I.) **The 3 Types of Documents produced at the Council:**

- **The Constitutions:** The Constitutions are the primary documents of an Ecumenical Council and usually the other Council documents take their lead from them. Often the Constitutions provide keys to properly understanding the decrees and declarations. As Edward Hanenburg notes in his book *The Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II:* “The Constitutions treat substantive doctrinal issues that pertain to the very nature of the Church.” Thus, the Constitutions can be considered as authoritative summaries of the official teachings of the Catholic Church with regards to doctrine and belief.

- **The Decrees & Declarations:** These types of documents generally tackle more practical issues or questions facing the Church. Likewise they can address issues of practical pastoral concern, such as the media or ecumenism.

Thus, if we had to get down to brass-tacks in categorizing the three types of documents we could say that the Constitutions set the tone and give more over-arching and general doctrinal definitions of Catholic belief, whereas the Decrees and Declarations are more specific in addressing certain areas of concern within Catholic life and practice.

I.) **The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy/Sacrosanctum Concilium**  
(Addressed: 1st Session – approved in 1962):

The bishops chose to tackle the document on the Sacred Liturgy first following the official opening of the Council on October 11, 1962. One of the reasons they chose to address this document first was that the ideas and sentiments expressed within the document had been circulating within the Church for years prior to the Council. Prior to the Second Vatican Council many felt, generally speaking, that the mass was both mystically beautiful yet to some degree mechanical. The prayers were completely in Latin. The majority of the mass was said with the back of the priest facing the congregation, which at times seemed to separate the congregation from what was
happening during the mass. Many times, as Hanenberg points out, the faithful felt that the mass was “done for them but not by them” (Pope Benedict XVI addresses this issue theologically in his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. p.13). By definition Liturgy means “the work of the people,” thus the people themselves are an integral part of the mass (this includes when a priest celebrates the mass in private since he celebrates the mass for the people and in union with the Church Triumphant, the Church Purgative, and the Church Militant). Prior to the Council, however, the beauty of the mass provided a definitive Catholic identity that many found very attractive. There are many Catholics who would argue that the mass was too rigid and impersonal, while others would argue that the mass of Paul VI, or the Novus Ordo/New Order mass (current form), also known as the ordinary form, has lost a definitive sense of the sacred, especially following the abuses in liturgical experimentation in the years following the Council. That being said, Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 permitted the wider celebration of the mass of the Tridentine Rite, or the mass of Pope St.Pius V (16th century), or the extraordinary form, with the release of the motu proprio *Summarum Pontificum*. Within the document the Holy Father underscores the fundamental point that the Tridentine Rite (extraordinary form of the mass) is in no way contradictory to the Novus Ordo/Mass of Paul VI (ordinary form of the mass), rather the two flow from the same Divine source. Likewise, in *Summarum Pontificum* he notes, “It is not appropriate to speak of these two versions of the Roman Missal as if they were two rites…rather, it is a matter of a twofold use of one and the same rite.” He goes on to point out that the Novus Ordo form, according to the 1970 Missal, “obviously is and continues to be the normal form” of the mass. Thus within the document Pope Benedict permits the greater use of the Mass of Blessed John XXIII, or the Tridentine Rite, and points out that individual priests do not need the permission from their bishops to celebrate the mass or any other sacrament according to the pre-Conciliar, or pre-Vatican II, Rite.

Pope Benedict XVI has stated many times, “Adoration is not a luxury, it is a priority.” In his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, the Holy Father makes clear the point that the full implementation of the Second Vatican Council is only now beginning to be understood and we still have a long way to go (my paraphrase). *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* passed with an overwhelming majority, 2,147 to 4. Many years before this Pope St.Pius X likewise encouraged greater
lay involvement in the mass, with the lowering of the age of receiving Holy Communion and the instruction of the lay faithful on Gregorian chant. Likewise in 1947 Pope Pius XII promulgated his encyclical *Mediator Dei*, and emphasized that the absolute center of the life of the Christian comes from an active participation in the liturgy. He emphasized the need for a proper interior spirit when approaching the mass, the importance of the Holy Eucharist in our lives, and the continued importance of growing in a Eucharistic awareness in our lives.

When most people consider the practical changes after the Second Vatican Council the first thing that comes to mind is usually the Liturgy. This was due in part because people noticed these changes every weekend at mass, but also because the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* was the first document approved by the Council Fathers. Below is a list of some of the liturgical aspects that were retained and others that were modified.

- **Liturgical Aspects Unchanged:**
  *Opening Prayer kept.*
  *Readings from the Scripture & a homily.*
  *Gloria & Creed retained for Sundays & Holy Days.*
  *The Offering of Gifts.*
  *Preface & the Canon of the Mass w/major parts.*
  *Our Father.*
  *Communion Service.*
  *Closing prayer & Blessing.*

- **Liturgical Aspects Altered Somehow:**
  *Opening prayers at the foot of the altar.*
  *The Silent reading of the Canon.*
  *The shifting of the Sacramentary/Roman Missal from different sides of the altar.*
  *Wearing of the biretta by the priest.*
  *Bowing one’s head at name of Jesus.*
  *People silently praying rosary during mass.*
  *Devotional prayer to St. Michael after mass.*
  *Low masses w/less solemnity & High masses w/subdeacon.*
  *Priest now faced the people.*
  *Use of vernacular, as opposed to Latin (it should be clearly noted that the Council never abolished the use of Latin, it
simply permitted the use of the vernacular. In reality the Council articulates that Latin should be retained as it is still the official language of the Church. Unfortunately, many have associated its use with the fundamentalist groups that argue that the Novus Ordo/Mass of Paul VI is invalid.

See Sections #36 & 54 in Sacrosanctum Concilium: 36. 1. Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites.

*People now shook hands at the sign of peace.*
*The Congregation was asked to sing, respond, and pray actively during and throughout the mass.

*Key Point:* In 2007, Pope Benedict pointed out in Sacramentum Caritatis/The Sacrament of Charity, that by the phrase, “full, conscious, and active participation” of the laity (as articulated by VCII) includes the prayers of the faithful during mass. Too often people assumed that they must actually be doing something in order to actively participate in the mass. This is untrue.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* recognized the liturgy as the “source and summit” of our faith:

The Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.

Thus, the Liturgy is everything to us and we are nothing without it.

*Final Vote Numbers: 2,147 yes – 4 no*

### II. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation/Dei Verbum
*Addressed: 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, & 4<sup>th</sup> Sessions – Approved in 1965:

Dei Verbum was one of the two Dogmatic Constitutions published by the Second Vatican Council. *Dei Verbum/The Word of God* was a vital text for the Council Fathers and took a considerable
time in debating and rewording. In it the Fathers point out that Scripture and Tradition are not two independent sources of Revelation but are completely linked and inseparable. The document and our Catechism both articulate that the Magisterium of the Church (Pope in union with the bishops) are at the service of Sacred Scripture and Tradition and are the authentic interpreters of them: “The authentic interpretation of God’s Word has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone” (DV,10). It points out that Scripture and Tradition, “make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God,” and “the two flow from the same wellspring and move towards the same goal” ((DV 9,10). The document underscores that while all public revelation ceased with the death of the last Apostle (John the Evangelist), the understanding of that public revelation continues as the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Tradition and Magisterium of the faith.

Debate on Dei Verbum began the same day as the Council Fathers generally approved the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (November 14, 1962). The draft prepared by Cardinal Ottaviani, Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (or The Holy Office, as it was known), was considered by many of the Fathers to be overly negative in its tone. Likewise, many argued that the original draft was anti-Ecumenical, that it contained too much theological jargon, and that it was overly suspicious towards biblical scholars. They immediately set to work redrafting and correcting the document. Cardinal Augustine Bea reminded the Council Fathers of Pope John’s opening address wherein he noted that the Council was meant to be Pastoral and to reach out to other faiths, to other Christians and to the world. Many, however, worried that that doctrinal purity was being clouded by too much of an effort to “reach out” to others. Bishops in both camps dug in their heals and there seemed to be a definitive impasse among them with neither side willing to budge. Those ‘progressives’ who wanted to altogether reject the document knew they would be sending it right back to Cardinal Ottaviani’s desk from where it had originated anyway.

Pope John intervened and appointed Cardinal Bea, an unofficial spokesman for the progressive camp, and Cardinal Ottaviani, an unofficial spokesman for the traditionalist camp, as joint presidents on a new theological commission appointed to address the document. This breathed a huge sigh of relief among the Fathers and thus real
compromise was able to take place. Among the many issues to be addressed in the document were:

- The Relationship between Scripture & Tradition.
- The Inerrancy of the Bible.
- The Historic nature of the Gospels.

Before the text was finally approved on November 18, 1965, many of the bishops had to “re-learn” their theology so to speak. While in Rome many of them attended theology classes, conferences, seminars, and lectures by one or more of the periti or theological advisors also attending the Council. One of the most acclaimed among these advisors was Fr. Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, who at the age of 34 was working as a theological advisor to Cardinal Frings from Cologne, Germany. Ratzinger was probably most known for having drafted a speech for Cardinal Frings wherein he is unsparing in his remarks in correcting The Holy Office, under Cardinal Ottaviani, for an unwillingness to be hear new arguments on old theological issues within the Church. Because Ratzinger himself would lead this very Congregation from 1981-2005 he frequently accused of “changing sides.” Or, as some theologians have argued, “the goal posts have been moved” (God’s Choice, Weigel).

Chapter 3 tackles three huge topics in earnest: the inspiration, inerrancy, and interpretation of Sacred Scripture. It articulates that while Scripture is truly inspired, the Sacred Writers were not robots, so to speak, simply “taking diction from God” (Hanenberg, 32). Nor did a divine bird whisper it in their ear. Rather, God Himself made true use of their human talents, limitations, and abilities in directly the writing through them.

In noting that the Bible is free from error, the Council Fathers point out that this does not include scientific, historical, or geographical errors per se, rather errors as they relate to the moral message of the Scripture. Cardinal Franziskus Konig of Vienna argued vehemently that the Council must acknowledge that the bible contains numerous errors as they relate to ‘historical events and scientific explanations.” Ultimately the document states that the books in the bible “firmly, faithfully, and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided in the sacred scriptures” (DV,11). Thus, the entire bible is without error specifically as it relates to salvation, not science or history.
Finally the Council Fathers note that in order to properly understand what the Sacred Writers intended on communicating we must seek to understand the times in which they lived (zeitgeist, or “the spirit of the age.”), their intended audience, and their writing style/genre (DV, 12).

*Dei Verbum, Nostra Aetate* (2), *Lumen Gentium* (16), and *Gaudium et Spes* clearly affirm that salvation is possible for those outside of the Catholic, or even Christian faiths, assuming they have never received and/or rejected the teachings of the faith. They teach that the “Church rejects nothing that is holy and genuine in other faiths,” which often possess “a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women.”

It is a great blessing that we have a Magisterium in order to serve as the authentic interpreters of Sacred Scripture because in our current culture Scripture is left to be greatly misinterpreted, such as with Protestant Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, creation vs. evolutionists, radical feminists, and Liberation Theologians (i.e. Fr. Jon Sobrino S.J., Fr. Leonardo Boff, & *Gustavo Gutierrez*).

*Final Vote Numbers: 2,344 yes – 6 no*

**III.) The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church/Lumen Gentium:**
*(Addressed: 1st, 2nd, & 3rd Sessions – Approved 1964)*

*Lumen Gentium* was one of the two Dogmatic Constitutions published by the Second Vatican Council. *Lumen Gentium* is translated as “Light of the Nations.” Many theologians argue that *Lumen Gentium* is, in many ways, the crowning achievement of the Second Vatican Council. This is because the Second Vatican Council was a “Council for the Church, of the Church, and about the Church” (37).” In no other document is the Church’s thought on herself laid out as clearly as in L.G. The document went through three definitive drafts, one during each of the first three sessions.

For hundreds of years the Church’s thoughts on herself were dominated by somewhat of a defensive nature due to the Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent and the need to defend the Papacy and the sacraments against Protestantism. Likewise, in the years following the Enlightenment era, Vatican I (1869-1870) redefined papal primacy and infallibility. Thus, for years many had the impression that the Catholic Church involved solely the Papacy.
Cardinals Leo Josef Suenens of Belgium and Giovanni Battista Montini of Milan (future Pope Paul VI) reiterated that *Lumen Gentium* should include a fuller understanding of the Church, namely that she is the Mystical Body of Christ (in little more than a year Montini, as Paul VI, would write an encyclical entitled *Mysterium Fidei/The Mystery of Faith*, wherein he makes this point again).

Certainly one of the most controversial aspects of the document is the statement that the Church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church.” In other words, the Catholic Church contains the fullness of truth and the full means of salvation. There are, however, elements of truth in other faiths and God does give all people the means of achieving salvation, even though their salvation ultimately is made possible through the work of Christ in the Catholic Church whether they actually realize this fact or not (see also: *Dominus Iesus* – September 2000). Last year the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Cardinal Leveda reiterated this point again.

It is important to recall that the permanent deaconate was restored with the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium* #29). In addressing the other aspects of Holy Orders, L.G. talks a lot about collegiality or the understanding of the pope is in union with the bishops. While the bishops do not receive their power from the pope as a person, but rather the sacrament of Holy Orders as received via Apostolic Succession, they exercise their office only in union with the Roman Pontiff. Article 25 points out the three ways in which something can be taught infallibly:

1.) When all the bishops throughout the world are in agreement on a particular teaching.

2.) When all the bishops are gathered in an Ecumenical Council with the Pope.

3.) When the Pope speaks Ex Cathedra (“from the chair”) on matters of faith and morals.

The Council, and our present Pope, have reiterated that the Church does not live by infallible teachings alone and the faithful are called to adhere to the teachings of the Church and the Magisterium even when they teach non-infallibly (see: *Salt of the Earth*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger).

Below is a list of some of the various aspects of the Church addressed by the Council Fathers:
• **Chapter 4 – On the Laity (30-38):** The Council describes the laity as including the whole people of God and as the mystical body of Christ. They are the members of the Church not within Holy Orders. *Lumen Gentium* notes: “It is the special vocation of the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will (31).” The lay faithful serve the Church in many important ways and are called to grow in holiness within their respective vocations.

• **Chapter 5 – The Universal Call to Holiness (39-42):** This chapter points out the fact that each human person is meant to become a saint and to grow in holiness within their respective vocations. Holiness is not just for the pope, bishops, priests, and nuns. Now we tend to take this for granted, but this was a startling point for an Ecumenical Council to make in the 1960’s. John Paul II used this as the primary theme of the Jubilee Year 2000: The Universal Call to Holiness (see: *Novo Millenio Ineunte*).

• **Chapter 6 – On the Religious (43-47):** This reaffirmed the call of those in religious life to the evangelical councils of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

• **Chapter 7 – The Pilgrim Church (48-51):** Pope John XXIII requested specifically that the Council draw attention to the importance of the saints in the life of the Church. This chapter began as a chapter on the saints but ended up as a chapter pointing to our eternal destiny to be with God in heaven. It refers to the Church’s “eschatological nature,” or state in heaven. John Paul II will later address this in greater detail in Cycle III of his *Theology of the Body*.

• **Chapter 8 – The Blessed Virgin Mary (52-69):** During the course of the Second Vatican Council there were several times when voting was very close in leaning one way or another. The choice to include Mary within *Lumen Gentium* or to compose a new document on her was likewise very close (On October 29,
1963 the vote to include her passed by 1,114 to 1,074). Ultimately the Fathers chose to include her in the document in order to underscore Her profound unity within the life of the Church. The Council Fathers referred to Mary as: Mediatrix, Auxiliatrix, and Advocate. They likewise reiterated that this unique role of Mary takes nothing away from or detracts from the unique role of Christ as the one mediator between God and humanity (62).

Because the Church delineates between the sinfulness of her members and the inerrancy of her teachings many have critiqued the Church as using this as an excuse for overlooking events such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the clergy sex-abuse scandals. Just as the Apostles were very imperfect men, but delivered the perfected Gospel, so too is the Church composed of sinful members delivering the inerrancy of truth. *Lumen Gentium* similarly describes the Church as a mystery (a mystery, according to Catholic belief, is a reality that can be understood only by love). Likewise she involves a communion among the faithful and a communion with God, both of which are bound together in the Eucharist. *Final Vote Numbers: 2,151 yes- 5 no.*

**IV. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World/ Gaudium et Spes:** (Addressed: 3rd & 4th Sessions – Approved 1965)

*Gaudium et Spes* is translated as “joy and hope.” While *Lumen Gentium* addresses the nature of the Church, *Gaudium et Spes* addresses the mission of the Church in the world. Both of the documents are undoubtedly the two primary documents of the entire Council. While Fr. Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI had a significant impact on *Lumen Gentium*, Archbishop Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II had a significant impact on *Gaudium et Spes*. Karol Wojtyla worked very hard on the draft of *Gaudium et Spes*, making over 80 amendments to the text during the Council. Later as Pope John Paul II, articles 22 and 24 would be the two
most quoted texts of the entire Council in his writings. John Paul II argued that article 22 was the theological linchpin of the entire Vatican Council: “Jesus Christ fully reveals man to himself.” Virtually all of JPII’s writings are somehow centered around the dignity of man and in many of his Papal documents he returns to the teachings of *Gaudium et Spes*.

The document was enthusiastically endorsed by John XXIII and Paul VI, and was originally known simply as Schema 13. No other document changed so radically during the course of the Council and no other document was nearly thrown-out so many times either. At one point during the Council things looked pretty dismal for Schema 13 and even its supporters admitted that the text needed a lot of work. The problem came for the Council Fathers in trying to discern just how to write it. Undoubtedly, it is the greatest mix of philosophy, theology, and pastoral ethics of all the Council documents. A draft was eventually ready for debate at the 3rd session, but underwent another complete rewriting during Session 4. It was ultimately approved and promulgated on December 7, 1965. Many of those bishops considered “progressive” during the Council, such as Cardinals Bea and Suenens, sounded very “conservative” in their addresses on Mary, whereas more traditional bishops, such as Cardinal Ottaviani, sounded much more progressive in the document *Gaudium et Spes* as it relates to warfare. Thus, many have come to argue that the Council documents, when properly understood, are not divisive among liberal and conservative camps, but rather healing and unifying.

- **Human Dignity (12-18):** If one were to look at for a common thread found throughout the document, it would be perhaps the dignity of the human person. Thus, it is perhaps easy to see the influence of Archbishop Wojtyla on the text. This is especially found in articles 1-3. The Council Fathers likewise point out that the Jesus Christ is the answer to every human longing for happiness and that Christ is the meaning of every human life. The dignity of the human person comes out of God’s creative act of creating man in his image and likeness. This image is disfigured through sin, but has found its redemption in Christ.

- **Atheism (19-21):** Atheism is named as one of the chief and primary threats to the dignity of the human person. During the time of the Council this was seen clearly in the “systematic atheism” of the Communists. It is seen today, as Pope Benedict XVI has noted, in a “practical atheism,” or a “dictatorship of
relativism,” whereby one denies the existence of an objective truth or any obligation to live in accordance with that truth. This likewise includes any culpability to the need to answer before God for having ignored this truth.

- **The Human Community (23-32):** The Council makes note of the fact that Jesus immersed Himself into the world in order to convert the world. Likewise, as Christians we are not called to retreat from the world but rather to go out into it in order to change and bring hope to it. This is in fact the meaning of the word “mass,” meaning *It missa est* or “to be sent.” The Church exists in the world and the Church recognizes that it has received from the world many beautiful things, such as art, science, culture, etc. (44).

- **The Nature of Marriage (47-48):** The Council underscores that marriage is not only for the procreation of children and the consolation of the spouses, but is likewise for the love and fruitfulness of the spouses and the family as a whole. Marriage is seen less as a legal contract and much more as a spiritual covenant (see also: Love & Responsibility – Karol Wojtyla). The Council’s emphasis on the marriage covenant rather than the marriage contract brought a “fresh air” and attitude within the Church and its relation to the family. Pope John Paul II repeatedly reiterated that sexual intercourse/conjugal bond is the beautiful manifestation of the husband and wife’s gift of one to the other and by the self-gift of the conjugal bond within marriage a couple actually grows in holiness (see also: Familiaris Consortio, & The Theology of the Body).

- **Birth Control (49-51):** The proliferation of the birth control pill in the 60’s lead many, including many within the Church, to believe that the Catholic Church would alter her teachings regarding artificial contraception. In 1964 Pope Paul VI established a theological commission, initially under the proposition of John XXIII, to examine further the Church’s teachings on artificial contraception (this commission included Karol Wojtyla). *Gaudium et Spes* noted that a couple has a moral right to regulate births but that they should live in accord with the Church’s revelation on the issue:

  Relying on these principals, sons (and daughters) of the Church may not undertake methods of birth regulation
which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of the divine law (51).

Four years later (July 29, 1968) Pope Paul VI upheld the Church’s longstanding position against the artificial means of birth control as intrinsically immoral.

Likewise, section 51 articulates that taking innocent human life via abortion is fundamentally a grave evil and can never be justifiable:

For God, the Lord of life, has conferred on men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life in a manner which is worthy of man. Therefore from the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes.

- **Peace (77-18):** Inspired by the other great social encyclicals of the 19th and 20th century such as *Rerum Novarum, Quadragesimo Ano,* and *Pacem in Terris,* the Council reaffirmed that peace is much more than simply the absence of war, it is the “effect of righteousness,” and is the ability to truly see the dignity of each human being.

- **Globalization:** The modern world is marked specifically by constant change and the Council affirmed that there is an increasing interconnectedness and connection among the world community. Likewise, there has been an increasing growing imbalance among the poor and the wealthy (see also: *Populorum Progresio, Centesimus Annus & Sollicitudo rei Socialis*). It makes note of the fact that those who do wish to improve globalization find it very difficult due to the immensity of the problem. Likewise, the wealthy and developed countries bare a moral duty before God to support the impoverished countries when need be. These impoverished countries should, on their part, do their best to ensure a just distribution of natural resources and job opportunities.

*Final Vote Numbers: 2,309 yes – 75 no*