

I. THE CHURCH IS ONE

"The sacred mystery of the Church's unity" (UR 2)

CCC #813 ... CCC #815

CCC #816 "The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it. . . . This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in (subsistit in) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him." [LG 8.2] The Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism explains: "For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God." [UR 3.5]

Wounds to unity

[other Christian Churches]

CCC #817 In fact, "in this one and only Church of God from its very beginnings there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly censures as damnable. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church - for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame." [UR 3.1] The ruptures that wound the unity of Christ's Body - here we must distinguish heresy, apostasy, and schism [cf. CIC, can 75] - do not occur without human sin: "Where there are sins, there are also divisions, schisms, heresies, and disputes. Where there is virtue, however, there also are harmony and unity, from which arise the one heart and one soul of all believers." [Origen]

CCC # 818 "However, one cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities [that resulted from such separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church." [UR 3.1]

CCC #819 "Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and of truth" [LG 8.2] are found outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church: "the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope, and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements." [UR 3.2, cf LG 15.] Christ's Spirit uses these Churches and ecclesial communities as means of salvation, whose power derives from the fullness of grace and truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church. All these blessings

come from Christ and lead to him, [cf UR 3] and are in themselves calls to "Catholic unity." [cf. LG 8]

Toward unity

CCC #820 "Christ bestowed unity on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time." [UR 4.3] Christ always gives his Church the gift of unity, but the Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her. This is why Jesus himself prayed at the hour of his Passion, and does not cease praying to his Father, for the unity of his disciples: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me." [Jn 17:21; cf. Heb 7:25] The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit. [cf. UR 1]

CCC #821 Certain things are required in order to respond adequately to this call:

- a permanent renewal of the Church in greater fidelity to her vocation; such renewal is the driving-force of the movement toward unity; [cf. UR 6]
- conversion of heart as the faithful "try to live holier lives according to the Gospel"; [UR 7.3] for it is the unfaithfulness of the members to Christ's gift which causes divisions;
- prayer in common, because "change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name 'spiritual ecumenism;'" [UR 8.1]
- fraternal knowledge of each other; [cf. UR 9]
- ecumenical formation of the faithful and especially of priests; [cf. UR 10]
- dialogue among theologians and meetings among Christians of the different churches and communities; [cf. UR 4; 9; 11]
- collaboration among Christians in various areas of service to mankind.² [cf. UR 12] "Human service" is the idiomatic phrase.

CCC #822 Concern for achieving unity "involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike." [UR 5] But we must realize "that this holy objective - the reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ - transcends human powers and gifts." That is why we place all our hope "in the prayer of Christ for the Church, in the love of the Father for us, and in the power of the Holy Spirit." [UR 24.2]

II. THE CHURCH IS HOLY

CCC #823 ... CCC #829

III. THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC

What does "catholic" mean?

CCC #830 The word "catholic" means "universal," in the sense of "according to the totality" or "in keeping with the whole." The Church is catholic in a double sense:

First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church." [St Ignatius] In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him "the fullness of the means of salvation" [UR 3; AG 6] which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession. The Church was, in this fundamental sense, catholic on the day of Pentecost [cf. AG 4] and will always be so until the day of the Parousia.

CCC #831 Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race: [cf Mt 29:19]

All men are called to belong to the new People of God. This People, therefore, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God's will may be fulfilled: he made human nature one in the beginning and has decreed that all his children who were scattered should be finally gathered together as one. . . . The character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself whereby the Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods, under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit. [LG 13]

Each particular Church is "catholic"

CCC #832 "The Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful, which, in so far as they are united to their pastors, are also quite appropriately called Churches in the New Testament. . . . In them the faithful are gathered together through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated. . . . In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present, through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church is constituted." [LG 26]

CCC #833 The phrase "particular Church," which is first of all the diocese (or eparchy), refers to a community of the Christian faithful in communion of faith and sacraments with their bishop ordained in apostolic succession. [cf. CD 11] These particular Churches "are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists." [LG 23]

CCC #834 Particular Churches are fully catholic through their communion with one of them, the Church of Rome "which presides in charity." [St Ignatius] "For with this church, by reason of its pre-eminence, the whole Church, that is the faithful everywhere,

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must necessarily be in accord." [St Irenaeus] Indeed, "from the incarnate Word's descent to us, all Christian churches everywhere have held and hold the great Church that is here [at Rome] to be their only basis and foundation since, according to the Savior's promise, the gates of hell have never prevailed against her." [St Maximus]

CCC #835 "Let us be very careful not to conceive of the universal Church as the simple sum, or . . . the more or less anomalous federation of essentially different particular churches. In the mind of the Lord the Church is universal by vocation and mission, but when she put down her roots in a variety of cultural, social, and human terrains, she takes on different external expressions and appearances in each part of the world." [Paul VI] The rich variety of ecclesiastical disciplines, liturgical rites, and theological and spiritual heritages proper to the local churches "unified in a common effort, shows all the more resplendently the catholicity of the undivided Church." [LG 23]

Who belongs to the Catholic Church?

CCC #836 "All men are called to this catholic unity of the People of God. . . . And to it, in different ways, belong or are ordered: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind, called by God's grace to salvation." [LG 13]

CCC #837 "Fully incorporated into the society of the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who - by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion - are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not however persevere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but 'in body' not 'in heart.'" [LG 14]

[Other Christians]

CCC #838 "The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter." [LG 15] Those "who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church." [UR 3] With the Orthodox Churches, this communion is so profound "that it lacks little to attain the fullness that would permit a common celebration of the Lord's Eucharist." [Paul VI; cf UR 13-18]

The Church and non-Christians

CCC #839 "Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways." [LG 16]

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Jewish People

The relationship of the Church with the Jewish People. When she delves into her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant, discovers her link with the Jewish People,[cf. NA 4] "the first to hear the Word of God." [Roman Missal, Good Friday 13; Intercessions. VI] The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ", [Rom 9:4-5] "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." [Rom 11:29]

CCC #840 And when one considers the future, God's People of the Old Covenant and the new People of God tend towards similar goals: expectation of the coming (or the return) of the Messiah. But one awaits the return of the Messiah who died and rose from the dead and is recognized as Lord and Son of God; the other awaits the coming of a Messiah, whose features remain hidden till the end of time; and the latter waiting is accompanied by the drama of not knowing or of misunderstanding Christ Jesus.

Muslim People

CCC #841 The Church's relationship with the Muslims. "The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day." [LG 16]

Other Non-Christians

CCC #842 The Church's bond with non-Christian religions is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race:

All nations form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city. . .331

CCC#843 The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life." [LG 16]

CCC #844 In their religious behavior, however, men also display the limits and errors that disfigure the image of God in them:

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Very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and served the creature rather than the Creator. Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair. [LG 16]

CCC #845 To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is "the world reconciled." She is that bark which "in the full sail of the Lord's cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world." According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves from the flood.[St Augustine, St Ambrose]

"Outside the Church there is no salvation"

CCC #846 How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? [cf. Cyprian] Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it. [LG14; cf. Mk 16:16, Jn 3:5]

Mk 16:15-16 He said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Jn 3:5 Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

CCC #847 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. [LG 16]

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References Key

AG = Vatican II *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church)

CD = Vatican II *Christus Dominus* (Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church)

CIC = Code of Canon Law

LG = Vatican II *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)

NA = *Nostra Aetate* (The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)

UR = Vatican II *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism)