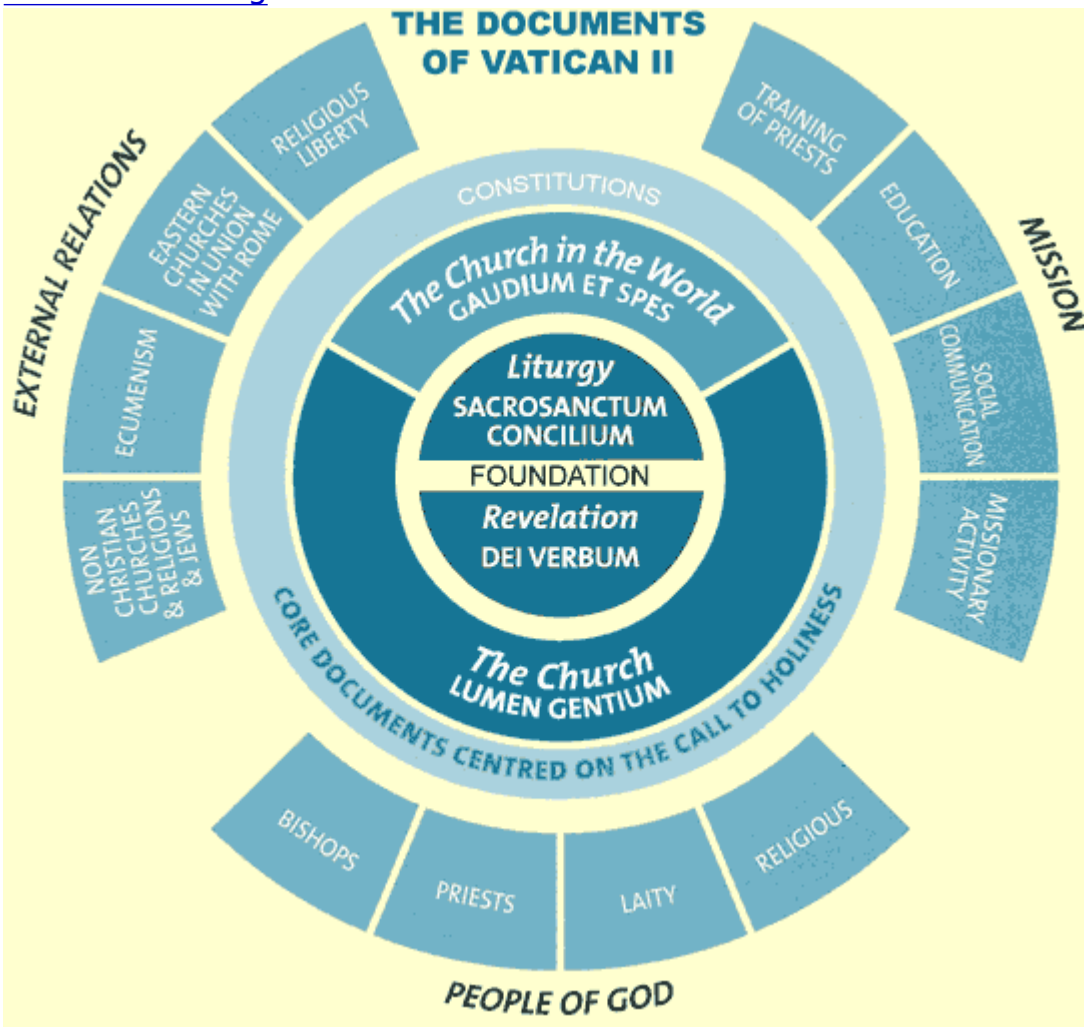
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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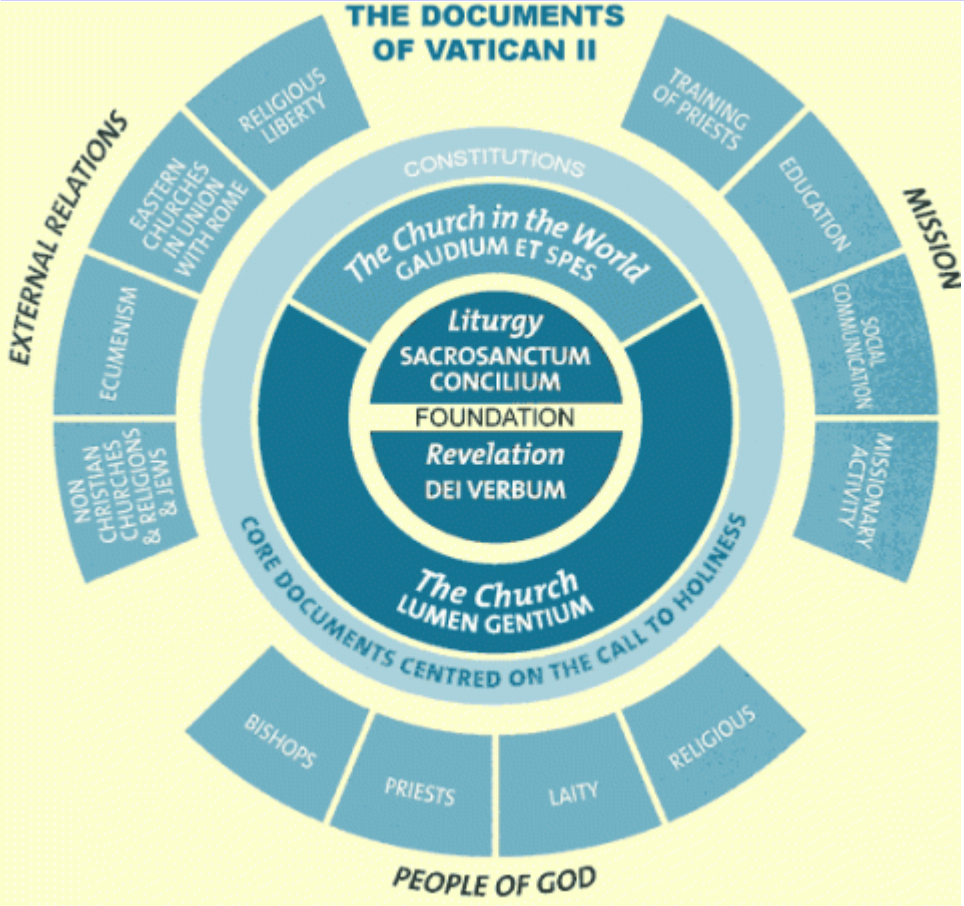

Nations shall walk by your light" (Isaiah 60:2).

60:1-6; Ps 72; Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matt 2:1-12

Epiphany of the Lord

When Vatican II named its document on the church *Lumen Gentium,* "Light of the Nations," it was describing its role and function in the world. The church exists to embody and magnify the mystery of the Incarnation, to illuminate and clarify the light of Christ for all people. The image with this column shows the foundation of the church as the Word and the Liturgy, God's revelation and our response in worship, especially the celebration of the Eucharist.

Today's Gospel, the story of the appearance of the star, the journey of the Magi to find the child and Herod's plot to kill Jesus, provides a dramatic context for the gift and the challenge the light of Christ introduced into history. One lesson is clear: the darker the times the more important the light. Pope Francis has illustrated this.

Though the church is a small player among world powers, the pope's voice on behalf of a justice and peace has been both significant and often in sharp contrast to the drift toward autocratic rule and the return of nationalist and racist ideologies that promote division, competition, borders and exclusion. In his eight years as pope, Francis' encyclicals on care of the planet, global cooperation, economic fairness, the centrality of the family and defense of the marginalized have been brilliant candles in the darkness.

The pope's travels have focused light on the needs of developing nations, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, the plight of refugees and victims of poverty and war, on environmental stewardship, the aspirations of young people and the rights of workers. His persistent efforts to reform the church to make it more pastoral and less judgmental, more transparent and accountable, have often been met by inside resistance and even subversion.

Matthew's Gospel shows us that even wonder, light and wisdom are ignored by those who will do anything to protect their power. Yet, even in the face of evil, God's purposes continue to define the deepest longings and the highest ideals of humanity. The light of glory shone brightly on the cross when Jesus emptied himself to reveal God's love for the world. Resistance to the light and the reality of suffering have always been marks of the authentic church.

As members of the church, our incorporation at baptism into the mystery of the crucified and risen Jesus makes each of us a light to the world. The small candle we received at baptism is lit from the large Easter Candle. We celebrate Epiphany by taking our lights to the world. The familiar motto of the Christopher movement, "It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness," reminds us that if we want a better, brighter world, we must be the candles that reveal Christ.

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