



THE CHURCH

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“There is one God, and one Christ, and one Church, and one chair founded by the voice of the Lord on the rock. Another altar cannot be set up, nor a new priesthood made, besides the one altar and the one priesthood. Whoever gathers elsewhere scatters.”

-St. Cyprian, Epistle 43:5

“Wheresoever Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”

-St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 8:6

“If I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.”

-I Tim. 3:15

Etymology of the Word “Church”

The English word “Church” is a corruption of the Greek word “kyriakon”, meaning “the Lord’s house,” from *kyrios* (lord).

French, Spanish, Italian and all of the Romance languages use variations of the Latin word for Church, *ecclesia*, itself a derivation of the Greek *ekklesia*, which in its pre-Christian context meant an assembly (for example, an assembly of Greek citizens gathered together in Council). Christian adopted the word early on based on the Septuagint’s use of the word *ekklesia* to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*, which denoted the assembly of ancient Israel before the presence of God in the tabernacle.

In the Old Testament

Since Old Testament times, God always had a people or society on the earth whereby His decrees were made manifest and His will acted out on the earth. Such were the people of Israel under the Old Covenant bound by the Law of Moses. Under this Law was initiated the entire Old Covenant economy of sacrifice and Temple worship.

Nevertheless, even in the Old Testament times, God promised His people the coming of a Messiah, a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31) and a time when the bloody sacrifices of the Old Covenant would no longer be required because of the institution of a new and pure sacrifice that will be offered "from the rising of the sun even to the going down" (Malachi 1:11). The sacrifices offered by the priesthood of the Messianic kingdom are to endure as long as day and night shall last (Jeremiah 33:20). Moreover, it is prophesied that God will gather together all of the nations under one Shepherd who will guide them and cause them to obey God’s ordinances (see Ezk. 34:23; 37:24-28).

In the Old Testament prophecies, the establishment of the New Covenant, the gathering together of the nations into one assembly (*ecclesia*), and the offering of a pure sacrifice are all bound up

intimately with the coming of the Messiah, the priest *par excellence*, who offers a pure sacrifice to God, not of the Aaronic priesthood, but of the priesthood “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4). Thus the Old Testament prophesies the ministry of the Messiah, the gathering of nations, and the offering of a pure sacrifice through a new priesthood as distinctive characteristics of the coming New Covenant, the Messianic Age.

The Church- Established by Christ

When Christ came to earth, He instituted His Holy Church as the means by which all men would come to the knowledge of God and, through which, the grace of Christ merited by His death on the cross would be diffused through the means of the sacraments. This Church of Christ is built upon the foundation of the apostles (Rev. 21:14) with Peter as its earthly head. Christ gave governance of the Church to Peter (Matt.16:13-19) and to his successor who, in collegiality with the bishops as successors of the apostles, are to govern the visible Church until the Second Coming.¹

It is of faith that Christ intentionally intended to establish a visible Church and that the Church He intended to build was none other than the Roman Catholic Church, as taught in Pope St. Pius X's *Lamentabili Sane* 52, 55 and 56 and reaffirmed by the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* 8. In its doctrinal beliefs, institutional development and historical continuity, the Church exists exactly how Christ intended it to.

The Mystical Body

The relationship of Christ to the Church is utterly unique. Scripture and Tradition have referred to the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, a phrase pregnant with many meanings. Pope Pius XII in his 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis* explained why the adjective “Mystical” is used:

“There are several reasons why it [the word mystical] should be used; for by it we may distinguish the Body of the Church, which is a Society whose Head and Ruler is Christ, from His physical Body, which, born of the Virgin Mother of God, now sits at the right hand of the Father and is hidden under the Eucharistic veils; and, that which is of greater importance in view of modern errors, this name enables us to distinguish it from any other body, whether in the physical or the moral order.”

-Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* 60

The phrase “Mystical Body of Christ” is meant to describe the unity of Christ with His Church. Christ is not simply the hierarchical head of the Church, the way a CEO is head of a corporation; Christ both rules the Church and is immediately present in her through the sacramental ministry of the priesthood, the guidance of the whole Church by the Holy Spirit and the reception of the sacramental Body of Christ by the faithful at the Mass. This unity of Christ with His Church was the plan of God from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-10) and proceeds from the infinite love of Christ. As St. Paul teaches, Christ “loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her” (Eph. 5:25). Christ is so identifiable with His Church that it is

¹ The specific characteristics of Peter's primacy and degrees of infallibility will be examined in the class on the Papacy.

Christ together with His Church that is said to make up the *Totus Christus*, the whole Christ, Head and Members. For example, see Matthew 25:40: “Truly, I say to you, whatever you do unto the least of my brethren, that you do unto Me” and Matt. 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered in My name there am I in the midst of them.” These verses show how Christ identifies Himself with His Church. This sentiment is also found in the Fathers; for example, St. Augustine’s commentary on Psalm 18 where he uses the Latin phrase *Totus Christus* to describe Christ and the Church: “Christ, then, and the Church, that is, whole Christ, the Head and the Body” (Exp. Ps. 18, 2)

Christ is not the Head of the Church the way that, for example, the President is the head of the executive branch of government or that Bill Gates is the head of Microsoft; rather, He is the Head in the way that the husband is head of the wife, and the both of them together in unity are one flesh. St. Paul makes this clear when he teaches that “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (Eph. 5:23). St. Paul called the union of Christ with His Church “a great mystery” (Eph. 5:32).

Scripture Verses Attesting to the Oneness of Christ with His Church

- “Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’” (Acts 9:3-5).
- “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).
- “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).
- “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (I Corinthians 12:27).
- “That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21).
- “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14:20).

Visible & Invisible

The Church is much more than just the visible, hierarchical form that we see. But neither is it a spiritual, invisible body alone, as Martin Luther and the Protestants taught. The Church is both the mystical Body of Christ and a hierarchical society, both a visible organization and a spiritual community, both an earthly Church and a Church endowed with heavenly riches. These aspects of the Church are “one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element (CCC 771). Pope Leo XIII taught that “When one visualizes the ultimate purpose of the Church and the proximate causes effecting sanctity, she is, in fact, spiritual. But when one

considers the members of the Church and the means which lead to the spiritual gifts, the she is externally and necessarily visible” (Leo XIII, *Satis Cognitum*, 1896). The invisible aspect of the Church is comprised of all of the saints and angels in heaven (the Church Triumphant), all of the members suffering in Purgatory (the Church Suffering) and all of the elect here on earth working out their salvation (the Church Militant). The entire body, with Christ as the Head, comprises the *Totus Christus*, the City of God, as taught by St. Augustine:

“Therefore the true order of the Creed demanded that the Church should be made subordinate to the Trinity, as the house to Him who dwells in it, the temple to God who occupies it, and the city to its builder. And we are here to understand the whole Church, not that part of it only which wanders as a stranger on the earth, praising the name of God from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same... but that part also which has always from its creation remained steadfast to God in heaven, and has never experienced the misery consequent upon a fall. This part is made up of the holy angels, who enjoy uninterrupted happiness; and (as it is bound to do) it renders assistance to the part which is still wandering among strangers: for these two parts shall be one in the fellowship of eternity, and now they are one in the bonds of love, the whole having been ordained for the worship of the one God...God, then, dwells in His temple: not the Holy Spirit only, but the Father also, and the Son, who says of His own body, through which He was made Head of the Church upon earth (“that in all things He might have the pre-eminence). The temple of God, then, that is, of the Supreme Trinity as a whole, is the Holy Church, embracing in its full extent both heaven and earth.”

St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, Chapter 56

The visible Church, on the other hand, constitutes those who are incorporated into her by baptism and are in communion with the visible head of the Church on earth, the Bishop of Rome. The sign of visible unity of the local church is the Bishop; local churches preserve their unity by communion with the head of the universal Church, the Bishop of Rome.

Nevertheless, not all members of the visible Church will necessarily go to heaven, for “narrow is the way that leads to life” and “broad is the path that leads to destruction” (Matt. 7:13-14). There are many who are in the Church who remain in it (through their own fault) in body but not in heart. On earth, it is impossible to say anything with regards to the eternal destiny of any person, but at the Second Coming Christ will harvest His Church and separate the wheat from the tares (Matt. 13:24-30).

Marks of the Church

Both the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed profess faith in “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” These four terms are referred to as the marks of the Church and distinguish the Catholic Church from every other Christian body. They are the characteristics of the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church alone preserves them in all of their fullness (see *Lumen Gentium* 8).

*The Church Is **One***

The unity of the Church is a supernatural unity possessed by virtue of Christ's unity with the Father (see John 17:21). The unity is both a unity of supernatural charity and of doctrine. The Church is One because she believes the one doctrine handed on to her by the Apostles. As St. Paul said: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6). Integration into the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is inseparable from incorporation into Christ, as St. Cyprian said: "There is one God, and Christ in one, and there is one church, and one episcopate...he can no longer have God for his Father who has not The Church for his mother" (*Unity of the Catholic Church*, 6).

"It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church's unity." Unity is of the essence of the Church. (CCC 813)

What are these bonds of unity? Above all, charity "binds everything together in perfect harmony." But the unity of the pilgrim Church is also assured by visible bonds of communion:

- profession of one faith received from the Apostles;
- common celebration of divine worship, especially of the sacraments;
- apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders, maintaining the fraternal concord of God's family.

-CCC 815

*The Church Is **Holy***

The Church is called holy not because every one of her members individually is holy, but because Christ, who is unfailingly holy, has united Himself to Her and in her resides the fullness of grace and all of the means of salvation given to man. Mary, the "all-holy," is the exemplar of the Church.

823 "The Church . . . is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as 'alone holy,' loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her; he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God." The Church, then, is "the holy People of God," and her members are called "saints."

824 United with Christ, the Church is sanctified by him; through him and with him she becomes sanctifying. "All the activities of the Church are directed, as toward their end, to the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God." It is in the Church that "the fullness of the means of salvation" has been deposited. It is in her that "by the grace of God we acquire holiness."

825 "The Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real though imperfect." In her members perfect holiness is something yet to be acquired: "Strengthened by so many and

such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state - though each in his own way - are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect.”

The Church Is Catholic

The word “catholic” means “universal.” 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,” taught St. Ignatius of Antioch. 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” which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession. Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been given a mission to all mankind.

In addition to this, each local church is catholic. Local churches are catholic by virtue of their organization around a bishop, their participation in sacramental life administered by a valid priesthood, and their communion with the Church of Rome.

The Church Is Apostolic

The phrase “apostolic” has several meanings. First, it means that the Church was founded by the Apostles by the mandate of Christ; second, that it faithfully hands on the teaching of the Apostles without error, and third, that in the person of the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, the Church continues to be guided by them. Thus, Protestant Churches, for example cannot be said to be apostolic because they have not preserved Apostolic Succession. Though the Eastern Christians have valid apostolic succession, they have not maintained their union with the Bishop of Rome. Therefore, only the Catholic Church is apostolic in the fullest sense of the word.

Relationship with Israel

In recent years, there has been much written on the relationship between the Catholic Church of the New Covenant and the Israelites, the chosen people of the Old Covenant. Some have asserted that God has nullified the Old Testament when He inaugurated the New; others say that the Old Testament is still a valid means of salvation to the Jews. What is the proper understanding of the Church’s relationship to the chosen people of the Old Testament?

Here is how we can look at this:

- The rituals of the Old Testament were never salvific for the Jews, even in Old Testament times (Heb. 10:4).
- The rituals were given for signs to prefigure to coming of the Messiah who, with the New Covenant, would inaugurate a new economy of signs (sacraments) that were actually able to effect what they symbolized. “The law was our custodian until Christ came” (Gal. 3:24).

- Jews who were saved under the Old Covenant, though God used the rituals of the law to save them, were not saved *because* of the rituals but because of the anticipated merits of Christ's crucifixion, which were applied to the rituals carried out in faith.
- The New Covenant was not to abolish the Old, but to interiorize it and make the promises (and moral mandates) of the Old Covenant attainable (Jer. 31:31-34). Thus the Old Covenant is taken up and transformed into the New.
- Christ taught that He came to fulfill the Old Law, not to abolish it (Matt. 5:17).
- In inaugurating the New Covenant, Christ extends it beyond Judaism to all peoples, who are now able to be "grafted into" God's family. Thus, the Gentiles are now part of Israel (Rom. 11:11-24).
- With the fulfilling of the Old Covenant, the merely preparatory rituals of the Old Covenant are no longer needed: "In speaking of the new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13).
- It is indeed impossible today to keep the Old Covenant, since to keep it requires sacrifice at the Temple of Jerusalem, which has not stood since the year 70 AD.
- The New Testament Church, made up of all nations, is the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). Not in the sense that they are a "new" Israel, but in that they are the fulfillment and unfolding of everything the old Israel was ever meant to be.

The main thing to remember is that the Church and Judaism are not two separate ways to salvation; Christ alone is the Way, and He perfectly fulfills the Old Covenant. There is no salvation except through Christ. Persons still clinging to the signs of the Old Covenant are like people sitting contently watching commercials for turkey on television while ignoring the real Thanksgiving dinner on the table.

In Statu Viae ("In a state of journeying")

Until the coming of Christ, when He will "clear His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His granary, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17), the Church continues on in a state of journeying, "afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8-9) until such a time when it, like the rock seen in a vision by the prophet Daniel, will "become a great mountain and fill the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35). At the Second Coming, when Christ gathers His people to Himself, every obstacle between complete union between God and His Church will be removed, "so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28) and the Church will reign with Christ throughout eternity. This union of Christ and the Church is mystically participated in every time we attend Mass, where "the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'" (Rev. 22:17).

For Further Reading: St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*; St. Cyprian, Epistle 43; St. Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope & Love*; Ps. 110; Malachi 1:11; Matt. 13:24-30, 16:13-19; Eph. 4:4-6, 5:21-33; Pope Leo XIII, *Satis Cognitum*, (1896); *Lamentabili Sane* of Pope St. Pius X, art. 52. 55. 56; Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 8; *Mystici Corporis* of Pope Pius XII; www.newadvent.org article under heading "Church"; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 811-870