as a response of the Catholic Church to the movement of the Protestant Reformation initiated by Luther. However, difficulties arose in fulfilling this purpose. One difficulty was that Luther's theology was not based on ecclesiological principles as such, but focused on the religious-existential problems of each individual; so the issue led to a deeper reflection on the theology of the common priesthood of the faithful.

The Council was purely episcopal, dominated by a group of bishops who were concerned with strengthening their position against Luther's denial of the hierarchy of the Church. Although this was the Church's response to the propositions of the Protestants, this council turned out to be much more than that; it was an expression of the vitality of the Church, as manifested at Trent during the sixteenth century, that bloomed as a revitalized movement until the seventeenth century.

Important and influential saints and other Church figures related to mysticism and prayer sprung from this movement: the fervour of piety cultivated by St. Philip Neri, St. Teresa of Jesus, St John of the Cross, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Peter of Alcantara, St. Francis de Sales etc. The sixteenth and seventeenth century are often referred to as the centuries of the saints.

The interior rebirth of the Church awoke many slumbering forces that had plagued the Catholic Church, including the high clergy. This rebirth accelerated their course of action by indicating the appropriate measures that they needed to take.

The intentions of the saints of the sixteenth century were:

"... Not to criticize others but mend themselves instead; not to change the structures of the Church established by Christ, but to reform those men in power who were holders of positions and specific functions; since the damage was mainly in the worldliness of the clergy. So first of all, it was important to reform the clergy".

According to the theologian, Giles of Viterbo, "men that must be transformed by religion, not religion by men." Thus, there was a parallel between the sixteenth century and the time period between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century: during the Middle Ages, the positive forces within the Church did not originate directly from the papacy, but from other groups and individuals (Cluny, Cistercian, the Mendicant orders). Likewise, during the sixteenth century, the drive to revitalize the Church first emerged among specific communities tied to mysticism (Carmelites, Jesuits, Theatines, Capuchins, Barnabites, Angelic, Ursulines, the Somascan Order ...) who humbly and unconditionally adhered to the Church hierarchy and the Papacy. This active spirit of revitalization within the Church had been hampered by the Renaissance and worldly spirit of the sixteenth century.

By the year 1530, the leaders of the Church in Rome seemed to be oblivious and out of touch with the reality of the evils affecting the Church. Leo X, for example, considered the Lutheran upheaval as being merely a quarrel between monks, and instead of dealing with it, Leo X would spend most of his time watching theatrical performances in his theatre in Rome.

It was only from around the time of Pope Paul V (1555-1559) that the reformation of the papacy became the backbone of the necessary changes taking place in the Church. Pope Paul V was regarded as being the most severe among the severe. This period saw establishment of the Magna Carta, the Society of Jesus and the meeting of the Council of Trent.

#### **4.2.1 Background to the Council of Trent**

In 1534, Cardinal Alexander Farnese was elected Pope, and he took the name of Paul III (1534-1549). He characterized the transition taking place within the Church at

the time - from humanistic Renaissance to Catholic Restoration. His personal life before he became pope bore testimony to the evils of the time: as a Cardinal, he owed his appointment to the illegitimate relationship between his sister Giulia and Rodrigo Borja (who would become the future Alexander VI). He had four illegitimate children. As Pope, he still gave in to worldliness and luxury, amusements and nepotism.

However, Pope III was more aware than previous pontiffs of the need for change and reform. He therefore favoured the new religious orders of the Theatines, Capuchins, Barnabites, Somascan, and Ursulines, and in 1540 he approved the establishment of the Society of Jesus. He chose learned and worthy men for the College of Cardinals, and appointed a committee of nine members, who prepared a report for the Pope that exposed the problems affecting the Church and the remedies necessary to resolve them.

The Church's awareness of the problems she faced was also awakened by yet another fact. The revolutionary "transalpine" ideas of the reformers were infiltrating and taking root in Italy, especially in Naples. The works of Protestant reformers Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Erasmus were spreading among the clergy and the people, which led to the apostasy of the capuchin Bernardino Ochino in 1542. Ambiguous characters appeared who did not break away from the Catholic Church but nevertheless took pleasure in the works of the Protestant Reformers.

To contain the spread of these advances, Pope Paul III reorganized the Inquisition, inspired by Cardinal Carafa (the future Paul IV) and St. Ignatius of Loyola: a commission of six Cardinals received the right to appoint "inquisitors" priests wherever it was deemed necessary. Thus originated the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition (that was renamed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith after the Second Vatican Council, as it had no longer anything to do with the Inquisition). This office proceeded to energetically counter the spread of those new ideas in Italy.

Much is spoken (as indeed, was the case in years gone by) of the necessity to convene ecumenical councils. However, obstacles existed that hampered the concrete realization of this ideal. Many men during that time leading up to the Council of Trent were fearful of Conciliarism (including Pope Clement VII, 1522-1534). Moreover, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V wanted the council to take place in Germany so that it

would facilitate the participation of the Lutherans that he hoped would be encouraged to come under the Church's fold again. The Pope, however, preferred a city in Italy. In short, the Emperor, the Papacy, the Protestants, Spain and France had something to say about the convening of the Council, but all in different terms.

After much frustration and ten years of trying, Pope Paul III finally managed to set a date and place for the council to occur. The council would take place in Trent (German territory) in March 1545. But the Council was only opened in December 1545, where a great assembly convened in the cathedral of Trent. The council lasted for 18 years, interrupted by two long breaks; during which four Popes died.

The Council took place in three phases between: 1545-1547; 1551-1552; 1562-1563. The predominant group present were the Spanish, who were endowed with a deep ecclesiastical focus. They played a crucial role in the dogmatic decrees of the Council that were drawn up.

#### **4.2.2- Dogmatic Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent**

- The canon of Sacred Scripture was reaffirmed once again; the importance of apostolic traditions was reiterated (the oral transmission of the Word of God in the form of traditions) and accepted with the same respect and authority as that of the Scriptures; it declared the Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate, as authentic (exempted from all theological errors in light of the many dubious translations of the Bible that occurred during that time period of Protestant Reformation).
- The sacraments: they are not just symbolic rites or rituals, but are channels that transmit God's grace - grace that is not merely the covering up of the sinner's soul, but a transformation (justification) that is intrinsic to each individual. The human will is not merely passive or a slave of sin, but is called to cooperate with God's grace. The Mass is the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross, in sacramental form.
- The council also decreed disciplinary measures; it prohibited the simultaneous holding of more than one clerical office, and the clerical office of "alms-collector" was abolished (the duty of announcing Indulgences was reserved henceforward to the bishop of the diocese, and, for the future, the

giving of an alms was never to be the necessary condition for the gaining of an Indulgence).

- Sacramental marriage became mandatory in the presence of a parish priest or vicar.
- Strict standards were set for the formation of priests in seminaries.

The Council ended on December 4, 1563. Pope Pius IV confirmed its decrees by the Papal Bull *Benedictus Deus*. At the request of the Council, an Index of Forbidden Books was published and a Tridentine Profession of Faith.

#### **4.2.3- The Ecclesiology of the Council of Trent**

The ecclesiological doctrines resulting from the Council of Trent influenced four centuries of ecclesiology.

We need to bear in mind that the purpose of the Council of Trent was to respond to the theology proposed by the Reformers, and thus stem the influence of the Reformation. Therefore, the council attempted to clarify those doctrinal points and issues that the Reformers had attacked the most. The council did not intend to present a systematic and comprehensive doctrinal proposal.

The Reformation brought into question everything that the Medieval Church had built in her pursuit to remain faithful to the Original Church, in regard to doctrine and discipline.

The Reformers were influenced by the mentality of the time, where individualism, subjectivism, criticism and opposition to the Church dominated. This stemmed from papal decadence, negative sentiments towards Roman Catholicism in Germany and Conciliarism. They contributed to the decline of scholastic theology and other intellectual development and trends.

The reforms that Luther proposed greatly affected some of the most important elements of the existing Church. Luther's concept of ecclesiology was based on:

- a) *Sola Scriptura*: the self-sufficiency of the Bible in the development of theological knowledge. The origins and nature of the Church are attributed to the Word of God.
- b) *Sola Fides*: the Church is the communion of saints, with the emphasis on salvific faith alone that incorporates believers into the community of the Church.

- c) *Sola Gratia*: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). There is no need for mediators between humanity and God's grace.

As a result, the Tridentine Catechism incorporated implicit ecclesiology dealing with issues such as: Scripture and Tradition, the hierarchical structures of the Church and the Sacraments.

The Reformation had consequences that affected the Church:

- The rupture of the monolithic unity of the Middle Ages, in terms of the religious, cultural and intellectual fields;
- The religious significance and respect for the Pope diminished; and
- The desire for reforms in the Church, with a return to the early Christianity as a source against formalism and legalism.

In the context of this situation, it is interesting to reflect upon some of the ecclesiological aspects that resulted from the Council of Trent:

- a) Both Scripture and Tradition together form the basis and criteria of theological development and knowledge in the Church. The Gospel and the Church are interwoven, and the role of the Church is to ensure the preservation of the Word of God.
- b) The existence of a hierachal structure in the Church is the affirmation that not all believers are ordained as ministerial priests or clergy.
- c) There was clarification on the origins and authority of the bishops.
- d) The Pope's juridical primacy was affirmed.

In summary, out of all the councils in the history of the Church, the Council of Trent lasted the longest and was the most difficult to organize. No other council had such a profound and lasting influence on the faith and discipline of the Church.

The truth of the matter is that the unity of the faith was not re-established at the Council of Trent but rather, Catholic doctrine was clarified and consolidated in all the areas where it had been threatened. The Tridentine reforms were at the basis of the revitalization of the clergy and the Catholic people, although the implementation of these decrees was sometimes slow and controversial. The Council instilled a newfound sense of unity and trust within those Catholics who were shaken by the events brought on by the Protestant Reformation.

The Council of Trent was also the most papal of all the councils before Vatican I (1870); and this paved the way for the official declaration of the doctrine of Papal Primacy, which would be developed further in 1870 at the First Vatican Council. This official declaration would have been premature in the sixteenth century, since the tendency to form national Churches was still strong.

The Council of Trent entrusted the Pope to promote the publication of a new Catechism, a new Missal and Liturgy of the Hours (which would be carried by the successors of Pius IV).

In a word, it can be said that the Council of Trent was the self-affirmation of the Church as the universal society of salvation against the various forms of individualism and subjectivism which were predominant during the threshold of the modern age.

It is true that in our day and age, the Council of Trent is not always lauded. It is often seen as being in opposition to the Second Vatican Council, as if an antithesis exists between them. But Vatican II often referred to the Tridentine liturgy and was based on it, adopting those elements for our modern age that the Council of Trent defined according to the language and the requirements of the sixteenth century.

#### **4.3- The First Vatican Council**

The First Vatican Council was the most important event in the history of the nineteenth-century Church.

##### **4.3.1- Preparations for the First Vatican Council**

In December 1864, Pope Pius IX secretly informed the Cardinals of his intention to gather together a new Ecumenical Council. Over three hundred years had elapsed since the last council had taken place at Trent. The Council was convoked to deal with the contemporary problems of the rising influence of rationalism, liberalism, and materialism. It was decided that a council would be an effective remedy to tackle these issues facing the Church.

The Bull of Convocation was promulgated on 29 June 1868, and it was also an invitation to Protestant and Orthodox Christians, however they did not attend. The news of a forthcoming Council garnered enthusiasm but also left many feeling apprehensive. The public were only informed that contemporary errors would be

condemned, the doctrines of the Church would be reaffirmed, and a revision of Church discipline, missionary work and the formation of seminarians would take place.

But in the Roman Curia, a certain mystery prevailed concerning the intense preparations involved for this Council. Public agitation increased in February 1869 when the Jesuit journal '*La Civiltà Cattolica*' revealed that the Council would define papal infallibility. The non-Catholic world, imbued with the ideals of liberalism, proclaimed themselves as defenders of the freedom of the simple Catholic faithful "subjugated to the dark obscurantism of the ecclesiastics"

In Germany, the historian Fr. Ignatius von Dollinger (1799-1890) spearheaded an 'anti-infallibility' movement, writing various works that attacked the declaration. The Prime Minister of Bavaria, Chlodwig of Hohenlohe sought the help of European governments to intervene against the alleged dangers of the Council. The German Bishops assembled at Fulda (September 1869) sent a written notice to the Pope revealing their reservations and concerns about the declaration, and although they did not oppose the doctrine, they feared the reactions of European governments and divisions that could be caused among Catholics themselves.

In fact, the definition of this dogma might seem daring in light of when it occurred – during a period of time where liberalism predominated.

#### **4.3.2 – What took place at the First Vatican Council**

The Council was opened on 8 December 1869 in St. Peter's Basilica and was attended by 764 prelates.

There were four public sessions during the Council. The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* was issued at the third session that occurred on 24 April 1870, and it was unanimously approved. Chapter 1 reaffirmed the existence of a personal God who acts freely, and who is Creator of all things and independent of the created world (this was a stance against materialism and pantheism); Chapter 2 taught that certain religious truths, such as the existence of God, "can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason" (this was a stance against atheism and fideism in a century where the Christian faith was attacked and mocked by rationalism. Despite this, the Council defended faith through reason!); the text of this 2nd chapter reiterated that Divine Revelation was transmitted to us through oral traditions and Sacred Scripture.

Chapter 3 proclaimed that faith is a free choice, where man adheres himself to God. Faith was seen as a gift of divine grace. Chapter 4 defined the principles of faith and reason. We are reminded that any apparent disagreement between faith and reason can only result from a false understanding of the propositions of the faith, and the conclusions of reason.

The fourth session of the Council occurred on 18 July 1870, and it defined the infallibility of the Pope and his primacy of jurisdiction over the whole church. The council members voted in favour of the Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*. Pius IV soon promulgated the Constitution, which consists of four chapters, affirming the biblical and patristic foundation of the papacy, its perpetual duration, the value and essence of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, and the infallibility of the papal magisterium.

The Pope's authority and immediate jurisdiction over the whole Church was defined (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 defined, as a divinely revealed dogma, that when the Roman Pontiff speaks *ex cathedra* - that is when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians (in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority) the pope defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, he possesses, by the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals.

After this memorable session, the Council still had much to discuss. However, the Council had to be stopped abruptly, because the Franco-German war broke out, which forced many prelates to return to their homeland. Consequently, the Pope suspended the Council, which was supposed to reconvene again in a more appropriate time, but this in fact never happened.

Vatican I was hugely important for the Church. The definition of papal infallibility was the logical conclusion of those assertions contained in Scripture itself (Mt 16: 16-19; Luke 22:31; John 21:15-17) and developed through the ages; especially whenever disputes affected the Church. It was during these difficult moments that the pre-eminence of the Magisterium of the successors of Peter emerged in the consciousness of Christians.

In an age marked by unbelief, the faith was boldly proclaimed and affirmed. The Church was presented as something transcendent or as a Sacrament that man receives from God, unlike any other society or institution.

The centralization of the Church, as spelled out by Vatican I, became even more apparent during the subsequent pontificates. It was necessary for the Second Vatican Council to occur (1962-65) to finish the work that the former had left unfinished.

Vatican I could only address the role of the Roman Pontiff, within the confined timeframe of the council's duration. Vatican II also addressed the role of bishops and priests in the Church, emphasizing the concept of collegiality. Without undermining the primacy of Peter, it enriches the structure of the Church.

#### **4.4- The Second Vatican Council**

The Council took place in the form of four sessions between October 11, 1962 and December 8, 1965. As a result of the Second Vatican Council, 16 documents were promulgated. The principle document was the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated on November 21, 1964.

##### **4.4.1- De Ecclesia**

With regards to the concept of what the 'Church' signifies, several theological schools each had their own specific viewpoints, and contributed to the council. From Belgian, French and German theologians of the former Catholic University of Louvain (characterized by intense biblical inspiration and supported by their episcopate), to Chilean theologians and scholars, who revealed the freshness and commitment of Church in Latin America.

In redrafting the text, the different visions of the Church in the context of the modern age emerged and were discussed and included in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* which became the centre of Vatican II.

It is important to affirm the fundamental value of *Lumen Gentium*, by envisaging a Church that is aware of the role entrusted to it. *Lumen Gentium* relates to the other texts of the Council and is configured hermeneutically as the basis of interpreting the rest of the conciliar documents properly.

*Lumen Gentium* presents the doctrine of the mystery of the Church and the People of God which all the faithful belong to through Baptism. The unity of all believers belonging to the Church is derived from this, and they all share in the universal character of the call to holiness.

It also states that the bishops are the legitimate successors of the Apostles and that, in addition to presiding over their particular Churches, they form part of an episcopal "college" or "body" where each Bishop is a member. This "college" is presided over by the Pope and the bishops respect this role in obedience.

It was during this period, while the document on the Church was being revised, that the Council was halted, as a result of the death of Pope John XXIII. Pope Paul VI was subsequently elected.

During the second conciliar period, special attention was again given to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. This document was the driving force and centre of conciliar decisions. It would play an important role in formalizing the nature and identity of the Church. The Church had actually required such a clarification since the thirteenth century.

At the end of the second period of the council in December 1963, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and the Decree on the Means of Social Communications (*Inter Mirifica*) were approved.

After another interval, in September 1964, Pope Paul VI inaugurated a new phase in the Council with a concelebration, where the newly established liturgical forms were expressed.

So the study on the Church resumed from the basis of a revised text, in addition to the original four chapters that dealt with the mystery of the Church, the People of God, the hierarchical structures and laity, the universal call to holiness, the vocation of the religious, the eschatological aspects of the Church and the Virgin Mary.

On November 21, 1964, after much discussion about the nature of the Church and its organizations and relationships, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - *Lumen Gentium* - was approved. The adoption of this Constitution would be proof of its positive acceptance and the adherence of the priests to the ecclesiological renewal. This document will be presented in the next chapter.

In this process it is necessary to highlight the importance of the *Dei Verbum*, (the incipit of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), a document in the form of a papal bull and one of the main documents of Vatican II.

It is referred to as "dogmatic constitution" because it contains and deals with "matters of faith". In fact, its content addresses the delicate and complex issue of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Sacred Tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture are closely linked and compatible with one another as both are derived from the same divine source.

Sacred Scripture is the Word of God, as it was written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Sacred Tradition, in turn, fully transmits the Word of God to the successors of the Apostles (the bishops). This Word of God was entrusted by Christ and by the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, so that they, together with the light of the Spirit of truth, would faithfully preserve and disseminate its message through their preaching. The Church affirms the reliability of divine revelation through the preservation of the Word through Sacred Traditions. Therefore both should be received and honoured with an equal spirit of piety and reverence. In this sense, it explains and justifies the new approach of how to interpret hermeneutics.

So, without neglecting its legal and institutional dimensions, the Church takes a step towards the liberation of the monarchical rigidity of those individuals who hold power. The Church begins to recognize the role and importance of its members and not only her teaching or Magisterium. "The Church starts learning how to recognize the signs of the times from theological viewpoints".

On September 14, 1965, the fourth and final period of the Second Vatican Council began. This period extended until December 8, 1965. During this period, several other documents, after *Lumen Gentium*, were discussed, reformulated and approved.

The new notion of the Church, officiated by this Constitution, encouraged unity and reintegration with other Christian traditions. The Church began to remove its triumphalist 'dress code' and took steps towards a new ecclesiastical approach. The Church sought to tone down its self-conception of being the only, incomparable Church above all churches.

It was in this period that the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch revoked the Reciprocal Excommunication of 1054.

On December 7, 1965, the proceedings and work undertaken at the Second Vatican Council were concluded with the vote and approval of the Pastoral

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). This Constitution drew attention to the contradictions of modernity. A note clarified the significance of this document being attributed to as a "pastoral" document by stating that: "on the basis of doctrinal principles, the constitution aims to expose the Church's attitude in relation to the modern world and to people today".

The Second Vatican Council adapted the traditional Christian message to modern times. "It was the council of self-consciousness, of clarification, comprehension and dialogue." "It was the largest council by the number of priests from around the world who took part in it; the most in depth in terms of matters and issues dealt with and has met the needs of the entire human family". "The Magisterium descended to engage in dialogue in an approachable, accessible and charitable way."

Ecclesiology, which up until Vatican II had served as a mechanism of defence and justification, now took on a missionary spirit with the focus on dialogue. Classic ecclesiology stemmed from legalistic origins intended to defend ecclesiastical power. This could be regarded as the "Origin of sin" theology. Then theology developed as anti-Protestant and anti-modernism apologetics in the post-Tridentine period in the defence of the '*vera ecclesia*'. To overcome this legalistic approach once and for all, the Council situates the Church in its due "place" in *Lumen Gentium*.

In summary, the Council Fathers were called to this Council and were given the task as protagonists for reform in the Church (*aggiornamento*). They needed to define a new identity for the Church, to make her relevant in modern day history. It was necessary for the Church to redefine itself.

The Council's main goals were: the development of the Catholic faith, the renewal of Christian life among the faithful, and an adaptation of ecclesiastical discipline to the needs of the present time.

The legacy of Vatican II is evident in its pastoral guidance, aimed at adapting ecclesiastical life to contemporary needs.

The Second Vatican Council was a kind of recognition and formalization of all that eagerness for renewal that had long existed within the People of God.

The Council Fathers revived fundamental aspects of the New Testament and Patristic Age to properly redefine the essence of the Church in modern times.

In this sense, the great Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation laid the theological foundations: the Church is the people of God and is constituted by the reception of the Word of God, the creative Word that determines the history of salvation, the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ. From the Word of God, the Council defined the Church as the People of God.

By referring to the Church as the People of God, it entailed rescuing and revitalizing the original church with biblical foundations. The Church would be following in Paul's steps as seen in the Acts of the Apostles. A Church that is open to all, welcoming everyone and unifying them as one people.

The Church of the People of God takes on a universal and human form. The Church comes to life with a human warmth that extends beyond the walls plastered with the rigidness of cold Institutionalisation. Now all men are called to salvation by the grace of God (LG, 13).

**Reflection:**

- 1) How do you understand the importance and significance of Councils for the development of ecclesiology?
- 2) What was the purpose of a Council? Do you know why each of these Councils were convened?
- 3) How do you understand the importance and significance of Paul, Peter and James' actions and behaviour that led to the Conference of Jerusalem?
- 4) Do we understand and participate in the Church as the People of God?
- 5) Do we sufficiently understand the importance and consequences that the Second Vatican Council had for the Church?
- 6) Do some research on the Second Vatican Council. What is the legacy of this Council that occurred over 50 years ago?

#### TABLE 5 - LUMEN GENTIUM

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, presents the Church as a sacrament in Christ, light of the people.

This ecclesiological Constitution – that together with *Dei Verbum* received the qualification as being "dogmatic", focuses on key elements in its first 3 chapters. The Second Vatican Council, in accordance with Patristic Tradition and due to the theological reforms of the first half of the twentieth century, presents the Church as "a sacrament in Christ, light of the people". The Church forms a crucial part of the Father's salvation plan, which ultimately is the goal of admittance into the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is distinct from the Church.

The distinction between the two is an important step in overcoming any confusion or dispute concerning the role of the Church and the Kingdom of God. Here the Church is given its identity as being the People of God who seek to build the Kingdom. This does away with preconceived ideas that the Church regards itself as superior to the Kingdom of God, or takes the place of the Kingdom.

The Church took important steps in defining its role as a means of finding and establishing a community built around the Kingdom of God.

According to the Second Vatican Council, by divine will, the Church is endowed with ministers whose authority is for the service of the faithful. As successors of the apostles, instituted by Christ Himself, the bishops continue their mission and constitute a "body" or college of bishops. All churches presided over by a bishop are united in communion with The Church. Through episcopal consecration, and the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the college accepts new members into her fold, who need to be in communion with the Bishop of Rome.

During sacramental consecration, the authority of Christ is bestowed upon bishops as they participate in His mission to sanctify, to teach and direct the local Church entrusted to each one of them in communion with the Bishop of Rome. The universal Church is for the whole of humanity.

*Lumen Gentium* goes on to prioritize Christocentrism and the sacramental and missionary dimensions of the Church. *Lumen Gentium* presents to the world a Church that has an identity, not as a punitive body.

Ecclesiology therefore shifts its focus from what was a legalistic framework to one now based on theology. This also enables for a reinterpretation of the Church's hierarchical structure to take place. Up until then, this hierarchical structure approached its role in a strictly judicial manner.

This constitution represented a clear step forward in comparison with the decisions and declarations adopted by Vatican I and the papal magisterium in the decades flowing this council.

*Lumen Gentium* aimed to update the Church's consciousness and self-awareness, in respect to her identity and the mystery of her nature. It did not seek to condemn anything or set dogmas. Its real value is how it presents the Church, in light of the mystery of salvation and human history. The essential and unchanging elements of the Church were brought to the fore, clearly revealing the mystery of the Church's interior dimensions.

In fact, *Lumen Gentium* embraced many aspects of the plan to revitalize the Church in light of modern times. It accepted Christocentrism that had become widespread since Vatican I. Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains His holy Church here on earth as a community of faith, hope and charity. This is an entity with a visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word (LG 8).

### **5.1- Jesus Christ and the Church**

Besides being the founder of the Church, Jesus Christ is also the Head of the Church as it is sanctified through Him.

The ecclesiological reforms within the Church are related to the notion of the mystery of the Church, and a new understanding of the significance and meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Church is not the source of its own light, but, like the moon, reflects the light of the sun. The Church reflects the light of the Son of God

Jesus Christ, as the light of His shining face is revealed to all mankind through her. The Church must be pure and transparent, because this will allow us to see Christ's living presence within the Church. Christ's presence should ensure that the Church remain transparent. Jesus is the Head of the Church and she must comply with Him since the Church and Christ form one true body.

The ecclesiological reforms stress fidelity to Jesus Christ, who always approached humanity with an openness. Openness signifies communion. Communion humanizes the relationship between the Church and the People of God. It overcomes juridical ecclesiology that was once prevalent in the Church. The very concept of the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, is one based on communion. The Holy Spirit unifies the Trinitarian community and gives it the Spirit of life and truth.

The New Testament affirms that the Holy Spirit constitutes the ecclesial community of salvation (Luke 24: 44-53; Acts 2: 1-13). For the Spirit and the Bride say to the Lord Jesus: "Come" (Revelation 22:17).

In this way, the whole Church is presented as "the people gathered in the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (LG 4).

The Church established by the Holy Spirit unites all believers to form one body. The Holy Spirit sanctifies and permanently guides the Church. This signifies that both the structures in place within the Church and its declarations and dogmas should be guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit does not only assist the Church. The Holy Spirit was a co-founder of the Church. "Indeed, the Church is the work of the Holy Spirit." The Church opens itself to the world, ready to engage in dialogue. The Church is the place where Christ the Redeemer acts through the Holy Spirit.

Christocentrism sacramentalizes the Church. This is the context, where Christ effectively acts through the Holy Spirit for the purpose of redemption. The Church therefore becomes a primordial Sacrament of God's grace for men. The Church's sacramental dimension is a result of its Christocentric dimension.

The Sacraments and the Church merge together as each one composes the other and vice versa. "Where there are sacraments, there is the Church, and where there is no Church, there are no sacraments. The Church is the universal sacrament of

salvation, the Church is in Christ like a sacrament" (LG, 1). "Christ sent the disciples His life-giving Spirit and He formed His body, the Church" (LG, 48).

The Sacraments are the salvific mystery of God present in the Church. Through the sacraments, God manifests Himself by sanctifying and redeeming the human being. It is a channel through which God approaches His people. By approaching His people, this fosters a sense of unity. Fellowship leads us to a spirit of unity and communion. Christians who are truly active members of the Church are called to build up the Church through the actions of their everyday lives. This will enable them to feel as though they are a part of this Church and its role in history. The Church built in history walks along a path for the future.

## **5.2- The People of God**

The Second Vatican Council opened the doors for the emergence of new ecclesiologies. A refreshing variety of insight, and a new understanding of the Church was emerging.

In Latin America, a much more liberal model of the Church is born. The poor have a theological role to play in the Church. Instead of it being a Church for the poor, the Church is required to be of the poor. The notion of moral sin and individual repression extends to an understanding of sin in light of it generating social and economic problems.

Instead of a focus based solely on the salvation of the soul of each individual, a new path to salvation is initiated, where the focus shifts to issues such as freedom from poverty, hunger and so many other injustices. The aim is to transform society through the faith and achieve personal, communal and structural release.

In the pre-Vatican period, the concept of the Church - as the Mystical Body of Christ, predominated. As we have seen, the Vatican II changed the focus to emphasize an image of the Church linked to the biblical concept of the Church as the People of God.

Thus the notion of the Church and the role of the People of God within the Church becomes a crucial element in the ecclesiological context. Up until Vatican II, the focus had mainly been on the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

The Church, which was established to be a missionary and servant to others (in the context of its notion as the People of God) starts distancing itself from its hierarchical character and begins to present itself as the ‘pilgrim Church’ with an active role in history.

"Already from the beginning of the world, the foreshadowing of the Church took place. It was prepared in a remarkable way throughout the history of Abraham's descendants, as a continuation of the chosen people of Israel".

*Lumen Gentium* stresses “the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ in search of the Kingdom of God. All men are called to this union with Christ as a community of believers. He is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains”. (LG 3)

Faith must be founded and based on Christ, and not the Church. Christ is the Light of the world, the *Lumen Gentium*, and like the moon from the sun, the Church reflects that Light as the sacrament of Christ, that is, a “sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people in pursuit of the Kingdom of God”. Jesus Himself established the Church with the emphasis to proclaim the Good News and the Kingdom of God. The focus was not on Himself nor on the Church as an institution. (LG 5)

So the Church is regarded as a means to serve Christ. A path to follow in His footsteps. It is the Church who must be at the service of the world, and not the world to the Church's service. Christ accomplished the work of redemption despite poverty and persecution; the Church is called to follow the same path in order to communicate the fruits of salvation to all mankind (LG 8).

The function of the Church is to proclaim and bear witness to the divinity and humanity of Christ, and His courage and detachment from earthly glory. It must serve those people in life who are in most need of dignity. The Church is the mother who loves her sick child the most as she searches for a cure; the hungry in search of food, the naked in search of clothing. The Church is the true sign or sacrament of Christ, who nourishes it and illuminates the path of those in most need to dignify themselves.

**The Church as the People of God: what exactly does this mean?** The concept of a ‘People of God’ includes the possibility of inconsistencies and discrepancies that are inherent to any other community too. The spread of Protestantism and the social

changes taking place in the modern world stripped away the garment of perfection that had cloaked the Church's image. The Church needed to reassert its relevance and restore its image as the one true Church, defending itself through the efforts of apologetics that defended the attributes of the One True Church, superior to all other social organizations.

In order to take the necessary step towards overcoming the current problems facing the Church, the Council began by redefining their concept of the modern world. The world up until then, regarded as an iniquitous place of perdition, would now become the stage and platform where God's divine self-communication and relationship with humanity would be revealed in its fullest sense.

God calls out to humanity and to the world. The Church would need to be in tune with the modern world to allow it to effectively carry out God's plan for salvation. The Church's relationship with the modern world thus became crucial in the definition, development and mission of the Church.

It is possible to distinguish between the juridical ecclesiology (prior to the Second Vatican Council) with that ecclesiology focused on fellowship that subsequently followed the Second Vatican Council. This ecclesiology gave relevance to the communal dimension and aspects of the Church.

The ecclesiology of the Church as the People of God emphasized the biblical image and concept of the People of God (1 Peter 1: 13-25). It revealed new relationships within the Church - relationships focusing on equality. It presented the historical nature of God as a pilgrim in the world. The importance of ministries was highlighted. The People of God are a ministerial people. Missionary work takes on the character of fostering human development besides evangelization. The post-conciliar ecclesiological model proposed that the Church follow the example of the first Christian communities. The Church sought to be a Church that serves, rather than one that is served.

This example of ecclesiology follows the example of the early Christian communities, where a strong spirit of community reigned supreme. This ecclesiology is characterized as proclaiming the Kingdom of God on earth through the work the Church does, especially among the poorest, where a strong sense of mutual

brotherhood is tangible. This springs forth among those who engage in the service of others as they keep alive the hope and promise of God's Kingdom.

Faith cannot neglect the practical dimension involved in favor of the needy. This enables a more in depth and accurate understanding of the shortfalls that affect humanity, allowing the Church to offer its charitable and merciful support which marked the first decades of Christianity.

This fosters an awareness of the need to contribute to social transformation. This transformation led to the much publicized engagement of the Church in Latin America with liberation theology, the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and so many other movements that were emerging.

All of this was realized by the theoretical framework, the methodological support and the Church's protection.

Therefore, the Church should characterize itself more by her service to others. With this attitude of service, all those that are baptized are called to be part of the common priesthood of Christ, which is a ministerial priesthood. Ministries can be both hierarchical and non-hierarchical. A large part of the Church consists of non-hierarchical ministries. However, this does not eliminate the need for hierarchical ministers.

### **5.3- The Church and Ministries**

The Church requires ministries such as the office and authority of the Pope, who is the legitimate successor of Peter, and a symbol of unity; the bishops, as successors of the apostles and symbols of unity in the particular Churches they preside over; priests and deacons for the daily lives of the faithful; and non-ordained ministries to address situations they encounter.

If the Church as a whole is constituted by the call of God through Christ in it, by the action of the Holy Spirit, God calls people to different ministries to serve His people. The Church is the mystery of God's action in the world. Its mission is service to the world and not to seek a world for its service.

The Second Vatican Council affirms that baptism enables every baptized person to be a participant of the holy priesthood. The Holy Spirit is at the essence of the Church. Through Baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit.

The Church's hierarchy does not restrain or tame the Holy Spirit acting in all the faithful. It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God in virtue, but also in the sharing and distributing of the gifts of the Spirit "to each one as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11).

The Holy Spirit distributes special graces among the faithful of all classes. These graces empower the faithful to be fit and ready to take upon themselves the various works of mercy and duties that contribute to the renewal and greater growth of the Church, according to these words: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12: 7).

However, the Council Fathers reserved the ecclesiastical authority the power to affirm or confirm the authenticity of the action of the Holy Spirit to those in ordained positions. In the balance between hierarchical and charismatic structures, the decisive word is with the hierarchy, which has the freedom and power to interpret the actions of the Holy Spirit "While diverse charisms or spiritual gifts may be distributed throughout the Church, judgment as to their genuinity and proper use belongs to those who are appointed leaders in the Church." (LG, 12).

The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood complement each other, though they differ in essence and not only in degree. All of our priestly and sacrificial activity is but a participation in the priestly and sacrificial action of Christ. This participation obligates all Christians to "bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them. The Council recognizes a distinction between "the common priesthood of the faithful" and "the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood" as two different ways of participating in "the one priesthood of Christ." The ordained priest has a special power to teach and rule "the priestly people." He acts *in persona Christi* to make the Eucharist present, "and offers it to God in the name of all the people." (LG, 10)

**The document makes it clear that every baptized person is called to holiness.** That criterion is based on charity. It is evident that the laity are called to have an increasingly active role in the Church. "Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God" (LG, 34).

The document provides important steps in the promotion of the laity, raising each ordinary mortal up to the level of active participants as the People of God.

But following the document, it is emphasized that every human being receives the vocation to be something in life. **In life we are called to be Christians.** Within the Christian vocation there are a variety of specific roles and ministries.

For each vocation, certain conditions are required. These conditions should be "accompanied by a supernatural inclination." The Church needs ministries to ensure that it lives and develops. The hierarchical structure of the Church facilitates these endeavors.

For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in His Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body. For those ministers, who are endowed with sacred power, serve their brethren, so that all who are of the People of God, and therefore enjoy a true Christian dignity, working toward a common goal freely and in an orderly way, may arrive at salvation (LG, 18).

When referring to the ministries, *Lumen Gentium* defines the bishops as "successors of the apostles, who received the power and authority from Jesus Himself to govern the Church." Episcopal ordination confers to the bishop "the office of teaching and of governing, which, however, by its very nature, can only be exercised in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college" (LG, 21). The bishop is the unifying force in his diocese, but needs the cooperation of other ministries.

The priests are assistants to the bishops. *Lumen Gentium* defines the ministerial priesthood as "those who are consecrated to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful and to celebrate divine worship" (LG, 28).

The other ordained ministry is the diaconate. It is a ministry that has accompanied the Church from the first communities (Acts 6: 1-6; 8: 5-13). According to *Lumen Gentium*, "At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service" (LG, 29).

In the final speech of the Council, Pope Paul VI expressed the new relationship between the Church and the world as being a relationship of service. The Church is the **"servant of humanity".**

Through its hierarchy, the Church recognizes the need of reaffirming its role in the defense of human life in a world that is increasingly challenging and complex. Therefore, the Church as the People of God, has attempted a moderate restructuring of the hierarchy within the Church to achieve this purpose.

The Second Vatican Council attempts to lay out and define the order of ecclesiastical power, within the structure of the Dogmatic Constitution of *Lumen Gentium*. Issues relating to the baptized and the People of God as a common brotherhood were given priority and dealt with first before the issues of the structures of the hierarchy within the Church. The notion of the Church as the People of God is the key to understanding the Council.

#### **5.4- The relationship between the local Church and the Universal Church**

As a consequence of the Second Vatican Council, the need arose for the Church to be understood on the basis of all different types of reality. The Council reaffirmed the ancient understanding of the Roman Catholic Church as a communion in which the universal church exists “in and from” the particular or local churches. A certain degree of liberty was deemed necessary for these local churches. However it was emphasized that the Church as the People of God is present in each of the local churches, not in isolation but linked to one another in the communion of the universal Church. Local churches exist in their proper fullness only in this communion, and the universal church exists in and from the local churches. The bishop is “the visible principle and foundation of unity” in a particular church. The bishops of the universal church form a college in union with the bishop of Rome. Each bishop represents the local church, but all of them together in union with the bishop of Rome, represent the universal church, as a visible sign of unity among all the faithful from all these churches united in Christ. (LG 23).

The Church is one and unique, and its essence is found in all local churches. The Church, as a universal Church, only exists as long as the faith is lived out in local churches.

This does not mean that the Church's universality is simply the sum of all the local churches, but is the expression of her universality in the inculturation within each church in particular.

The important thing is to realize that the Vatican no longer proposes a Church that descends over all local churches like a universal cloak that covers the amalgamation of all the local churches, but is a Church that depends on each local church in particular to live out their faith as the People of God in a universal communion of believers.

As with all spiritual experiences, John XXIII's experience was a seed of renewal or *Aggiornamento* of the Church, where the realities of the modern world necessitated that the Church manifest all her strength, as history has taught us over the past fifty years.

The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium* encourages an ecclesiology of community when referring to the People of God. The ministry of the Church is a mission of service, in continuity with the spirit of Jesus, who came to serve, not to be served.

#### **Reflection:**

- 1) Why is the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, considered a watershed and key document when studying and meditating on the ecclesiology?
- 2) Are we aware that each individual becomes a member of the People of God when they are baptized, and how this entails each member required to become an active participant in evangelization?
- 3) How do you understand the relationship between the local and universal Church? What is expected of each bishop to create and maintain this relationship?
- 4) How can we ensure that our participation in the Church remains active and fruitful, as *Lumen Gentium* encourages us to be?
- 5) Why has the role of the laity assumed greater importance in the ecclesiology of the Church as the People of God?
- 6) What do you understand about the ecclesiology of communion?
- 7) Chapter V of *Lumen Gentium*, deals with the universal call to holiness in the Church. Do you understand why Fr. Caffarel insisted on this call to holiness for all couples that are members of Teams of Our Lady? He wanted "nothing more, nothing less." Only couples who are called to be holy.

## TABLE 6 – THE IMAGERY USED TO SYMBOLIZE THE CHURCH

By affirming that the Church participates in the mystery of what is divine, and man is therefore unable to fully understand or grasp it, only demonstrates the limitations of our minds and knowledge, and not the impossibility of understanding the reality of the Church.

All the earthly elements of the Church are accessible to us, but their perfect relationship with the heavenly elements, as well as their exact salvific dynamism, is given to us by faith. Herein lies precisely its "mystery."

Of all the imagery used to describe the Church - a flock, herd, vineyard, field, building, bride, etc. - the ones we shall focus on are related to each Person of the Trinity: the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit.

### 6.1- Imagery of the Church

#### 6.1.1- People of God

As we have previously seen, the importance of this image is reflected in its use as the title of the second chapter of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. This Pauline imagery was removed from obscurity, as it became the principle notion used to highlight the role of the Church in the history of salvation that was already prefigured in the Old Testament in the form of Israel. "At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right. God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledge Him in truth and serve Him in holiness" (LG 9).

By using this image, the key idea of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church is to emphasize that the Church, as the People of God, is constituted of all the faithful who have been baptized. The role of the Church hierarchy as members of the People of God (deacons, priests and bishops), is to serve others, rather than being served.

The term "laity" (from "laos" meaning consecrated) originally signified all the members belonging to the people of God; only after the third century A.D did this name signify those individuals, as distinct from the clergy.

The Church does not consist of only the clergy; the Church is composed of all the baptized: The state of this people is one of dignity and freedom as the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in His temple. Its law is the new commandment, to love other just as Christ loved us (John 13:34). The people of God strive towards the Kingdom of God, begun on earth by God Himself who dwelled among us. This shall occur until the end of time, when Christ our life is revealed then (Colossians 3:4) and we as the creatures of God shall be freed from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty, as the children of God (Romans 8:21); (LG 9).

#### **6.1.2- The Mystical Body of Christ**

Up until the sixteenth century, theologians were hesitant to apply this imagery to the Church, since the only true Body of Christ was the Eucharist. However, it is clear that there is a complementary relationship between the two realities, when seen in light of how the communion of the Eucharistic Body of Christ fosters and builds an intimate communion among all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church. "The entire spiritual wealth of the Church is contained in the most holy Eucharist".

In 1943, Pope Pius XII, in the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* affirmed that the imagery of the Mystical Body of Christ, was an excellent description of the Church and this description was also welcomed by Vatican II, where a whole section in *Lumen Gentium* was dedicated to define it (LG, 7).

#### **6.1.3- Temple of the Holy Spirit**

This imagery was the one the least elaborated on by theology, in comparison to the other imagery previous ones that have been mentioned. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, 797 and 798) brings together the various aspects of the actions of the Holy Spirit as the "soul" of the Church. In fact, this is precisely what this imagery portrays: the presence of the Holy Spirit within the Church as the principle, unifying and sanctifying factor that brings together the People of God and the Mystical Body of Christ. Temple signifies the building in which God "dwells" and therefore where man meets Him and worships Him.

In light of these meanings and its significance, we find that the Church is the beloved "home" of the Holy Trinity. The Church has a fundamental role of offering worship and service to God, and is the place where human beings can relate to God.

## 6.2- Other images of the Church

Besides these three forms of representing the Church, there are other outward signs that are characteristics of the Church - the Sacraments and Communion that are pivotal to the Church's living tradition, society and institution.

### 6.2.1- The Church as a SACRAMENT

According to the Second Vatican Council, the Church is defined as a Sacrament (sacramentum: LG 1, 9, 59; SC, 5, 26; GS, 42; AG, 5; *universale sacramentum salutis*: LG, 48; GS, 45; AG 1). This is undoubtedly the most meaningful description of the Church, in view of the incorporation of this concept to the conciliar text.

This definition appears in the conciliar texts, in a mainly christological context that is clearly evident. Thus, in the Constitution on The Sacred Liturgy it is emphasized that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man, especially through his paschal mystery. For it was from the side of Christ that there came forth "the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church (SC, 5; LG, 3). In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, right at the beginning it is clear that: "*Lumen Gentium com sit Christus*" ("Christ is the light of the people" - LG, 1), and this is why the Church is in Christ "like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.

In *Lumen Gentium* (LG 9), it states that Jesus is the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and He established a Church so that it would become the visible sacrament of this saving unity. Further on (LG, 59), it is affirmed that the risen and glorified Christ, through his Spirit, transformed the Church into the universal sacrament of salvation, and continues to act in His Church through the means of the Holy Spirit.

These texts refer to Jesus Christ and affirm His supremacy over the Church, since there exists no other light except that which radiates from Christ over the world. And that is why the Second Vatican Council compares the Church to the mystery of the incarnate Word, and this analogy is based on the fact that the visible social structures of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, just as the Incarnate Word acted on the basis of His human nature (LG 8).

This definition appears within an **eschatological** context. In effect, the Kingdom of God is manifested in the words, deeds and above all, in the personal presence of Christ. This is why the Church, being "the Kingdom of Christ now present in mystery" (LG 3), is "the seed and beginning of this Kingdom on earth" (LG 5). Although the messianic people does not actually include all people, and at times may look like a small flock, it is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race (LG 9).

This eschatological aspect is clearly prevalent in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern Word - *Gaudium et spes* (cf. GS, 42-45). One of the most emblematic statements of the Second Vatican Council is: "the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows in the way of penance and its renewal".<sup>5</sup>

This dual perspective - **christological and eschatological**-, reveals how the concept of the Church as a sacrament, is not derived from the theology of the sacraments, as developed in the twelfth century A.D and declared at the Council of Trent, together with the definition of the seven sacraments. The source of this concept analogically used here, must be sought in patristic theology, for which the Latin term *sacramentum* translated the biblical concept of *mysterium*. According to the Second Vatican Council itself, this is not something unknowable and obscure, but like the Bible, is equivalent to being a bearer of the divine message of salvation, revealed in a visible way.

The Council, employing the concept of sacrament, intended to express the dual aspects of the Church, both human and divine, visible and invisible that form "one complex reality" which coalesces from a divine and a human element (LG 8).

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<sup>5</sup>Eschatology is a part of theology concerned with the final events of history, or the ultimate destiny of humanity. This concept is commonly referred to as the "end of the world" or "end time". The word arises from the Greek ἔσχατος eschatos meaning "last" and -logy meaning "the study of". It is interesting that the Catechism of the Catholic Church gives the Church an eschatological character. The Church is portrayed as part of this eschatological process that leads us to the Father's house in the kingdom: "the visible church symbolizes the paternal house that the people of God are making their way towards on the path of their salvation, where the Father will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4). Therefore, the Church is also home to all of God's children, with arms wide open and welcoming everyone" (No. 1186). We therefore see that "eschatology" is not a theological doctrine about the four last things - death, judgement, Heaven and Hell – but a reflection on Christian hope. Thus, the basic content of all eschatology is based on hope. We all live in hope that our current situations will improve, and that the structures of oppression affecting our lives will no longer exist. Good will always prevail over evil. Eschatology encourages us to stand firm in our faith. In spite of all the evil that we see in the world, is an invitation to always stand firm in the hope that the historic plan of God's salvation will triumph over everything and everyone.

### 6.2.2- The Church as a COMMUNITY

Gradually, it became clear that the ecclesiological vision of Vatican II included a renewed concept of what **community** truly entailed, although the Church had never been defined in this way (LG, 4, 8, 13-15, 18, 21 24 .; DV, 10; GS, 32; UR 2-4,14 .; 17-19, 22).

This concept basically signifies being in communion with God, through actively participating in the Word of God and the Sacraments. This kind of fellowship leads to a sense of community that exists among Catholics, and specifically occurs during the *communio* of all the churches in the world, where the Real Presence is celebrated in the Eucharist.

We now focus on the technical notion of *communio*, a fundamental reality and concept held in high honour in the ancient Church, especially in the churches of the East (cf. LG, 2). This played an important role in the decree in respect to these churches (OE 13) and the decree on ecumenism (UR, 14). The Council also attributed special value to this *communio* that exists between the ancient churches and communities with those of the present day (AG, 19, 37).

But the prominent stricture of *communio* was defined in "*Locus theologicus*", in the ecclesiastical formula of *Lumen Gentium* 23 that states: "It is the bishops who sanctify and govern that part of the Lord's flock entrusted to them, as they make the universal Church (*ad imaginem Ecclesiae universalis formati*) visible in their own locality and bring an efficacious assistance to the building up of the whole body of Christ (*in quibus et ex quibus*)".

The Council returned to the ecclesiology of *communio* from the first millennium, and emphasized how it can coexist with the juridical ecclesiology more typical of the second millennium, that the term hierarchical *communio* refers to (LG, 22). This binds the episcopal mystery to the universal Church, specifically with the Pope and the episcopal college.

The continuity of sacred tradition requires for a creative synthesis to occur between the two millennia, together with their corresponding ecclesiologies. The ecclesiology of communion forms the basis for the structures within the Church, and to foster the correct relationship between unity and pluriformity within the Church.

### **6.2.3- The Church as a LIVING TRADITION**

In the ecclesiology of recent times, the definition of the Church in terms of this concept has not been too common. It nevertheless is a key aspect when taking into account the perspective, as stipulated in *Dei Verbum*, where Christ commanded the apostolic church to proclaim the Good News. Therefore Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and to impart to them heavenly gifts (DV 7).

And so all the traditions, transmitted through apostolic preaching, comprise all those requirements that guide the faithful towards living a holy life, growing in the faith as God's people. This way, the Church, in her doctrines, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to all generation all that she is, and all that she believes. (DV, 8).

The notion of sacred traditions, as associated with the Church, involves the dynamism of her doctrines, of her worship and the life of the Church as an expression of faith in Christ.

The very nature of the living tradition of the Church consists precisely in its connaturally with divine revelation, realized through words and gestures that are intrinsically linked (DV, 2).

Living tradition and Scripture have much in common, especially as a means of ensuring the continuity and identity of the apostolic Church, for later generations to come until the end of time. This not only refers to the level of knowledge, but also in the experience of the apostles as they carried out their evangelization. In addition to doctrine, tradition also transmits the life and nature of the Church which is worship. "Tradition is the expression of the Holy Spirit that animates the community of the faithful; it exists throughout all time, exists for every moment and continuously takes shape. This vital, spiritual strength that we have inherited from our parents and that is perpetuated in the Church, is known as the living tradition".

### **6.2.4- The Church and Society**

The description of the Church is referred to in a specific way several times, especially in *Lumen Gentium*: "a visible and social structure" (LG, 14), "a visible entity",

"a society structured with hierarchical organs" (LG, 14; 20; 23) "earthly Church," "established and structured in this world as a society."

We refer to a quote by St Robert Bellarmine, which was most appropriate in countering the charges laid by the Protestant reformers. There is only one Church, not two; this Church being "a single visible society of believers, united by the same faith, the same sacraments and the submission to the same hierarchy" (De Ecclesia, III, 2).

The Second Vatican Council united all these concepts and elements together to form a vision of the Mystical Body of Christ, as can be seen in the paragraphs of *Lumen Gentium* 8, and the section about the sacraments. *Lumen Gentium* adds that in order for individuals to be fully incorporated into the Church, by doing so just in "body" is not enough. The faithful also need to give "all their heart and soul" to be active participants and members of the Church (LG, 14b). St. Augustine also took on a similar view that truly reveals what "society" means in light of the Church, and this in turn calls into question any ecclesiological apologetics that merely focus on the outward and structural aspects of the Church.

#### **6.2.5- The Church as an INSTITUTION**

Linked to the concept of Church-society is the concept of the Church as an institution, a concept often discussed in light of modern day sociology. By institution, this refers to a set of forms and functions that are typical of a society or organization that has certain permanence, even if they have evolved over history. (e.g. the subdivision of functions and roles within the inner workings of the institution, traditions, rites and permanent symbols, moral norms etc.).

The more complex a society is, in virtue of its history, scope, purpose, etc., the greater the importance of these different forms and functions that encourage order and unity within the institution.

There are three relevant aspects that justify the importance and value of the Church as an institution.

- **First aspect:** on the one hand, the institution of the Church represents a sign of the presence of the Spirit working within it. The Holy Spirit continually helps the Church to identify itself with the original message of the Gospel, and therefore find her true identity as a community of believers in Jesus Christ. For

this purpose, the Holy Spirit works through the Church's institutional structures.

- **Second aspect:** The second aspect that justifies the Church as an institution, is the fact that it is a sign of the integrative power of the Spirit. Indeed, this aspect of integration emphasizes how the Spirit inhabits each believer, and also the various other churches, to promote the original unity of the Universal Church. This is effectively achieved through the means of the institutionalized structures of the Church. This integration is not uniform but diverse as a result of the various charisms and ministries of each believer, which enables for an "open system" to exist towards the Spirit. The ultimate reason why the unity of the Church is vital is because of the multiple, God-given gifts that the Church communicates to the faithful.
- **The third and final aspect** shows us how the institution of the Church is a sign of the liberating power of the Spirit. Indeed, it is liberating because the Church exempts her believers of the need and duty to seek their salvation on their own. Thus, the "extensive reach" of the religious tradition represented by the institutionalized Church, relativises the gift of faith in the manner through which it has been adopted in the specific communities of the faithful. Therefore, each believer will acknowledge their own charisma due to the Church's presence throughout the whole world.

### 6.3- The Church as a hierarchically structured society

The word hierarchy comes from the Greek: "**hierôn**" (sacred), and "**arche**", rule. Etymologically, it therefore means "sacred rule" or "holy government."

In fact, Church hierarchy does not imply a caste of privileged people, as there are no superior or inferior classes in the Church. By being a sacrament, the Church's Supreme Pastor is Jesus Christ who bestows the clergy with the abilities that are necessary to enable them to wisely govern the People of God.

What distinguishes those individuals, placed in high positions in the Church, from the others is not a greater degree of grace and holiness, but a greater degree of responsibility given to them to guide and conduct the people they serve. As a result, the authority of those ministers consecrated in the Church is seen as a service

(ministry) that should contribute to the good of the whole People of God (Romans 13: 1-4; 1 Peter 5: 2-4).

The hierarchical structure of the Church is, nowadays, more complex than how it was when the Church was first established; this is due to the fact that all the people, as they develop, require new structures and organization to meet their needs. It should be clearly understood that the hierarchical structure of the Church is not the result of a democratic delegation, but is the continuation of the apostolic structure given by Jesus Christ. We know this by resorting to Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

Being a member of the Church through incorporation to Christ, is a fundamental aspect of the Church. The faithful form a part of the Mystical Body and are members of the People of God. Only then can we speak of the hierarchy as being a God-given authority called by Christ for the service of His people.

The Second Vatican Council dedicated Chapter III of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* to the Church hierarchy: "For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in His Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body. For those ministers, who are endowed with sacred power, serve their brethren, so that all who are of the People of God, and therefore enjoy a true Christian dignity, working toward a common goal freely and in an orderly way, may arrive at salvation" (LG, 18a).

This Sacred Council teaches and declares that "Jesus Christ, the eternal Shepherd, established His holy Church, having sent forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father (John 20:21). He willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world. And in order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed St Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion" (LG, 18b).

Thus the bishops preserve the succession of the first apostolic seed, since the beginning of the Church.

The hierarchy is thus a sacred power, a power that comes directly from Christ. It is not a community delegation. The community cannot increase or decrease it in size, as happens in democratic civil societies. Moreover, this hierarchical constitution is in no way opposed to the common responsibility of all the baptized. Everyone is

responsible in the Church, although this responsibility varies according to the function that each person has within it.

The supreme responsibility in the Church is exercised by the Pope and the Episcopal College, presided over by the Supreme Pontiff. This supreme responsibility was originally granted to Peter, chosen by Christ as the rock upon which He would build His Church, giving Peter the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16:18), and constituting the shepherd of the whole flock (John 21: 15). But on the other hand, Christ Himself gave this power to the entire apostolic college, attached to its Head (Matthew 18:18; 28:16-20). This apostolic college cannot function on its own without the Pope, but does so united to the Pope, entrusted with strengthening the faith of the people of God (Luke 22:32).

The authority of the Church hierarchy is an authority of service to others, like Christ who "came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45; John 13:20; Matthew 23: 8-11).

This authority is therefore a type that is not governed by the style of authority found in this world. It is an authority that carries out the mission of Jesus Christ and the permanent action of the Spirit. It is an authority that is exercised within the fraternity and for the service of others. It is an authority marked by the transience and pilgrim nature of the Church and should never be exercised for the benefit of those entrusted with power. This authority does not seek human glory, nor gives in to the whims of the people, but faithfully transmits the Word of God, encourages the sanctification of those people it cares for, as well as correcting, exhorting and governing the people of God.

As citizens of the People of God, the Christian faithful are children of God and have a very special dignity; therein lies the "principle of essential equality" of all members of the Church, which ensures the cooperation and responsibility of all. Each member has a function, role and position in the Church, with a view to build up the Body of Christ.

However, this principle of essential equality is immediately influenced by the "principle of functional diversity"; also by divine institution in the existing typology found in the Church: **the consecrated ministers or clergy, who are those individuals who have received the Sacrament of Orders; and the laity.**

As can be seen, the Sacrament of Holy Orders is a crucial element in differentiating between the **common priesthood**, that all Christians are called to be a part of (1 Peter 2:9) from the **ministerial priesthood**, referring to those individuals who serve the people with the authority and dignity entrusted to them.

The common priesthood is a participation in the priesthood of Christ that is transmitted through baptism, strengthened in Confirmation, with its centre and root in the Eucharist.

Therefore, this priesthood is exercised "by receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy life and active charity."

Besides this, it enables us to offer spiritual sacrifices by the grace of God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5), and contribute to the saving mission of the Church.

At the same time, through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, some of the members belonging to the People of God are received into the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood on the basis of this common priesthood. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is a special participation in the priesthood of Christ, who bestows upon them the sacred power of Holy Orders. This gives the priest the authority to offer the prayers of consecration during the Eucharistic celebration, to forgive sins and officially exercise the priestly office in the name of Jesus Christ and for the faithful.

We can conclude that the common and ministerial priesthood "are essentially different and not only in degree or scope", because those who receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders are able to act in the name and with the authority of Jesus Christ, that is, "in the person of Christ" (*"in persona Christi"*), i.e., in full sacramental identification with Him.

Sacred authority is given to the ordained ministers of the Church. This sacred authority, transmitted through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, is conferred in three levels based on the degree of office the ordained minister will occupy: **episcopate (bishops), presbyterate (priests) and the diaconate (deacons)**.

The People of God constitute a hierarchically structured society that is principally in service of others - "the ministers who have the sacred authority at the service of their brethren, so that all who belong to the People of God can achieve salvation." This is why the hierarchy is called the "ecclesial ministry", and its members, "ministers", i.e. servants.

This service provided by the hierarchy of the Church consists of **feeding, teaching, sanctifying and governing** the members of God's people. Each minister engages in his ecclesial ministry according to the degree of the Order they were ordained with.

The Church's hierarchical structure was established and organized on the earth by the will of Jesus Christ. Among other passages of Scripture that are already well known, we emphasize the Jesus bestowed the fullness of His authority to the College of Apostles (Matthew 18:18; 28:18-20; John 20:21). Furthermore, Jesus gave Peter the ultimate authority in the Church (Mt 16:18-19) and Peter became the shepherd of the whole flock (John 21: 15-17). Peter was the head of the Twelve Apostles, and his primacy was at the service taking care of all his brothers (Luke 22:32).

The Apostles were aware that they were participants of the full authority of Christ, as per His expressed will. This is particularly important as it reveals how they would have been concerned about transmitting this authority to their successors. The Apostles ensured that this happened by naming their successors from within their ordained community. So they not only had several assistants to help them in their ministry, but also to guarantee that the mission that had been entrusted to them would perpetually continue after their deaths. The apostles passed the baton on to their successors and trusted them to carry out the task that had begun with them. With the help of the Holy Spirit, these successors would be able to guide and spiritually feed the flock under their care, which was the Church of God.

#### **6.4- The mission of the laity**

The Second Vatican Council understood and defined the mission of the laity as: to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification

of the world. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. See (LG, 30-38)

As can be seen, the Second Vatican Council described the laity in positive terms: - those faithful, who by baptism, are made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God. They did not receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders nor form part of any religious order but participate in the salvific mission of the Church itself in search of the Kingdom of God. They assist each other to live holier lives, even in their daily occupations. In this way the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ.

In this context, we can conclude that:

- **The laity are called by God to live in the World:** Divine providence destined the laity to be a part of the secular world. So to be secular is not something generic, vague or fortuitous, but they are placed in the world for a purpose. Their daily life is not just a physical existence because by the grace of God, the power of the Gospel shines forth in their daily social and family life. They conduct themselves in a way that bears testimony to Christ's promise of the Kingdom, thus sanctifying themselves and others in the tasks they perform.
- **The laity must sanctify the world from within:** the pursuit of personal holiness is the obligation of every faithful Christian from the time of their baptism (be it a layperson, priest or religious). The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God. Therefore, the mission of the laity can be summed up as making present the Kingdom of God amidst an increasingly "profane" and "secular" world.
- **The laity face everyday issues:** this is the context that the laity has to work with, as catalysts to sanctify the world from within. Their field of evangelization includes the complex world of politics and society; however the laity also encounter situations that promote a spirit of evangelization such as love, family, education, their professional lives and suffering. The more laypeople get involved as active participants in evangelization, the

more their actions will serve as testimony in the service of proclaiming the reality of the Kingdom of God and its transcendent dimension.

- Finally, **by carrying out everyday duties**, the laity can conduct themselves with all the appropriate virtues related to social relations such as honesty, the spirit of justice, sincerity, good intentions and charity and the strength of will and of the soul. An authentic Christian life cannot exist without the application of such virtues.

#### 6.5- The Church as the Communion of Saints

The expression "communion of saints" ("*koinonía ton hagión* ") is used in two senses: the first sense being the communion and solidarity among all the faithful. The second sense is communion with the sacred elements of the Church, such as the treasury of the merits of Christ. These are applied to the faithful through the sacraments, especially Baptism and the Eucharist.

The second sense is preferable and leads to the first: the faithful participate in the spiritual benefits that Christ has conquered for them, and this consequently enables them to get a sense of mutual solidarity among one another.

The spiritual benefits that the faithful participate in are:

- **Faith:** a treasure given to the Church and transmitted to the faithful;
- **The sacraments and the grace that flows from them:** the fruits (grace) of the sacraments belong to all the faithful and the communion of saints is realized through their participation in the Church, especially through the Eucharist.
- **The charisms:** special graces granted by God for the service and the building of the community.

The communion with the sacred elements of the Church constitute a communion that incorporates the holy people of God – Christians who are pilgrims in this world making their way towards Heaven; all those who have departed or are glorified in Heaven and all those waiting in anticipation of Heaven - in the state of Purgatory. Until the Parousia or Second Coming of Christ, humanity will continue as pilgrims on this earth, and many of those who have departed will be purified to finally become glorified and clearly contemplate the Triune God, as He is.

By observing an iceberg, we can draw an analogy with the Catholic Church. Whoever only looks at the visible part of the Church cannot ascertain its real dimension, its divine mystery and also its human reality.

In the Creed, we confess that in the Church there is an intimate connection between all its members, wherever they are: on earth, in purgatory or in heaven.

This communion can be described as a kind of inner current of grace and divine life which circulates among all the members of the Church.

This communion (grace), that originates from God the Father, springs forth from the merits of Christ and is continuously channelled by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this truth of the faith is a recapitulation or summary of the Church's mystery: "What is the Church if not the assembly of all the saints? The communion of saints is the Church".

#### **6.5.1- The Church Triumphant (CCC, 1023-1029)**

It is the Church in Heaven, consisting of all those who died in the state of God's grace and are perfectly purified. Here, the communion of souls with God and each other is perfect and eternal. This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. However, we know that the faithful of the Church Triumphant see God as He really is (1 Corinthians 2:9; 13: 12; 1 John 3:2). Although words fail to aptly describe this state, it can be said that the Beatific Vision is the glory of heaven - "Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness".

More than any triumph of man, the Church triumphant represents God's victory defined by infinite love, perfected holiness and eternal bliss. Among the faithful, the Blessed Virgin Mary particularly shines, with her unique and pure beauty.

#### **6.5.2- The Church Penitent (CCC, 1030-1032)**

"All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven." (CCC, 1030)

"The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned." (CCC, 1031)

It is certain that the Church is one of hope, since all the faithful are assured of blessedness and eternal communion with the Father once they have completed their full purification.

#### **6.5.3- The Church Militant or Pilgrim Church on earth**

Formed by those who still walk the earth, and who received the Sacrament of Baptism and are making their way towards God's Kingdom. It is also called "militant" by virtue of the efforts that the Church itself should ascribe to, in order to remain faithful to Christ.

It also refers to the perseverance of every Christian in the fight to overcome sin, and the difficulties that arise during the walk. They are given the help of God's grace and sanctification through the means of the Church.

One should always remember that the struggle for holiness is not only personal, but primarily ecclesial: in fellowship with other believers through testimony, word and prayer, thus fulfilling the missionary mandate that Christ gave His Apostles.

#### **6.6- The Church exists to be missionary**

Evangelizing is the mission of the Church, its identity and its own reason for being. The Lord Jesus gave his disciples - the early Church, its mandate to: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. I am with you every day, until the end of time" (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Church exists to proclaim and teach; to be the witness of God's grace; to reconcile humanity with the Merciful Father and perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, as the memorial of His death and glorious Resurrection. The origin of the Church's mission is seen in the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father into the world.

At Pentecost, the mission was begun, and it remains up to the present day. After twenty centuries, there are still many people who have never heard of Jesus Christ nor His message. Even in our cities, there are people living in environments and cultures who do not know about the Good News.

Through the action of the Church, God's Word is spreading in the world. The Book of Acts tells us the story about the first communities of the early Church and the

actions of the Apostles, especially Peter and Paul. In Acts, we read that the Word grew and multiplied among those that heard the Word, welcomed it and became disciples of Jesus - in other words Christians.

Jesus is the missionary of the Father. The mission that Jesus entrusted to His disciples is the same mission the Father entrusted to His Son. Jesus is the permanent source where the missionary derives his zeal and prophetic wisdom from to proclaim the Gospel of life. The encounter with the living Christ, missionary of the Father, as a personal experience in the community of faith, nourishes the missionary and permanently revives his ardour.

That is what happened to the Samaritan woman (cf. John 4: 1-26) and the disciples (John 1: 19-51). The experiences of encountering Christ radically changes one's life, as happened with Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10) and Paul (Acts 9: 1-22). It is a unique and very beautiful experience that needs to be communicated and shared.

In the Eucharist, we have an encounter with Christ in a very special way. If our mission is not nourished by the Eucharist, it loses its identity. It becomes nothing more than hollow proselytism or advertising, devoid of its significance. The Eucharist is also the profound objective of the mission: to encourage everyone to become disciples of Jesus, through a personal encounter with Him and living together with Him.

The mission is, for the Church, the cause of causes, the first and most important service that it provides to humanity. No member of the Church is exempt from this mission. Parents, families, young people, teachers and workers - all are missionaries.

Above all the dioceses and parishes should develop a plan of action and prepare their missionary disciples carefully. To reach everyone, it is necessary to create communities and groups dedicated to the defence of human dignity, the preservation of life and the salvation of all.

#### **Reflection:**

- 1) Of the many images used to define or represent the Church, the most elaborate are related to each Person of the Trinity: the People of God, Mystical Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. How do you

understand the importance of these images for the Christian life in today's world?

- 2) What is the role and responsibility of the Church hierarchy?
- 3) As laypeople, are we aware of our role in building the Kingdom of God?
- 4) How do you understand the Church as a 'Communion of Saints' if we are all sinners?

## TABLE 7 - MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

It is in Mary where the Church and the Kingdom encounter their ultimate fulfillment: "The Church has already reached, through the Blessed Virgin, perfection that makes her spotless and without wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27)." Mary is the Mother of the Church because she is the Mother of Christ who is the Head of the Church, which is His Mystical Body.

During the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI solemnly declared that "Mary is Mother of the Church, that is, Mother of the entire Christian people, both faithful and pastors" (November 21, 1964). On June 30, 1968, in the Credo of the People of God, he reaffirmed this truth even more strongly: "We believe that the Blessed Mother of God, the New Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in Heaven her maternal role with regard to Christ's members, cooperating with the birth and growth of divine life in the souls of the redeemed".

The presence of the Virgin Mary is so strong and inseparable from the mystery of Christ and the Church that Paul VI, in his speech of November 21, 1964 said: "Knowledge of the true Catholic doctrine regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary will always be the key to obtain an exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and the Church".

Understanding Mary "according to Catholic doctrine" is to understand Jesus and the Church, because Mary was a key part and indispensable in God's plan for the redemption of mankind; and so "when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Galatians 4:4).

Or as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (also called the **Nicene Creed**) declares, when referring to Jesus: "Who, for the sake of us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary."

Since the early centuries of Christianity, Christians have recognized and called Mary the Mother of God (**Theotokos**). Since the end of the second century, the Christians of Egypt and North Africa (where more than 400 Christian communities had been established) already invoked Mary as Mother of God, in a prayer that is perhaps the oldest one that the Church is aware of: "Under Your protection we take refuge,

Holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin".

To accomplish the extraordinary mission as Mother of God, Mary was enriched by God with all the graces necessary, and in a unique and very special way, she was blessed with the grace of being immaculate and sinless. Mary knew neither original nor personal sin from the moment she was conceived in her mother St Anne's womb.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, already recognized by the Church from the earliest centuries of Christianity, was solemnly proclaimed by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854 by the Papal Bull "*Ineffabilis Deus*": We declare, decree and define that, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, her Son and the Redeemer of the human race, the Blessed Virgin Mary was preserved free from all stain of original sin". During the apparitions to St. Catherine Labouré in Paris in 1830, Mary taught Catherine this well-known prayer that was engraved in the Miraculous Medal: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee".

In 1858, four years after the solemn declaration of Pope Pius IX, Mary herself revealed this name to St. Bernadette in Lourdes: "I am the Immaculate Conception".

The Second Vatican Council called her: Mother of the Son of God, beloved daughter of the Father and the Temple of the Holy Spirit (LG, 53).

And the Second Vatican Council also stated: "Because of this gift of sublime grace, she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth". Echoing the words of St. Augustine, *Lumen Gentium* states: "She is truly the mother of the members of Christ, because through her love, she ensured that the faithful would be born into the Church, who are members of that Head. For this reason, she is hailed as a pre-eminent and unique member of the Church, and as its model and an excellent example of faith and charity. The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honours her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother (LG53).

And the Second Vatican Council recognizes that "Mary, occupies a place in the Church which is the highest after Christ and yet very close to us" (LG, 54).

Mary is that Woman who crosses through the whole history of salvation, from Genesis to Revelation. She is the Woman who crushed the head of the Serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the Woman, and between your offspring and hers. She shall crush your head, and you will bruise her heel "(Gen 3:15).

When Jesus calls His mother 'Woman', it is an indication that Mary is God's most beloved daughter – as if she were the new Eve. And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4 – the Wedding at Cana). "Woman, behold your son" (John 19:26 - Jesus and His mother at the foot of the cross).

Mary is the Virgin that the prophets announced would conceive and bear a son, whose name would be Emmanuel (cf. Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:23; Matthew 1: 22-23). For it was from the first virgin, Eve, that sin entered into the history of mankind, and with it death (Romans 6:2). However, through the new Virgin, salvation and eternal life entered the world.

The Son of God took a human nature from Mary, so that, in the mysteries of His flesh, He would free man from sin (LG, 55). Christ is the great and eternal Priest of the New Covenant because He is the Word made flesh.

That would be the indispensable role of Mary. As said the Church Fathers said: "Mary, by being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race (LG, 56). God the Father of mercies wished for the Incarnation to be preceded by a willing acceptance on the part of the predestined Mother. Therefore, just as a woman had contributed to the death of mankind, another woman would contribute to its life and salvation.

The Church Fathers said:

- ""The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith" (St. Irenaeus).

And St. Jerome said:

- "Death entered through Eve; life through Mary".

In the plan of Redemption, Mary's union with her son Jesus took place from the moment of His Incarnation until His death on Calvary. This union was also evident in Mary's visit to Elizabeth (Luke 1: 41-45), at Jesus' birth in the stable at Bethlehem, in the presentation of Jesus at the Temple in front of Simeon (Luke 2: 34-35), and the boy Jesus at the Temple (Luke 2: 41-51).

In the public life of Jesus' ministry, Mary anticipated the time when His miracles would start taking place (the Wedding at Cana - John 2:11), proving herself to be the mother of mercy and our intercessor.

During Jesus' preaching, Mary gathered His words and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19 and 51). She advanced on the path of faith and faithfully persevered her union with her Son right up to the Cross where, by God's will, she was standing (John 19:25), offering her son to God. With Jesus, she suffered deeply. "Jesus suffered the Passion, Mary compassion". The sword predicted by Simeon had pierced her soul entirely.

The Second Vatican Council expressed that: Mary suffered deeply with the Only Begotten Son and associated herself to His sacrifice by her maternal heart, lovingly consenting to the immolation of the victim that she had generated; finally she heard these words from Jesus Christ Himself, as He was dying on the cross, entrusting her to the disciple He loved: "Woman, behold your son" (John 19: 26-27) (LG, 62).

After the Lord's Ascension into Heaven, we see Mary with His disciples, awaiting the coming of the One the Father promised, imploring the arrival of the Holy Spirit with her prayers: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" (Acts 1:14).

And, finally at the end of her earthly life, she remained free and preserved from all the stains of sin, and was assumed into heavenly glory in soul and body, and exalted by the Lord as Queen of the Universe and mother of the Son, who is the Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16) and the conqueror of sin and death (LG 59).

Mary does not substitute Christ's unique Mediation before the Father. St Paul clearly states:

- For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself as a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Timothy 2:56).
- Mary's maternal role occurred by God's will and choice, and this was carried out through the merits of Christ and His unique mediation. She depended entirely on it in all its effectiveness; that is, without the redeeming sacrifice of Christ, Mary's role as Mediatrix, would not be possible.

➤ Therefore, Mary, far from impeding the contact of God's children with the Son, actually facilitates this encounter. Mary will never replace the unique and indispensable mediation of Jesus Christ between God the Father and men. She cooperates with Jesus for the sake of God's children.

The Church assures us that in Heaven, Mary continues her mission as Intercessor, to obtain for us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity and love, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and worries, until they are led into the happiness of their true homeland (LG, 62).

Without diminishing the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ, as the one Mediator, Mary is invoked by her children with the titles of Advocate, Mediatrix, Helper of Christians, Refuge, Consoler, Gate of Heaven, and many other titles. This is why the Church offers, and has always paid a special devotion to Mary, the Mother of God.

It must be emphasized that Mary is not worshipped (**latraria**), which is reserved solely to God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), but venerated or honoured (**hyperdulia**).

The Second Vatican Council deliberately emphasized this Catholic doctrine and at the same time urged all the children of the Church to foster a healthy and appropriate devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, and the practices and exercises of piety, recommended by the Magisterium of the Church over the course of centuries (LG, 67).

And the Second Vatican Council warns: Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues (LG, 67).

The Virgin Mary has always given clear signs and evidence of her maternal love for the Church, especially during those times when it was threatened.

For example, in 1571, the whole Christian civilization in Europe was at risk due to the threatening advance of the Muslims, Pope St. Pius V implored the protection of Mary in favour of the Christian people, asking the Virgin to remove the threat and dangers of Islam once and for all.

On October 7, 1571, in the great and decisive battle of Lepanto in Greece, the troops of the Christian princes definitely defeated the Ottoman Turks. To thank the Mother of the Church for this outstanding victory, the Pope included the invocation "*Advocata Christianorum* (Helper of Christians) pray for us", in the Litany of Loreto and declared October 7 as the Feast Day of the most holy Rosary, in thanksgiving and homage of the protection she gave to the Church.

Mary is related to the Trinitarian mystery on the basis of her **christological**, **pneumatological** (Holy Spirit) and **ecclesiological** aspects.

Right at the beginning of chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium* entitled "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and the Church", it states:

"The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the Angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honoured as being truly the Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer. Redeemed by reason of the merits of her Son and united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God, by which account she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace, she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth. At the same time, however, because she belongs to the offspring of Adam she is one with all those who are to be saved. She is "the mother of the members of Christ . . . having cooperated by her love and charity, ensuring that the faithful might be born into the Church, who are members of that Head. Wherefore she is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its model and excellent example of faith and charity. The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honours her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother" (LG 53).

Pope Paul VI, who had given Mary the official title of "Mother of the Church", developed this theme in his 'Apostolic Exhortation for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion To The Blessed Virgin Mary – *Marialis cultus*', one of the most beautiful documents of his pontificate. The Pope presented Mary as a model of the Church, as presented in the Marian Feasts of the Liturgical calendar. He requested further guidelines from Scripture, liturgy, ecumenism and anthropology to facilitate in the creation of new devotions to Mary, in order to emphasize and accentuate the bond which unites the Church to her, who is the Mother of Christ and our Mother in the Communion of Saints (MC, 29).

The Pope described Mary as a model for the Church who listened and welcomed the Word of God with faith. This is the specific mission of the Church: to listen, accept, proclaim, venerate and distribute the Word of God as the Bread of Life (MC 17). Mary is a role model as an intercessor and in her life of prayer. Mary presents to the Father the needs of her children, praises the Lord unceasingly and intercedes for the salvation of the world (MC 18). For by her preaching and by baptism she brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of God (MC 19)

Pope VI went on to say in *Marialis Cultus*: "This union of the Mother and the Son in the work of redemption reached its climax on Calvary, where Christ offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God, and where Mary stood by the cross suffering grievously with her only-begotten Son. There she united herself with a maternal heart to His sacrifice, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this victim which she herself had brought forth, and was also offering to the eternal Father. To perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross down the centuries, the divine Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of His death and resurrection, and entrusted it to His spouse the Church" (MC 20).

In fact, Mary is an essential part of the Church. We can say that the Church is in Mary and Mary is in the Church.

This aspect was highlighted by St John Paul II in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, which bears the title: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church:

"And so, in the redemptive economy of grace, brought about through the action of the Holy Spirit, there is a unique correspondence between the moment of the Incarnation of the Word and the moment of the birth of the Church. The person who links these two moments is Mary: Mary at Nazareth and Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem" (RM, 24).

After accentuating Mary as being at the centre of the Church's life, the Pope concludes:

"The Virgin Mary is constantly present in the journey of faith of the People of God" (RM 35). Thus, throughout her life, the Church maintains with the Mother of God a link which embraces, in the saving mystery, the past, the present and the future, and venerates her as the spiritual mother of humanity and the advocate of grace" (RM, 47).

Mary not only unites active Christians, but also the common people and even those who are separated from the Church. For many of these individuals, Mary is often the only link to the Church's life.

Mary teaches us to live in faith for all the situations of life, with courage and constant perseverance. Her presence in the Church encourages Christians to listen to the Word of God every day. Mary's example teaches the Church about the value of silence. Mary silence is, above all, wisdom and acceptance of the Word.

By the way she lived her life in Nazareth, Mary teaches the Church about the value of a humble and hidden life. The Church tries to imitate her in its daily journey. The Church lives by faith, and learns that "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!" (Luke 1: 45).

Mary is a role model of charity for the Church. Because of Mary's charity, it has contributed towards harmony and brotherly love within the Church. And in his apostolic mission, the Church looks to Mary as taught by Vatican Council II:

"Hence the Church, in her apostolic work justly looks to her, who, conceived of the Holy Spirit, brought forth Christ, who was born of the Virgin so that through the Church He may be born, and may grow in the hearts of the faithful. The Virgin throughout her own life lived an example of that maternal love that cooperates in the apostolic mission of the Church for the regeneration of men"(LG, 65).

### **Reflection:**

- 1)** Reflecting on the role of Mary in the Church's life, what lessons can we learn from her to apply in our everyday life?
- 2)** Mary is an essential part of the Church. We can say that the Church is in Mary, and Mary is in the Church. Do you also see Mary this way?
- 3)** Mary is related to the Trinitarian mystery by her christological, pneumatological and ecclesiological aspects. Do you understand all of the different aspects related to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother?
- 4)** "Knowledge of the true Catholic doctrine regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary will always be the key to obtain an exact understanding of the mystery of Christ and the Church " Do you strive to understand the true doctrines of the Catholic Church regarding Mary?

#### TABLE 8 - THE CHURCH TODAY: THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF POPE FRANCIS

The novelty of Vatican II was the Church's openness and attempts at engaging with the problems and challenges facing the modern world. Humanity today is experiencing a new phase in its history, where profound and rapid changes within societies are occurring throughout the world.

Triggered by the intelligence and creative activity of man, these changes affect human judgment and individual and collective desires. It influences our ways of thinking and acting - both in relation to how we interact with people. We can truly speak of a social and cultural transformation taking place in the modern world, which is also reflected in religious life (GS 2-10).

As often occurs with radical changes, this transformation brings with it some difficulties. Even though humanity intensely strives to extend its influence on the world in pursuit of power, it is not always able to put this power effectively at its service. In the attempt to seek and penetrate deeper within himself, mankind seems to become more and more uncertain about the laws, morals and norms of social life and the meaning of their existence.

Never in the history of Mankind have we had so much access to such an abundance of wealth, opportunities and economic power at our disposal; and yet, a huge part of the earth's inhabitants are plagued by hunger and poverty, and many are still illiterate.

Never before has Mankind experienced such a keen sense of freedom like today, although behind of this are new forms of social and psychological bondage that have emerged.

While the world intensely experiences an unparalleled sense of unity and mutual interdependence among its inhabitants, it will be severely torn by opposing forces that arise from political, social, economic, racial and ideological conflicts.

An increase in the exchange of ideas has clearly taken place; but the very words used to express these different ideologies take on different meaning to different people based on social and economic contexts, and there are consequences to this.

Finally, by being committed to search for a more perfect temporal order, mankind has often neglected the proportional spiritual progress that should accompany such developments in society.

Marked by these circumstances that are so complex, many of our contemporaries are unable to truly discern the enduring values that define humanity, and fail to harmonize these values with the new ones that they encounter. Agitated between hope and despair, they feel overwhelmed by these current developments. However, at the same time, these changes challenge mankind, forcing it to provide an answer.

### **8.1- Evolution and the field of technology and science**

The current disruption occurring within the human spirit, and the changes in their living conditions are linked to a broader transformation, where the predominance is given to the mathematical and natural sciences in the formation of this human spirit.

This scientific mentality shapes cultures and specific ways of thinking in a manner that is very different from what has happened in the past. Human endeavor has progressed to such an extent that it has forever transformed the earth, and now even extends into outer space.

Human intelligence even extends its influence over time: looking back into the past, man can shape his future with foresight and planning as a result of historical lessons learnt.

The progress of biological, psychological and social sciences not only helps man to understand himself better, but also allows him to have a direct influence on the lives of societies. At the same time, humanity has become increasingly concerned about predicting and controlling their population growth.

Everything is happening so fast in this moment of history that we are living in, and we can hardly keep pace with the changes.

The destiny of the human community has now becomes one common destiny, and is no longer divided between independent stories.

The concept of humanity has shifted and taken on a very dynamic aspect that is constantly evolving. This had led to a whole range of immense problems that Mankind now faces, which demand a new analysis and syntheses.

## **8.2- Changes in the social order**

In light of the developments in the modern world, this had led to an even greater amount of change within traditional and local communities consisting of patriarchal families, clans, tribes, villages and other different groups, and the social relations between them.

Society has progressively transformed itself into one that is focused on industrial and economic activity, and this has led to extravagant wealth and opulence in many countries, radically transforming the ideas and social conditions of life that had existed for centuries.

The world is becoming increasingly urbanized, and this pursuit of urban life has greatly increased the size of the cities around the world and their influence on rural populations.

The new and more perfect means of social communication allow for a rapid and broad dissemination of knowledge to occur. This relates to specific events, and different ways of thinking and feeling that are all now just a click away, and this has given rise to many repercussions. Many people have changed their ways of life as a result of the various reasons and circumstances that have led to emigration.

The relations occurring between different types and communities of people have unceasingly multiplied, while at the same time, this socialization has introduced new connections among people that favour truly personal relationships ("personalization").

It is true that such developments are more apparent in those developed nations that have benefitted the most from the advantages of economic and technical progress. But these changes have also been observed among people in the developing world, who also seek to achieve the benefits of industrialization and urbanization in their own countries. These people, especially those who are attached to older traditions, feel the need to exercise their personal freedom that is ever increasing.

## **8.3- Psychological, moral and religious transformations**

The transformation in the mentality and structures of modern day society have often put accepted values into question, especially among young people. They become

increasingly impatient, rebelling against the establishment the more aware they are of their importance and role in social life that they seek to be a part of. This had led to increasing difficulties that parents and teachers face when carrying out their mission among the youth.

In turn, institutions, laws and certain ways of thinking that have been inherited from the past appear outdated and not always well adapted to the current situation; and this influences the behavior and actions of many.

Finally, these new circumstances have affected the religious life. On the one hand, a more rational and critical approach among people have purified the magical aspects of certain superstitious acts and beliefs, and has fostered an adherence to a personal and active faith. This way, many people have encountered a more lively sense of God.

But, on the other hand, a vast number of individuals have distanced themselves from the practice of religion. Contrary to what happened in the past, denying God or religion is no longer seen as an individualistic and unusual fact. In the modern age, the denial of all things religious is often presented as a requirement that allows for scientific progress to occur, and this has become a new kind of humanism.

In many regions in the world, this humanism has been affirmed through philosophical means, and has widely influenced literature, art, the interpretation of the human sciences and history and even civil laws; causing a sense of disorientation in many people.

#### **8.4- Personal, social and familial imbalances**

Such rapid evolution in society has often been handled haphazardly and, above all, the acute awareness of the inequalities affecting the world have generated and increased the contradictions and imbalances found within societies.

At the level of the individual, an imbalance has resulted between modern practical knowledge and theoretical thinking. Man's inability to master all of his knowledge into a satisfactory syntheses is evident. The imbalance between the concerns of practical efficiency and the demands of moral conscience, has also emerged. It has affected the collective conditions of man's existence and the demands of personal thought and even of contemplation.

We also see an imbalance between the specialization of human activity and a global vision of reality.

In the context of family life, tensions have stemmed from the pressures of demographic, economic and social conditions, as well as the difficulties that arise between the different generations, as the result of the new type of social relations that exist between men and women.

Huge discrepancies exist between the races and various other social groups; between rich nations and those poor nations that are less prosperous; and even between international institutions that have the ambition to propagate a certain type of ideology, and selfishly impose itself on other nations despite having been originally established to promote peace among people.

This has resulted in mutual mistrust and animosity, and conflicts and misfortunes, of which man was both the cause and victim.

### **8.5- The universal aspirations of Mankind**

In the meantime, a growing conviction is emerging that mankind cannot continue its relentless pursue of increasing its dominion over all created things, especially at the expense of others. There is a need for the establishment of a political, social and economic order to better serve and help individuals and groups affirm and develop their dignity.

There is a growing insistence for an equal distribution of wealth to occur, especially wealth that was accrued through unfair means. There is an acute awareness of the unequal distribution of wealth among nations and societies. Nations in the developing world, and those that are newly independent, desire to share the benefits of human civilization, not only in the political field but also in the economic and social spheres, and these nations aspire to freely play their role in world affairs. Yet in the meantime, the gap between the rich and poor nations increases more every day, especially among those poor nations that are economically dependent on other rich nations that have benefitted from more rapid progress and growth.

Those people oppressed by hunger appeal to the rich. Women claim equality in areas where they are still discriminated and have not reached parity with men. The workers and farmers do not only want to earn a living to make ends meet, but also

develop their abilities and qualities through the work they do, by actively participating in the economic, social, political and cultural organization of society.

For the first time in human history, almost all people have a common conviction that cultural assets should be distributed and freely shared among everyone.

However, a deeper and universal aspiration is concealed, and this underlies all of these aspirations. All people dream of a free life lived to the full, worthy of the dignity of man. They dream of benefitting from all those things that the world could provide them with such abundance, were it to be managed properly. Nations strive to reach a certain universal community among themselves.

The present world is therefore presented as being simultaneously powerful and weak; capable of the best and the worst; of choosing the path of freedom or a path of slavery and decline; brotherhood and hatred. And man becomes aware that he is responsible in directing the forces he has created in the world, and that these forces can both crush and serve him. So he looks within and questions himself.

#### **8.6- Jesus Christ, the response and solution to all human problems**

In fact, the imbalances affecting the world today are connected with that fundamental imbalance which is rooted in the human heart. This is because many elements are engaged in a battle within man himself. On the one hand, man experiences life as the limited creature that he is, yet on the other, he feels boundless in his desires, and is summoned to a higher and more spiritual life.

Tugged in all directions by the many attractions and temptations that exist in the world, humanity is constantly called to choose some things while renouncing others. Moreover, as a result of their weak and sinful nature, human beings often choose to do things that they don't want to, neglecting what they should do. Many individuals suffer from internal conflicts that lead to the discords in society.

Many people who lead a life steeped in materialism and wealth, do not have a perception of this dramatic situation that occurs. Many are oppressed by misery and a sense of emptiness despite being wealthy. Many people expect to find peace in the fleeting diversions that the world offers them. Many others are convinced that the full

liberation of mankind will be achieved through the human empire established here on earth, which will satisfy every desire of their hearts.

There are many people who are desperate to make sense of the purpose of life, to try and understand the perceived emptiness of human existence.

However, given the current evolution of the world today, more and more individuals pose these fundamental questions upon themselves: **What is man? What is the meaning of suffering, evil and death, that still exist despite the enormous progress that mankind has achieved? What is the use of human endeavor and victory if it comes with a big price? How can man contribute to society, and what can he receive from it? What lies beyond this earthly life?**

The Church, on its part, believes that Jesus Christ, who died and rose from the dead for the salvation of all mankind, offers everyone His Spirit as the light and the strength to attain their ultimate vocation in life which is the Kingdom of God. There is no other name under Heaven that will save them.

The Church also believes that the key purpose at the centre of all human history is found in Jesus the Lord and Master. The Church also maintains that beneath all the changes that occur in life, there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, Who is the same yesterday and today, and forever.

Hence under the light of Christ, the image of the unseen God, the firstborn of every creature, the Second Vatican Council wished to call out to all humanity, and shed light on the mystery of man and to cooperate in finding the solution to the main problems of our time.

### **8.7- The Church is rooted in missionary work**

Jesus's mission is prolonged through the missionary work of those individual He sent out into the world. This mission was to preach the Gospel and heal the sick (Luke 9:1). The Apostles fulfilled this mission, not through their own merits but through the power of the Holy Spirit who was given to them (John 14: 26).

**And where should we carry out our missionary work?** In all the situations throughout the world that pose a challenge to the Church's catholicity. From this perspective, the Church is aware of the need for dialogue with the world and with

different cultures. This aspect of the Church's mission needs to be seen in light of the context of the Second Vatican Council.

Several documents were promulgated that presented the Church as being missionary in essence, and emphasized the necessity of this mission in the life of the Church. The Second Vatican Council had the 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World - *Gaudium Et Spes*' that opened up a relevant space for dialogue for the Church's presence in modern society.

*Ad gentes* is the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, and it defines the pilgrim Church as missionary in nature (AG 2).

The Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, introduces a new concept of evangelization in the Church - the relationship between evangelization and the promotion of human liberation; the role of the local churches, and the union between the Holy Spirit and evangelization. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed. This is because the Gospel message brought with evangelization involves a lifetime of service to the Lord.

Pope John Paul II was also involved with the mission of the Church when he wrote the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, as a revival of *Ad Gentes*, that gave an even greater incentive to promote missionary work within the Church.

### **8.8- The Pope Francis and the Church today**

With regards to the Church today, it is important to consider the thoughts of Pope Francis on his understanding of the Church.

The ecclesiology of Francis Pope is explored by Osmar Cavaca in the book "Uma eclesiologia chamada Francisco: Estudo da eclesiologia do Papa Francisco a partir da *Evangelii Gaudium* (An ecclesiology called Francis: The Ecclesiology Study of Pope Francis based on *Evangelii Gaudium*.)

According to Cavaca, we need to understand the ecclesiology of Francis Pope based on the choice of name Cardinal Bergoglio gave himself when he was elected pope, because this name signifies the mission of the Church today!

In the Bible, the renaming of an individual carried with it the theological significance of an eminently missionary nature. Throughout the history of the world, a

name has always revealed the existential desire of the individual, or the parents of the individual, whenever a name was inscribed to them.

Throughout the centuries of Catholic tradition, religious groups opted for a name change that would be a renunciation of their former selves in relation of their desire to take on a new role or participation of life and mission.

In the history of the papacy, in a special way, the choice of name the Pope gives himself has always been revealing, not only in the sense of honoring or remembering someone's virtues, but as a sign that represent the characterizing elements of the new pope's mission, according to the dictates of what is in his heart.

Thus, the name Francis has a profound significance in the life and mission of Pope Bergoglio.

Pope Francis explained his choice of name, by referring to an episode where he was engaged in a brief conversation with Cardinal Hummes, immediately after he was elected pope. Cardinal Hummes told Cardinal Bergoglio "Do not forget the poor!" Taking his friend's advice, Cardinal Bergoglio thought of St Francis of Assisi and the wars taking place in the world. St Francis was a man of peace. And so, the name Francis of Assisi arose from the pope's heart. Pope Francis said: "I desire a poor Church to serve the poor!"

Bergoglio knew how to combine two great evangelical intuitions with a single name. The name 'Francis' signifies Francis of Assisi's simplicity, tenderness and love of peace and of the poor. Pope Francis' name also alludes to the missionary ardor of Francis Xavier, and this aspect has especially characterized the ministry of the new Pope.

The ministerial actions of "this pope who has come from the far ends of the world" has shown that more than a just being a name, 'Francis' signifies a way of life; or, as Leonardo Boff put it: "Francis is not a name. (...) It represents the Church's mission to be poor, simple, evangelical and devoid of all power (...). It is an ecological Church that calls all people with the sweet words 'brothers and sisters'".

Cavaca recalls the words that the Lord spoke to the young Francis of Assisi through the Crucifix of St Damian. The painted image of Christ crucified moved its lips and spoke. Calling him by name it said: "Francis, go, repair my house, which, as you

see, is falling completely to ruin". Thus, a small, simple word can define a whole mission: to rebuild the Church of Christ according to the Gospel.

### **8.9- The Church that Pope Francis desires**

It is quite evident that Pope Francis' thoughts on the Church of Christ take us back to the ecclesiological spirit of Vatican II. But Bergoglio, as a Latin American bishop, had a good grasp and understanding of how the Church had developed on the South American continent. He explained this at the CELAM Conference in Aparecida (São Paulo), which was a conference where he was actively involved in.

We therefore understand that the ecclesiology of Pope Francis can only be understood by taking these two ecclesiological themes into consideration that emanated from the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM Conference at Aparecida, in São Paulo.

Pope Francis, in his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, deals with the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world. In this work, the Pope extensively refers to joy, especially the joy that arises from the encounter with the Lord Jesus through the Church's missionary transformation. He acknowledges the social dimension of evangelization and emphasizes that evangelizers with spirit and fervor are crucial and necessary. He reaffirms the dimensions of participation and collegiality as proposed by the Second Vatican Council, pointing to the need of decentralization in the Church.

The Pope addressed the following issues in his Exhortation (EG, 17). "Here I have chosen to present some guidelines which can encourage and guide the whole Church in a new phase of evangelization, one marked by enthusiasm and vitality. I have decided, among other themes, to discuss at length the following questions:

- a) The reform of the Church in her missionary outreach;
- b) The temptations faced by pastoral workers;
- c) The Church, understood as the entire People of God which evangelizes;
- d) The homily and its preparation;
- e) The inclusion of the poor in society;
- f) Peace and dialogue within society;
- g) The spiritual motivation for mission".

Although we limit ourselves to the ecclesiological aspects presented in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (the numbers in brackets refer to it), let us note that this post-Vatican II communication on the New Evangelization in the Church is presented by Pope Francis to emphasize that what he am trying to express here has a programmatic significance and important consequences (EG, 24). In fact, right at the beginning of the Exhortation, Pope Francis says "in this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come" (EG, 1)

While acknowledging beforehand that we cannot address all the points of his programme, we will deal with the points that are most relevant.

#### **8.9.1- A missionary Church that is decentralized**

Every single aspect and sense of Jesus Christ's life was to proclaim and realize the Kingdom of God in humanity. Without this central objective, His identity would become unintelligible. The salvific plan of God, already initiated in the Old Testament, reached its fullness in Jesus Christ, who through His actions and words, revealed the salvific action of the Father and His love and unconditional mercy. This Kingdom implies imitating the behavior of Jesus who "passed through this world doing good" (Acts 10:38), but this also connotes a social dimension, since the individual can only be happy in a society that recognizes and ensures fraternal love and justice.

This task of proclaiming and spreading the Good News is the goal of evangelization that Jesus entrusted to His followers and their successors. Therefore, this constitutes a community of believers that form the Church.

In other words, the entire meaning, purpose and role of the Church is at the service of implementing the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church is not the end, but a means and an instrument of God - the sign and sacrament of salvation. The Church should visualize how this Kingdom is not a utopia, but a reality within the history of mankind, as seen by the testimony of the life of Christians.

Hence the statement of Pope Francis: "Missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity" (GS, 15). In other words, the salvific aspects and purpose of the Church is priority, ensuring that the doctrinal, legal and institutional structures are at the service of achieving this ultimate purpose.

This was the conviction of Jesus Christ of Nazareth Himself, in His criticism of the religion of His time. This was also the concern of the participants of the Second Vatican Council. This is also the underlying reason for the statements and decisions that have been made by our current pope. Words such as 'participation, decentralization, dialogue, the spirit of service, human sensitivity, proximity to the poor and marginalized' spring forth as a result of the Church's central focus on the Kingdom of God.

Pope Francis considers the structures and activity of the Church as "a channel providing more to the evangelization of today's world, than to self-preservation" (EG, 27). The Pope acknowledges that "all of us are asked to obey His call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel (EG, 20)". Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice (EG, 24). A renewal of preaching can offer believers, as well as the lukewarm and the non-practising, new joy in the faith and fruitfulness in the work of evangelization and in line with the 'Document of Aparecida' (EG, 25). As it is not easy to break with the inertia of the well-known and familiar status quo, the Pope invites "bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities" (EG, 33).

However, certain questions remain: Are we really convinced of this truth - all of us, both clergy and laity? Are there sufficient conditions and structures in place in the Church for all Catholics to actively assume their missionary responsibility? Do we not give the impression of caring more about doctrinal and canonical statement (which in themselves are necessary) than the proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ?

Does the impression of the Church as a static, ecclesial institution not conceal its true essence of being a living and missionary community? Has there been a reduction in the pastoral zeal of the clergy as a result of the impact of current society? (EG, 80).

#### **8.9.2- A Church that is collegially formed.**

During the Second Vatican Council, it was evident that the bishops were concerned about reaching an equilibrium with regards to the notion of primacy, as defined in Vatican I but that remained incomplete by the forced interruption of this Council. It is evident to see how extensively this topic has been dealt with.

Even without getting into details and further discussions, we can affirm that the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* initiated an important revaluation of the episcopal body. The bishops receive the authority, from the Jesus Christ Himself, to teach, sanctify and governing the flock. But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff. The pope's power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful, remains whole and intact. In virtue of his office, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church (LG, 22). Some of these churches, notably the ancient patriarchal churches, are connected down to our own time by a close bond of charity in their sacramental life and in their mutual respect for their rights and duties. This variety of local churches with one common aspiration, is splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church. In like manner the Episcopal bodies of today are in a position to render a manifold and fruitful assistance, so that this collegiate feeling may be put into practical application (LG, 23).

Bishops duly established in local churches all parts of the world, are in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome in a bond of unity or, in the early church of the first millennium, as an "ecclesiology of communion" meaning that the patriarchal structure maintained the diversity and unity of the Church. The patriarch, in a synodal system, that is, together with the other bishops, resolved the issues relating to liturgical or canon law.

Pope Francis pleads for a reform of the structures of the Church, which should be "more missionary" (EG, 27), because "there are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church's "fidelity to her own calling", any new structure will soon prove ineffective" (EG, 26). And Pope Francis affirms: "Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach" (EG 32). In relation to Episcopal Conferences, his position is clear: "The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position "to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit" (LG, 23)

He adds elsewhere: "It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory" (EG 16).

### **8.9.3 The inculturation of the Church**

Closely related to the local Church is the question of the inculturation of the faith. God's saving plan only reaches its goal when it is freely accepted by the human being through faith. We can only embrace divine revelation or the Word of God within us by responding to it through faith. This faith is the fruit of God's work in us.

Therefore, the development and application of faith is an integral part of revelation; without it, the salvific events of Jesus would be merely historical facts, the Word of God would only be the human word and the person of Jesus Christ would be unknown to us, as it was for the Pharisees of the time.

However, any person who professes their faith, lives within social contexts that provides them with language, values, behavior patterns, the social life and capacity to develop as a human being. Therefore, to capture and receive the Word of God, this would entail that this person does so in light of their own culture. This is the adaptation of Christian liturgy to a non-Christian cultural background. This is how we all encounter the Word of God or the Gospel – in a manner where the Gospel message has become inculturated.

Since faith is the foundation of any ecclesial community, as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us, we encounter the Church as a community of believers who inevitably exist within the context of the culture they grew up with, and this determines how the faithful understand and live the Christian message. Therefore, the local church always implies an inculturated Church.

So in order for the Church to be recognized as a symbol of salvation, she needs to accept and understand the language, mentality, gestures, customs, knowledge and arts that form part of the culture of those individuals who are being addressed, as St John Paul II so often insisted.

Therefore, culture is not a static reality, but is actually a social process and phenomenon that is affected by the challenges it faces from within itself, and beyond its reach.

In the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, the Second Vatican council emphasizes "This congregation of the faithful, endowed with the riches

of its own nation's culture, should be deeply rooted in the people. Let associations and groups be organized by means of which the lay apostolate will be able to permeate the whole of society with the spirit of the Gospel" (AG 15; 22).

Pope Francis includes the principles of cultural anthropology in his Exhortation by saying: "Grace supposes culture, and God's gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it" (EG, 115). Therefore, "the history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, remaining completely true to itself, with unwavering fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root" (EG, 116).

As affirming what St John Paul II said regarding this topic, Pope Francis states: "Every culture offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived out through actions. In this way, the Church takes up the values of different cultures and truly becomes catholic (EG, 116). This is always a slow process and we can be overly fearful. But if we allow doubts and fears to dampen our courage, instead of being creative we will remain comfortable and make no progress whatsoever (EG 129).

#### **8.9.4- A Church of missionary disciples**

All members of the Church constitute the people of God; therefore all are charged to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to society.

We need to remedy the impression of the Church as consisting of an active clerical Church and a passive laity. Every member of the Church "share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ" (LG 32).

Therefore, every single member constituting the Church (LG, 30), "Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, may every opportunity be given them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church" (LG, 33).

In the Decree on the Apostolate of the laity, *apostolicam actuositatem*, solemnly promulgated by Pope Paul VI, he states: "The laity derive the

right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself" (AA, 3).

Pastoral action in the Church has been increasing in the years following the Second Vatican Council. This has enabled for the renewal of ministries, thus opening up new fields of activity: (catechesis, human development, charity work, pastoral coordination, different forms of pastoral assistance and liturgical and theological education).

At the General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in 2007 in Aparecida (São Paulo), Cardinal Bergoglio (Pope Francis) presided over the committee responsible for drafting the final document of the Conference. This document is known as 'Documento de Aparecida (DAp)' states: "the aim is to foster the formation of a laity able to act as true ecclesial agent and competent interlocutor between Church and society, and society and Church (Dap 497a). The local bishops shall be willing to open spaces for the laity to participate, and to entrust them with ministries and responsibilities in a Church where all live out their Christian commitment responsibly (DAp, 211). In order to carry out their mission, lay people need a solid doctrinal, pastoral, and spiritual formation (DAp, 212). The laity must play an active and creative role in the preparation and execution of pastoral projects for the good of the community (DAp, 213). Lay people must participate in discernment, decision making, planning and execution (DAp, 371).

Naturally the same document proposes for "a greater open-mindedness on the part of the Church hierarchy, in understanding and accepting the "being" and the "doing" of lay people in the church" (DAp, 213).

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* clearly points out that "All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization" (EG, 120). Pope Francis' stated: "My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an "extra" or just another moment in my life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self" (EG, 273). This conforms with

the declarations of the Second Vatican Council, and was emphasized in the Episcopal Conference at Aparecida in 2007,

Although mentioning the necessity for better formation for the laity (EG, 121), the Pope insists on an evangelization achieved through personal contact (EG, 127), as evangelization involves a person communicating how his or her encounter with the love of God in Christ Jesus has led them onto the path of salvation. Pope Francis states “If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully. The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him because of the woman’s testimony. So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, immediately proclaimed Jesus” (EG, 120). Pope Francis highlights some difficulties that the laity face in the Church: “At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making” (EG, 102).

#### **8.9.5- A Church that bears witness of her faith in Jesus Christ**

Without neglecting the many examples of so many Christians who lived out their faith in an authentic and generous way, as modern day Catholics, we cannot ignore the fact that we inherited a Church as a reality where the doctrinal elements dominated her existential elements. Juridical aspects dominated the sacraments; institutionalism prevailed over mysticism; traditionalism impeded urgent reforms that were necessary for the Church to be in tune with the modern world; the fear of novelty prevented new, innovative forms of evangelization from developing; a focus on ecclesiastical power clouded what true ecclesiastical service entails.

Ecclesial reforms imply a return to the core aspects of the Christian faith, which defined the way the early church communities lived out their faith. This expression of faith has been obscured by doctrines, rules, regulations and traditions which were important and necessary in safeguarding the authority and unity of the one true Church. However by occupying a central place in the life of the Church, the role of

certain elements of the Church may have been overemphasized, and that was not originally intended.

This fact has not gone unnoticed by Pope Francis, as we shall see. Firstly, he emphasizes the fundamental importance of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Indeed, if the Church consists of a community of believers in Jesus Christ, then it is entirely based upon the action of the Holy Spirit. For we can only confess Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Saviour, by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). The participation of all the faithful in the same Holy Spirit, creates a sacred communion (2 Corinthians 13:13). The Spirit that was present and active when Jesus lived in this world is still active in the lives of Christians today. (LG, 7).

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis states that "a spirit-filled evangelization is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for he is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel. Before offering some spiritual motivations and suggestions, I once more invoke the Holy Spirit. I implore him to come and renew the Church, to stir and impel her to go forth boldly to evangelize all peoples. (EG, 261).

He adds: "Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit. There is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills" (EG 280).

In a modern world dominated by an explosion of thoughts and opinions expressed through the means of various social media, where there is often skepticism in relation to certain ideologies and worldviews, the personal experiences of each individual becomes very important to help support our personal convictions.

This reality also applies to the faith of Christians. God came looking for us and gave us His only begotten Son, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we would attain the fullness of life by being faithful Christians.

Therefore, faith is a salvific event in one's life and that is a personal experience. This experience reaches out to the heart of each individual, and gives meaning to human existence by consoling, strengthening and enlightening those who trust in the Lord. This is the experience of the love, goodness and mercy of God as a fundamental reality in our lives.

The Pope emphasizes the importance of a personal experience with Jesus Christ, and the love of God that He reveals to us.

In his words: "A true missionary (...) knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him and works with him" (EG, 266).

When starting his public ministry, Jesus proclaimed: "The time has come. The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the Good News" (Mark 1:15). This type of conversion is closely linked to the Kingdom of God, as it entails accept in faith the ultimate salvation of God through the Person of Jesus Christ, at the core of the Christians' existence.

This conversion should manifest itself in the life of the Christian a fundamental attitude that accompanies that person forever. This also applies to the Church when referring to its essence and institutions.

This requirement is clearly demonstrated in the 'Documento de Aparecida'. Personal conversion engenders the ability to make everything subject to establishing the Kingdom of life (DAp, 366). This demands a greater open-mindedness on the part of their shepherds in understanding and accepting the "being" and the "doing" of lay people in the Church (DAp, 213). All ecclesial structures must be imbued with this firm missionary decision. No community should excuse itself from entering decidedly with all its might into the ongoing processes of missionary renewal and from giving up outdated structures that are no longer helpful for handing on the faith. (DAp, 365).

Pope Francis demonstrates that he is aware of the challenges facing ecclesial renewal and reforms, and urges all to a "pastoral and missionary conversion" (EG, 25). In *Evangelii Gaudium* he states: "Spiritual worldliness, hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church. This consists in seeking, not the Lord's glory, but human glory and personal well-being (EG, 93). A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyses and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying (EG, 94). Those who have fallen into this worldliness look on from above and afar, they reject the prophecy of their brothers and sisters, they discredit those who raise questions, they constantly point out the mistakes of others and they are obsessed by appearances. God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings!" (EG, 94).

### 8.9.6- A Church for the poor

We learnt about the efforts of group of bishops at the Second Vatican Council to promote greater simplicity and austerity in the Church. They were well aware that many symbols of power and wealth were aggregating to the ecclesial institution over the centuries. *Lumen Gentium* states: “just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution, so the Church is called to follow the same route that it might communicate the fruits of salvation to men” (LG 8).

In addressing the social dimension of evangelization in Chapter IV of the Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis states: To evangelize is to make the Kingdom of God present in our world (EG, 176). Our redemption has a social dimension because God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men (EG, 178); To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity for all (EG, 180). The New Testament (...) expresses the absolute priority of going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God’s completely free gift (EG, 179). An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it (EG, 183). Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor (EG, 187). The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few (EG, 188). A new self-centred paganism (...) is emerging in society (EG, 195)”.

It is no wonder that Pope Francis has been at the receiving end of strong criticism from certain sectors of society. Pope Francis affirms that: “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor” (EG, 198). In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis gives the example of the Church in Latin America that moved from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry. For Pope Francis, “Only a real and sincere sense of closeness to the poor (...) will be the greatest and most effective presentation of the Good news of the Kingdom (EG, 199). Since this

Exhortation is addressed to members of the Catholic Church, I want to say, with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care" (EG, 200).

In conclusion, the mission of the Church is not realized unless grounded in the person of Jesus, in our encounter with Him and from Him. He is our basis as we go out into the world proclaiming the Good News.

For this to occur effectively, **missionary theology** is based on the following plans of action:

- a) **Christological plan of action:** Understanding the theology of the cross and the paschal mystery;
- b) **Anthropological plan of action:** Understanding the human history, norms and cultural aspects of societies is a constant and necessary activity for effective inculturation to take place. This takes into account the truly human values of diverse cultures, in the evangelization of the culture itself once they learn about the Good News.
- c) **Dialogue as a plan of action:** When dealing with non-Christian religions and non-believers, *Lumen Gentium* states: "Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life" (LG 16).
- d) **Diaconal plan of action:** An awareness of the appropriate actions best suited to address the poor, oppressed and marginalized. In this preferential plan of action, the true spirit of the Gospel shines.

#### **Reflection:**

- 1- What are the main features of the ecclesiology of Vatican II?
- 2- What are the main features of the ecclesiology of Pope John Paul II?
- 3- What are the main features of the ecclesiology of Pope Benedict XVI?
- 4- What are the main features of the ecclesiology of Pope Francis?

## ANNEXURE:

### "I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH"

#### HOW THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ADDRESSES THIS THEME

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Saviour. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life. (CCC 1)

To ensure that this call should resound throughout the world, Christ sent forth the Apostles he had chosen, commissioning them to proclaim the gospel: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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. I am with you always, until the end of time" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Strengthened by this mission, the apostles "went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it (Mark 16:20) (CCC, 2).

Quite early on, the name **catechesis** was given to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples, to help men believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ (CCC, 4)

Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes the teaching of Christian doctrine that is imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life. (CCC, 5)

Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church's life. Not only her geographical extension and numerical increase, but even more her inner growth and correspondence with God's plan depend essentially on catechesis. (CCC, 7)

In view of this, it shouldn't come as a surprise to us that the dynamism that followed the Second Vatican Council (which Pope Paul VI considered as a great catechism of modern times), the Catechism of the Church has attracted the attention of many people.

The current Catechism of the Church is inspired the Sacred Tradition. The Catechism of the Church is defined as four "pillars":

- The profession of baptismal faith (the Symbol);
- The sacraments of faith;
- The life of faith (the Commandments);
- The Lord's Prayer (the "Our Father").

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we understand the Church's role in **God's plan of salvation.**

We now present the main points that we feel are important in helping us advance on our path of evangelization. These points encompass themes and issues already covered in previous chapters of this study on the Ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, with the corresponding numbers as found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church

### **1. What does the term “Church” signify?**

It designates the People that God calls and gathers together, from every part of the world, to form the assembly of those who, through faith and Baptism, become the children of God, members of the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. (CCC, 751-752; 777; 804)

### **2. Are there names and imagery in the Bible that are associated with the Church?**

In Scripture, we find a host of interrelated images and figures through which Revelation speaks of the inexhaustible mystery of the Church. The images taken from the Old Testament are variations on a profound theme: the People of God. In the New Testament, all these images find a new centre because Christ has become the Head of this people, which is His Body. Images are used from the pastoral life (flock, sheep), agriculture (field, olive grove, vineyard), domestic (dwelling place, stone, temple) and family (wife, mother, family) (CCC, 753-757).

### **3. What are the origins and foundation of the Church?**

The Church is both the means and the goal of God's plan: prefigured in creation, prepared for in the history of Israel and the Old Covenant, founded by the words and actions of Jesus Christ, fulfilled by his redeeming cross and his Resurrection, the Church has been manifested as the mystery of salvation by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She will be perfected in the glory of heaven as the assembly of all the redeemed of the earth (CCC, 758-766; 778).

### **4. What is the mission of the Church?**

The Church's receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is on earth the seed and the beginning of that salvific Kingdom (CCC 767-769).

### **5. In what sense is the Church a Mystery?**

The Church is in history, but at the same time she transcends it. It is only "with the eyes of faith that one can see her in her visible reality and at the same time in her spiritual reality as bearer of divine life (CCC, 770-773; 779).

### **6. The Church is the Universal Sacrament of salvation. What does this mean?**

It means that it is a sign and instrument of the reconciliation and communion of all humanity with God, and of the unity of all mankind. (CCC, 774-776; 780)

### **7. Why is the Church referred to as the People of God?**

The Church is referred to as the people of God because Jesus Christ, the Son, is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit. The whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for the mission and service that flow from them. (CCC, 781; 802-804)

### **8. What are the characteristics of the People of God?**

We become members of the People of God through our faith in Christ and the sacrament of Baptism. This People has for its Head Jesus the Christ (the anointed, the Messiah). Because the same anointing, the Holy Spirit, flows from the head into the

body, they are referred to as "the messianic people". They follow the law that is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us. Their mission is to be salt of the earth and light of the world. (CCC, 782)

**9. In what sense do the people of God participates in the three functions of Christ: Priest, Prophet and King?**

On entering the People of God through faith and Baptism, one receives a share in this people's unique, priestly vocation. The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. The holy People of God also share in Christ's prophetic office, above all in the supernatural sense of faith that belongs to the whole People, laity and clergy. Finally, the People of God shares in the royal office of Christ. He exercises his kingship by drawing all men to himself through his death and Resurrection. Christ, King and Lord of the universe, made himself the servant of all, for he came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. For the Christian, "to reign is to serve him," particularly when serving "the poor and the suffering, in whom the Church recognizes the image of her poor and suffering founder" (CCC, 783-786).

**10. How is the Church the Body of Christ?**

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ rose from the dead and unites Himself intimately with His faithful. Those who believe in Christ, especially in the Eucharist, are united among themselves in charity, forming one body, the Church, whose unity is realized in the diversity of its members and their roles. (CCC, 787-791; 805-806)

**11. Who is the Head of this Body?**

Christ is the "Head of the body, which is the Church" (Col 1:18). The Church lives from Him, in Him and for Him. Christ and the Church make up the "whole body of Christ" (Saint Augustine). "The Head and the body are like one mystical person". (Saint Thomas Aquinas) (CCC, 792-795; 807)

## **12. Why the Church is called the Bride of Christ?**

Because the Lord has identified Himself as the "Bridegroom" (Mark 2:19), who loved the Church, uniting it to Himself with an everlasting Covenant. He gave Himself for her, to purify her with his blood and "make it holy (Ephesians 5:26) and the fertile mother of all the children of God." If the term "body" represents the unity of the "head" with its "members", the term "wife" emphasizes the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. (CCC, 796; 808)

## **13. Why is the Church called the temple of the Holy Spirit?**

Because the Holy Spirit resides in the body which is the Church. Moreover, the Spirit in love with the Word of God, the sacraments, the virtues and the charisms. St Augustine states: "What our spirit, i.e., our soul, is for our members, the Holy Spirit is for Christ's members, for the Body of Christ which is the Church" (CCC, 797-798; 809-810).

## **14. What are charisms?**

Charisms are special gifts of the Spirit granted to each individual for the good of others, for the needs of the world and in particular for the building up of the Church, as discerned by the Magisterium. (CCC, 799-801)

## **15. Why is the Church One?**

The Church is one because she has as her source and exemplar, the unity of the Trinity of the divine Persons as the one True God. Jesus Christ, as the founder and head of the Church, re-establishes the unity of all the people in one body. The Holy Spirit, as the soul of the Church, unites all the faithful in communion with Christ. The Church has only one faith, one sacramental life, one apostolic succession, one common hope and the same charity. (CCC, 813-815; 866)

## **16. Where do we find the one true Church of Christ?**

The one true Church of Christ, as a society constituted and organized in the world, is found in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Only through the Catholic Church can the faithful receive the

fullness of the means of salvation, for the Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college, whose Head is St Peter. (CCC, 816; 870)

### **17. What are 'neo-catholic' Christians?**

In the churches and ecclesial communities separated from full communion with the Catholic Church, many elements of sanctification and truth exist. Members of these churches and communities are incorporated into Christ through our common Baptism, and so we recognize them as brothers. (CCC, 817-819)

### **18. How can we strive for Christian unity?**

The desire to restore the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Spirit. It relates to the whole Church, and occurs through conversion of heart, prayer, mutual fraternal knowledge and theological dialogue. (CCC, 820-822; 866)

### **19. In what sense is the Church holy?**

The Church is holy, because Holy God intended it to be. Christ gave himself for the Church to sanctify her and to enable the Church to sanctify others. The Holy Spirit brings the Church to life through charity. The Church is the fullness of the means of salvation. Holiness is the vocation of each member of the Church. The Church has the Blessed Virgin Mary and numerous saints as exemplars and intercessors. The holiness of the Church is the source of the sanctification of her children, who while on earth as pilgrim making their way to Heaven, recognize themselves as sinners in need of conversion and purification. (CCC, 823-829; 867)

### **20. Why is the Church referred to as being Catholic?**

The Church is catholic, or universal, because Christ is present in the Church: "Where there is Christ, there is the Catholic Church" (Saint Ignatius of Antioch). The Church proclaims the integrity of the faith; and bears and administers the fullness of the means of salvation. The Church is sent on a mission of evangelization to all peoples, at all times and to whatever culture they belong to. (CCC, 830-831; 868)

## **21. Is the local church Catholic?**

All local churches are Catholic (that is, as a diocese and parish), formed by the community of Christians in communion with the faith and sacraments. Their bishops are ordained in continuation with the apostolic succession, and has as her head the Pope, who "presides in charity" (Saint Ignatius of Antioch) (CCC, 832-833).

## **22. Who belongs to the Catholic Church?**

All those individuals who belong to, or are ordained to be a part of the Catholic unity of God's people. These members are fully incorporated into the Catholic Church sanctified by the Spirit. The members of the Church form a common community, united in their participation of the sacraments. Those who are baptized, but do not fully participate in this Catholic unity, are communion with the Catholic Church, though it is an imperfect communion. (CCC, 836-838)

## **23. What is the relationship of the Catholic Church with the Jewish people?**

The Catholic Church recognizes its relationship with the Jewish people, due to the fact that they were God's first Chosen People, who accepted His word. The Hebrew people were entrusted with "the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised!" (Romans 9: 4-5). Unlike other non-Christian religions, the Jewish faith is already a response to God's divine revelation in the Old Covenant (CCC, 839-840).

## **24. What connection is there between the Catholic Church and non-Christian religions?**

The Church's bond with non-Christian religions is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race. The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search for the God who is unknown to them. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by Jesus Christ for the unity of mankind in the Church of Christ (CCC, 841-845).

**25. How are we to understand the affirmation "Outside the Church there is no salvation"?**

Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head, through the Church which is his Body. Therefore, those individuals cannot be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded by God through Christ as necessary for salvation, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it. This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church: Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation (CCC 848-848).

**26. Why should the Church proclaim the Gospel to the world?**

Because Christ commanded: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). This missionary command of the Lord has its source in the eternal love of God who sent his Son and his Spirit because "He wills to have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4) (CCC, 849-851).

**27. How is the Church missionary?**

The Holy Spirit leads the Church on her missionary paths. Christians are sent to evangelize the Good News brought by Christ, so the Church, urged on by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ himself walked. This a way of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice, even to death (CCC, 852-856).

**28. Why is the Church Apostolic?**

The Church is apostolic in origin, being built on the "foundation of the apostles" (Acts 2:20). She continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ's return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of bishops, "assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Church's supreme pastor" (CCC, 857; 869).

### **29. What is the mission of the Apostles?**

The word Apostle means 'to be sent'. Jesus, the One sent by the Father, called twelve of his disciples and appointed them as his Apostles, making them the chosen witnesses of his Resurrection and the foundation of his Church. He gave them the mandate to continue his mission, saying, "As the Father sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21) and he promised to remain with them until the end of the world (CCC, 858-861).

### **30. What is apostolic succession?**

Apostolic succession is the transmission by means of the sacrament of Holy Orders of the mission and power of the Apostles to their successors, the bishops. Thanks to this transmission the Church remains in communion of faith and life with her origin, while through the centuries she carries on her apostolate for the spread of the Kingdom of Christ on earth (CCC, 861-865).

### **31. Who are the faithful?**

The Christian faithful are those who, inasmuch as they have been incorporated in Christ through Baptism, have been constituted as the people of God; for this reason, since they have become sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal office in their own manner, they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church. There exists a true equality among them in their dignity as children of God (CCC, 871-872).

### **32. How are the people of God formed?**

Among the faithful by divine institution there exist sacred ministers who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders and who form the hierarchy of the Church. The other members of the Church are called the laity. In both the hierarchy and the laity there are certain of the faithful who are consecrated in a special manner to God by the profession of the evangelical counsels: chastity or celibacy, poverty, and obedience (CCC, 873; 934).

### **33. Why did Christ institute an ecclesiastical hierarchy?**

Christ instituted an ecclesiastical hierarchy with the mission of feeding the people of God in his name and for this purpose gave it authority. The hierarchy is formed of sacred ministers: bishops, priests, and deacons. Thanks to the sacrament of Orders, bishops and priests act in the exercise of their ministry in the name and person of Christ the Head. Deacons minister to the people of God in the *diakonia* (service) of word, liturgy, and charity (CCC, 874-876; 935).

#### **34. How is the collegial dimension of Church ministry carried out?**

After the example of the twelve Apostles who were chosen and sent out together by Christ, the unity of the Church's hierarchy is at the service of the communion of all the faithful. Every bishop exercises his ministry as a member of the episcopal college in communion with the Pope and shares with him in the care of the universal Church. Priests exercise their ministry in the presbyterate of the local Church in communion with their own bishop and under his direction (CCC, 877).

#### **35. Why does ecclesial ministry also have a personal character?**

Ecclesial ministry also has a personal character in as much as each minister, in virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, is responsible before Christ who called him personally and conferred on him his mission (CCC, 878-879).

#### **36. What is the mission of the Pope?**

The Pope, Bishop of Rome and the Successor of Saint Peter, is the perpetual, visible source and foundation of the unity of the Church. He is the Vicar of Christ, the head of the College of bishops and pastor of the universal Church over which he has by divine institution full, supreme, immediate, and universal power (CCC, 881-882; 936-937).

#### **37. What is the authority of the college of bishops?**

The college of bishops in union with the Pope, and never without him, also exercises supreme and full authority over the Church (CCC, 883-885).

### **38. How do the bishops carry out their mission of teaching?**

Since they are authentic witnesses of the apostolic faith and are invested with the authority of Christ, the bishops in union with the Pope have the duty of proclaiming the Gospel faithfully and authoritatively to all. By means of a supernatural sense of faith, the people of God unfailingly adhere to the faith under the guidance of the living Magisterium of the Church (CCC, 888-890; 939).

### **39. When is the infallibility of the Magisterium exercised?**

Infallibility is exercised when the Roman Pontiff, in virtue of his office as the Supreme Pastor of the Church, or the College of Bishops, in union with the Pope especially when joined together in an Ecumenical Council, proclaim by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals. Infallibility is also exercised when the Pope and Bishops in their ordinary Magisterium are in agreement in proposing a doctrine as definitive. Every one of the faithful must adhere to such teaching with the obedience of faith (CCC, 891).

### **40. How do Bishops exercise their ministry of sanctification?**

Bishops sanctify the Church by dispensing the grace of Christ by their ministry of the word and the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, and also by their prayers, their example and their work (CCC, 893).

### **41. How do the Bishops exercise their function of governing?**

Every bishop, insofar as he is a member of the college of bishops, bears collegially the care for all particular Churches and for the entire Church along with all the other bishops who are united to the Pope. A bishop to whom a particular Church has been entrusted governs that Church with the authority of his own sacred power which is ordinary and immediate and exercised in the name of Christ, the Good Shepherd, in communion with the entire Church and under the guidance of the Successor of Peter (CCC, 894-896).

#### **42. What is the vocation of the lay faithful?**

The lay faithful have as their own vocation to seek the Kingdom of God by illuminating and ordering temporal affairs according to the plan of God. They carry out in this way their call to holiness and to the apostolate, a call given to all the baptized (CCC, 897-900; 940).

#### **43. How do the lay faithful participate in the priestly office of Christ?**

They participate in it especially in the Eucharist by offering as a spiritual sacrifice “acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5) their own lives with all of their works, their prayers, their apostolic undertakings, their family life, their daily work and hardships borne with patience and even their consolations of spirit and body. In this way, even the laity, dedicated to Christ and consecrated by the Holy Spirit, offer to God the world itself (CCC, 901-903).

#### **44. How does the laity participate in the prophetic office?**

They participate in it by welcoming evermore in faith the Word of Christ and proclaiming it to the world by the witness of their lives, their words, their evangelizing action, and by catechesis. This evangelizing action acquires a particular efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world (CCC, 904-907; 942).

#### **45. How do they participate in the kingly office?**

The laity participate in the kingly function of Christ because they have received from him the power to overcome sin in themselves and in the world by self-denial and the holiness of their lives. They exercise various ministries at the service of the community and they imbue temporal activities and the institutions of society with moral values (CCC, 908-913; 943).

#### **46. What is the consecrated life?**

The consecrated life is a state of life recognized by the Church. It is a free response to a special call from Christ by which those consecrated give themselves completely to God

and strive for the perfection of charity moved by the Holy Spirit. This consecration is characterized by the practice of the evangelical counsels (CCC, 931c-933; 945).

**47. What can the consecrated life give to the mission of the Church?**

The consecrated life participates in the mission of the Church by means of a complete dedication to Christ and to one's brothers and sisters witnessing to the hope of the heavenly Kingdom (CCC, 931-933; 945).

**48. What is the meaning of the “communion of saints”?**

This expression indicates first of all the common sharing of all the members of the Church in holy things (sancta): the faith, the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the charisms, and the other spiritual gifts. At the root of this communion is love which “does not seek its own interests” (1 Corinthians 13:5) but leads the faithful to “hold everything in common” (Acts 4:32), even to put one's own material goods at the service of the most poor (CCC, 946-953; 960).

**49. What else does “the communion of saints” mean?**

This expression also refers to the communion between holy persons (sancti); that is, between those who by grace are united to the dead and risen Christ. Some are pilgrims on the earth; others, having passed from this life, are undergoing purification and are helped also by our prayers. Others already enjoy the glory of God and intercede for us. All of these together form in Christ one family, the Church, to the praise and glory of the Trinity (CCC, 954-959; 961-962).

**50. In what sense is the Blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of the Church?**

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of the Church in the order of grace because she gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God, the Head of the body which is the Church. When he was dying on the cross Jesus gave his mother to his disciple with the words, “Behold your mother” (John 19:27) (CCC, 963-966; 973).

### **51. How does the Virgin Mary help the Church?**

After the Ascension of her Son, the Virgin Mary aided the beginnings of the Church with her prayers. Even after her Assumption into heaven, she continues to intercede for her children, to be a model of faith and charity for all, and to exercise over them a salutary influence deriving from the superabundant merits of Christ. The faithful see in Mary an image and an anticipation of the resurrection that awaits them and they invoke her as advocate, helper, benefactress and Mediatrix (CCC, 967-970).

### **52. What kind of devotion is directed to the holy Virgin?**

It is a singular kind of devotion which differs essentially from the cult of adoration given only to the Most Holy Trinity. This special veneration directed to Mary finds particular expression in the liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and in Marian prayers such as the holy Rosary which is a compendium of the whole Gospel (CCC, 971).

### **53. In what way is the Blessed Virgin Mary the eschatological icon of the Church?**

Looking upon Mary, who is completely holy and already glorified in body and soul, the Church contemplates in her what she herself is called to be on earth and what she will be in the homeland of Heaven (CCC, 972; 974-975).

### **54. How are sins remitted?**

The first and chief sacrament for the forgiveness of sins is Baptism. For those sins committed after Baptism, Christ instituted the sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance through which a baptized person is reconciled with God and with the Church (CCC, 976-980; 984-985).

### **55. Why does the Church have the power to forgive sins?**

The Church has the mission and the power to forgive sins because Christ himself has conferred it upon her: "Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23) (CCC, 981-983; 986-987).

# CHURCH DOCUMENTS CONSULTED AND CITED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS HOSTEL

## 1- ABBREVIATIONS AND CHURCH DOCUMENTS

**AA - Apostolicam Actuositatem** (Decreto do Concílio Vaticano II sobre o Apostolado dos Leigos, 1965).

**AD - Ad Gentes** (Decreto do Concílio Vaticano II sobre a Atividade Missionária da Igreja, 1965).

**CD - Christus Dominus** (Decreto do Concílio Vaticano II sobre o Múnus Pastoral dos Bispos na Igreja, 1965).

**CIC - Catecismo da Igreja Católica**, 1992.

**CTI - Comissão Teológica Internacional.**

**DV - Dei Verbum** (Constituição Dogmática do Concílio Vaticano II sobre a Revelação Divina, 1965).

**EG – Evangelii Gaudium** (Exortação Apostólica A Alegria do Evangelho do Papa Francisco – sobre o anúncio do Evangelho no mundo atual)

**EV - Evangelium Vitae** (Carta Encíclica de João Paulo II sobre o Valor e Inviolabilidade da Vida Humana, 1995).

**GS - Gaudium et Spes** (Constituição Pastoral do Concílio Vaticano II sobre a Igreja no Mundo Atual, 1965).

**LG - Lumen Gentium** (Constituição Dogmática do Concílio Vaticano II sobre a Igreja, 1964).

**MR - Missal Romano.**

**PO - Presbyterorum Ordinis** (Decreto do Concílio Vaticano II sobre o Ministério e Vida dos Presbíteros, 1965).

**SC - Sacrosanctum Concilium** (Constituição do Concílio Vaticano II sobre a Sagrada Liturgia, 1963).

**SM - Signum Magnum** (Exortação Apostólica consagrada ao Culto da Virgem Maria, Mãe da Igreja e Modelo de Todas as Virtudes, 1967).

**UR - Unitatis Redintegratio** (Decreto do Concílio Vaticano II sobre o Ecumenismo, 1964).

**UUS - Ut Unum Sint** (Carta Encíclica, João Paulo II, sobre o Empenho Ecumênico, 1995).

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