

ARTICLE 9

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

748 “Christ is the light of humanity; and it is, accordingly, the heart-felt desire of this sacred Council, being gathered together in the Holy Spirit, that, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature, it may bring to all men that light of Christ which shines out visibly from the Church.”¹³⁵ These words open the Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. By choosing this starting point, the Council demonstrates that the article of faith about the Church depends entirely on the articles concerning Christ Jesus. The Church has no other light than Christ’s; according to a favorite image of the Church Fathers, the Church is like the moon, all its light reflected from the sun.

749 The article concerning the Church also depends entirely on the article about the Holy Spirit, which immediately precedes it. “Indeed, having shown that the Spirit is the source and giver of all holiness, we now confess that it is he who has endowed the Church with holiness.”¹³⁶ The Church is, in a phrase used by the Fathers, the place “where the Spirit flourishes.”¹³⁷

750 To believe that the Church is “holy” and “catholic,” and that she is “one” and “apostolic” (as the Nicene Creed adds), is inseparable from belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the Apostles’ Creed we profess “one Holy Church” (*Credo . . . Ecclesiam*), and not to believe *in* the Church, so as not to confuse God with his works and to attribute clearly to God’s goodness *all* the gifts he has bestowed on his Church.¹³⁸

Paragraph 1. The Church in God’s Plan

I. NAMES AND IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

751 The word “Church” (Latin *ecclesia*, from the Greek *ek-kalein*, to “call out of”) means a convocation or an assembly. It designates the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose.¹³⁹ *Ekklesia* is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the Chosen People before God, above all for

135 LG 1; cf. Mk 16:15.

136 *Roman Catechism* I, 10, 1.

137 St. Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 35: SCh 11, 118.

138 *Roman Catechism* I, 10, 22.

139 Cf. Acts 19:39.

their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the Law and was established by God as his holy people.¹⁴⁰ By calling itself "Church," the first community of Christian believers recognized itself as heir to that assembly. In the Church, God is "calling together" his people from all the ends of the earth. The equivalent Greek term *Kyriak*, from which the English word *Church* and the German *Kirche* are derived, means "what belongs to the Lord."

752 In Christian usage, the word "church" designates the liturgical assembly,¹⁴¹ but also the local community¹⁴² or the whole
1140, 832 universal community of believers.¹⁴³ These three meanings are
830 inseparable. "The Church" is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body.

Symbols of the Church

753 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
781, 789 Testament, all these images find a new center because Christ has become the head of this people, which henceforth is his Body.¹⁴⁴ Around this center are grouped images taken "from the life of the shepherd or from cultivation of the land, from the art of building or from family life and marriage."¹⁴⁵

857 754 "The Church is, accordingly, a *sheepfold*, the sole and necessary gateway to which is Christ. It is also the flock of which God himself foretold that he would be the shepherd, and whose sheep, even though governed by human shepherds, are unfailingly nourished and led by Christ himself, the Good Shepherd and Prince of Shepherds, who gave his life for his sheep."¹⁴⁶

140 Cf. Ex 19.

141 Cf. 1 Cor 11:18; 14:19, 28, 34, 35.

142 Cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 16:1.

143 Cf. 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13; Phil 3:6.

144 Cf. Eph 1:22; Col 1:18; LG 9.

145 LG 6.

146 LG 6; cf. Jn 10:1-10; Isa 40:11; Ezek 34:11-31; Jn 10:11; 1 Pet 5:4; Jn 10:11-16.

755 "The Church is a *cultivated field*, the tillage of God. On that land the ancient olive tree grows whose holy roots were the prophets and in which the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles has been brought about and will be brought about again. That land, like a choice vineyard, has been planted by the heavenly cultivator. Yet the true vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us, who through the Church remain in Christ, without whom we can do nothing.¹⁴⁷ 795

756 "Often, too, the Church is called the *building* of God. The Lord compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the corner-stone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles and from it the Church receives solidity and unity. This edifice has many names to describe it: the house of God in which his *family* dwells; the household of God in the Spirit; the dwelling-place of God among men; and, especially, the holy *temple*. This temple, symbolized in places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the Fathers and, not without reason, is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. As living stones we here on earth are built into it. It is this holy city that is seen by John as it comes down out of heaven from God when the world is made anew, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.¹⁴⁸ 797 857 1045

757 "The Church, further, which is called 'that Jerusalem which is above' and 'our mother,' is described as the spotless spouse of the spotless lamb. It is she whom Christ 'loved and for whom he delivered himself up that he might sanctify her.' It is she whom he unites to himself by an unbreakable alliance, and whom he constantly 'nourishes and cherishes.'¹⁴⁹ 507, 796 1616

II. THE CHURCH'S ORIGIN, FOUNDATION, AND MISSION

758 We begin our investigation of the Church's mystery by meditating on her origin in the Holy Trinity's plan and her progressive realization in history. 257

A plan born in the Father's heart

759 "The eternal Father, in accordance with the utterly gratuitous and mysterious design of his wisdom and goodness, created the whole universe and chose to raise up men to share in his own divine life,"¹⁵⁰ to which he calls all men in his Son. "The Father . . . determined to call together in a holy Church those who should believe in Christ."¹⁵¹ This "family of God" is gradually formed and takes shape during the stages of human history, in keeping with the Father's plan. In fact, "already present in figure at the beginning 293 1655

147 LG 6; cf. 1 Cor 3:9; Rom 11:13-26; Mt 21:33-43 and parallels; Isa 5:1-7; Jn 15:1-5.

148 LG 6; cf. 1 Cor 3:9; Mt 21:42 and parallels; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7; Ps 118:22; 1 Cor 3:11; 1 Tim 3:15; Eph 2:19-22; Rev 21:3; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 21:1-2.

149 LG 6; cf. Gal 4:26; Rev 12:17; 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17; Eph 5:25-26, 29.

150 LG 2.

151 LG 2.

of the world, this Church was prepared in marvellous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and the old Alliance. Established in this last age of the world and made manifest in the outpouring of the Spirit, it will be brought to glorious completion at the end of time."¹⁵²

The Church—foreshadowed from the world's beginning

760 Christians of the first centuries said, "The world was created for the sake of the Church."¹⁵³ God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought
294 about by the "convocation" of men in Christ, and this "convocation" is the Church. The Church is the goal of all things,¹⁵⁴ and God permitted such painful upheavals as the angels' fall and man's sin
309 only as occasions and means for displaying all the power of his arm and the whole measure of the love he wanted to give the world:

Just as God's will is creation and is called "the world," so his intention is the salvation of men, and it is called "the Church."¹⁵⁵

The Church—prepared for in the Old Covenant

761 The gathering together of the People of God began at the moment when sin destroyed the communion of men with God, and that of men among themselves. The gathering together of the Church
55 is, as it were, God's reaction to the chaos provoked by sin. This reunification is achieved secretly in the heart of all peoples: "In every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable" to God.¹⁵⁶

762 The remote *preparation* for this gathering together of the People of God begins when he calls Abraham and promises that he
122, 522 will become the father of a great people.¹⁵⁷ Its immediate preparation
60 begins with Israel's election as the People of God. By this election, Israel is to be the sign of the future gathering of all nations.¹⁵⁸ But the prophets accuse Israel of breaking the covenant
64 and behaving like a prostitute. They announce a new and eternal covenant. "Christ instituted this New Covenant."¹⁵⁹

152 LG 2.

153 *Pastor Hermæ*, Vision 2, 4, 1: PG 2, 899; cf. Aristides, *Apol.* 16, 6; St. Justin, *Apol.* 2, 7: PG 6, 456; Tertullian, *Apol.* 31, 3; 32, 1: PL 1, 508-509.

154 Cf. St. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 1, 1, 5: PG 41, 181C.

155 Clement of Alex., *Pæd.* 1, 6, 27: PG 8, 281.

156 Acts 10:35; cf. LG 9; 13; 16.

157 Cf. Gen 12:2; 15:5-6.

158 Cf. Ex 19:5-6; Deut 7:6; Isa 2:2-5; Mic 4:1-4.

159 LG 9; cf. Hos 1; Isa 1:2-4; Jer 2; 31:31-34; Isa 55:3.

The Church—instituted by Christ Jesus

763 It was the Son's task to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation in the fullness of time. Its accomplishment was the reason for his being sent.¹⁶⁰ "The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures."¹⁶¹ To fulfill the Father's will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church "is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery."¹⁶² 541

764 "This Kingdom shines out before men in the word, in the works and in the presence of Christ."¹⁶³ To welcome Jesus' word is to welcome "the Kingdom itself."¹⁶⁴ The seed and beginning of the Kingdom are the "little flock" of those whom Jesus came to gather around him, the flock whose shepherd he is.¹⁶⁵ They form Jesus' true family.¹⁶⁶ To those whom he thus gathered around him, he taught a new "way of acting" and a prayer of their own.¹⁶⁷ 543 1691 2558

765 The Lord Jesus endowed his community with a structure that will remain until the Kingdom is fully achieved. Before all else there is the choice of the Twelve with Peter as their head.¹⁶⁸ Representing the twelve tribes of Israel, they are the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem.¹⁶⁹ The Twelve and the other disciples share in Christ's mission and his power, but also in his lot.¹⁷⁰ By all his actions, Christ prepares and builds his Church. 610 551

766 The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. "The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus."¹⁷¹ "For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the 'wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.'"¹⁷² As Eve was 813, 860 1340 617 478

160 Cf. LG 3; AG 3.

161 LG 5.

162 LG 3.

163 LG 5.

164 LG 5.

165 Lk 12:32; cf. Mt 10:16; 26:31; Jn 10:1-21.

166 Cf. Mt 12:49.

167 Cf. Mt 5-6.

168 Cf. Mk 3:14-15.

169 Cf. Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30; Rev 21:12-14.

170 Cf. Mk 6:7; Lk 10:1-2; Mt 10:25; Jn 15:20.

171 LG 3; cf. Jn 19:34.

172 SC 5.

formed from the sleeping Adam's side, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross.¹⁷³

The Church—revealed by the Holy Spirit

767 "When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on
 earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of
 731 Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the
 Church."¹⁷⁴ Then "the Church was openly displayed to the crowds
 and the spread of the Gospel among the nations, through preach-
 ing, was begun."¹⁷⁵ As the "convocation" of all men for salvation,
 849 the Church in her very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to all
 the nations to make disciples of them.¹⁷⁶

768 So that she can fulfill her mission, the Holy Spirit "bestows
 upon [the Church] varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in
 this way directs her."¹⁷⁷ Henceforward the Church, endowed with
 the gifts of her founder and faithfully observing his precepts of
 charity, humility and self-denial, receives the mission of proclaiming
 and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God,
 541 and she is on earth the seed and the beginning of that kingdom."¹⁷⁸

The Church—perfected in glory

769 "The Church . . . will receive its perfection only in the glory
 of heaven,"¹⁷⁹ at the time of Christ's glorious return. Until that day,
 671, 2818 "the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's
 persecutions and God's consolations."¹⁸⁰ Here below she knows
 that she is in exile far from the Lord, and longs for the full coming
 675 of the Kingdom, when she will "be united in glory with her
 king."¹⁸¹ The Church, and through her the world, will not be
 perfected in glory without great trials. Only then will "all the just
 from the time of Adam, 'from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect,'
 1045 . . . be gathered together in the universal Church in the Father's
 presence."¹⁸²

173 Cf. St. Ambrose, *In Luc.* 2, 85-89: PL 15, 1666-1668.

174 LG 4; cf. *Jn* 17:4.

175 AG 4.

176 Cf. *Mt* 28:19-20; AG 2; 5-6.

177 LG 4.

178 LG 5.

179 LG 48.

180 St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei*, 18, 51: PL 41, 614; cf. LG 8.

181 LG 5; cf. 6; 2 *Cor* 5:6.

182 LG 2.

Paragraph 3. The Church Is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic

811 "This is the sole Church of Christ, which in the Creed we
 profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic."²⁵⁶ These four
 750 characteristics, inseparably linked with each other,²⁵⁷ indicate es-
 sential features of the Church and her mission. The Church does
 832, 865 not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy
 Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and it
 is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities.

812 Only faith can recognize that the Church possesses these
 properties from her divine source. But their historical manifesta-
 156, 770 tions are signs that also speak clearly to human reason. As the First
 Vatican Council noted, the "Church herself, with her marvellous
 propagation, eminent holiness, and inexhaustible fruitfulness in
 everything good, her catholic unity and invincible stability, is a
 great and perpetual motive of credibility and an irrefutable witness
 of her divine mission."²⁵⁸

I. THE CHURCH IS ONE

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

813 *The Church is one because of her source:* "the highest exemplar
 and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of
 172 one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit."²⁵⁹ The Church
 766 *is one because of her founder:* for "the Word made flesh, the prince of
 peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross, . . . restoring the unity
 797 of all in one people and one body."²⁶⁰ The Church is one *because of*
her "soul": "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."²⁶¹ Unity is of the essence of the Church:

What an astonishing mystery! There is one Father of the
 universe, one Logos of the universe, and also one Holy Spirit,

256 LG 8.

257 Cf. DS 2888.

258 Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius* 3: DS 3013.

259 UR 2 § 5.

260 GS 78 § 3.

261 UR 2 § 2.

everywhere one and the same; there is also one virgin become mother, and I should like to call her "Church."²⁶²

814 From the beginning, this one Church has been marked by a great *diversity* which comes from both the variety of God's gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Within the unity of 791, 873 the People of God, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures is gathered together. Among the Church's members, there are different gifts, offices, conditions, and ways of life. "Holding a rightful place 1202 in the communion of the Church there are also particular Churches that retain their own traditions."²⁶³ The great richness of such diversity is not opposed to the Church's unity. Yet sin and the 832 burden of its consequences constantly threaten the gift of unity. And so the Apostle has to exhort Christians to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."²⁶⁴

815 What are these bonds of unity? Above all, charity "binds 1827 everything together in perfect harmony."²⁶⁵ But the unity of the 830, 837 pilgrim Church is also assured by visible bonds of communion: 173

— 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.²⁶⁶

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."²⁶⁷

The Second Vatican Council's *Decree on Ecumenism* explains: 830
 "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."²⁶⁸

262 St. Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1, 6, 42: PG 8, 300.

263 LG 13 § 2.

264 Eph 4:3.

265 Col 3:14.

266 Cf. UR 2; LG 14; CIC, can. 205.

267 LG 8 § 2.

268 UR 3 § 5.

Wounds to unity

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.”²⁶⁹ The ruptures that wound the unity of Christ’s Body—here we must distinguish
2089 heresy, apostasy, and schism²⁷⁰—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.²⁷¹

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
1271 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.”²⁷²

819 “Furthermore, many elements of sanctification and of truth”²⁷³ 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.”²⁷⁴ 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,²⁷⁵ and are in themselves calls to “Catholic unity.”²⁷⁶

269 UR 3 § 1.

270 Cf. CIC, can. 751.

271 Origen, *Hom. in Ezech.* 9, 1: PG 13, 732.

272 UR 3 § 1.

273 LG 8 § 2.

274 UR 3 § 2; cf. LG 15.

275 Cf. UR 3.

276 Cf. LG 8.

Toward unity

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.”²⁷⁷ 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 2748 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.”²⁷⁸ The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit.²⁷⁹

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;²⁸⁰

— *conversion of heart* as the faithful “try to live holier lives according to the Gospel”;²⁸¹ for it is the unfaithfulness of the members to Christ’s gift 827 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;’”²⁸² 2791

— *fraternal knowledge of each other*;²⁸³

— *ecumenical formation* of the faithful and especially of priests;²⁸⁴

— *dialogue* among theologians and meetings among Christians of the different churches and communities;²⁸⁵

— *collaboration* among Christians in various areas of service to mankind.²⁸⁶ “Human service” is the idiomatic phrase.

277 UR 4 § 3.

278 Jn 17:21; cf. Heb 7:25.

279 Cf. UR 1.

280 Cf. UR 6.

281 UR 7 § 3.

282 UR 8 § 1.

283 Cf. UR 9.

284 Cf. UR 10.

285 Cf. UR 4; 9; 11.

286 Cf. UR 12.

822 Concern for achieving unity “involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike.”²⁸⁷ 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.”²⁸⁸

II. THE CHURCH IS HOLY

823 “The Church . . . is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfail-
ingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, who with the
459 Father and the Spirit is hailed as ‘alone holy,’ loved the Church as
796 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.”²⁸⁹ The Church, then, is “the holy
946 People of God,”²⁹⁰ and her members are called “saints.”²⁹¹

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.”²⁹² It is in the Church that “the fullness of the means of salvation”²⁹³ has
816 been deposited. It is in her that “by the grace of God we acquire holiness.”²⁹⁴

825 “The Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real though imperfect.”²⁹⁵ In her members perfect holiness
670 is something yet to be acquired: “Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their
2013 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.”²⁹⁶

1827, 2658 826 Charity is the soul of the holiness to which all are called: it “governs, shapes, and perfects all the means of sanctification.”²⁹⁷

287 UR 5.

288 UR 24 § 2.

289 LG 39; cf. *Eph* 5:25-26.

290 LG 12.

291 *Acts* 9:13; *1 Cor* 6:1; 16:1.

292 SC 10.

293 UR 3 § 5.

294 LG 48.

295 LG 48 § 3.

296 LG 11 § 3.

297 LG 42.

If the Church was a body composed of different members, it couldn't lack the noblest of all; *it must have a Heart, and a Heart BURNING WITH LOVE*. And I realized that *this love alone* was the true motive force which enabled the other members of the Church to act; if it ceased to function, the Apostles would forget to preach the gospel, the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. LOVE, IN FACT, IS THE VOCATION WHICH INCLUDES ALL OTHERS; IT'S A UNIVERSE OF ITS OWN, COMPRISING ALL TIME AND SPACE—IT'S ETERNAL!²⁹⁸

864

827 "Christ, 'holy, innocent, and undefiled,' knew nothing of sin, but came only to expiate the sins of the people. The Church, however, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always 1425-1429 in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and 821 renewal."²⁹⁹ All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners.³⁰⁰ In everyone, the weeds of sin will still be mixed with the good wheat of the Gospel until the end of time.³⁰¹ Hence the Church gathers sinners already caught up in Christ's salvation but still on the way to holiness:

The Church is therefore holy, though having sinners in her midst, because she herself has no other life but the life of grace. If they live her life, her members are sanctified; if they move away from her life, they fall into sins and disorders that prevent the radiation of her sanctity. This is why she suffers and does penance for those offenses, of which she has the power to free her children through the blood of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁰²

828 By *canonizing* some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of 1173 holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors.³⁰³ "The saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church's history."³⁰⁴ Indeed, "holiness is the 2045 hidden source and infallible measure of her apostolic activity and missionary zeal."³⁰⁵

298 St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Autobiography of a Saint*, tr. Ronald Knox (London: Harvill, 1958) 235.

299 LG 8 § 3; cf. UR 3; 6; Heb 2:17; 7:26; 2 Cor 5:21.

300 Cf. 1 Jn 1:8-10.

301 Cf. Mt 13:24-30.

302 Paul VI, CPG § 19.

303 Cf. LG 40; 48-51.

304 John Paul II, CL 16, 3.

305 CL 17, 3.

829 "But while in the most Blessed Virgin the Church has
 1172 already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or
 972 wrinkle, the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in
 holiness. And so they turn their eyes to Mary":³⁰⁶ in her, the
 Church is already the "all-holy."

III. THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC

What does "catholic" mean?

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
 795 her. "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church."³⁰⁷
 815-816 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"³⁰⁸ which he has willed: correct and complete confes-
 sion of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apos-
 tolic succession. The Church was, in this fundamental sense,
 catholic on the day of Pentecost³⁰⁹ and will always be so until the
 day of the Parousia.

831 Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent
 849 out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race.³¹⁰

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
 360 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
 518 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.³¹¹

306 LG 65; cf. Eph 5:26-27.

307 St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Smyrn.* 8, 2: *Apostolic Fathers*, II/2, 311.

308 UR 3; AG 6; Eph 1:22-23.

309 Cf. AG 4.

310 Cf. Mt 28:19.

311 LG 13 §§ 1-2; cf. Jn 11:52.

Each particular Church is "catholic"

832 "The Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately 814
organized local groups of the faithful, which, in so far as they are 811
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."³¹²

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.³¹³ These particular Churches "are consti- 886
tuted after the model of the universal Church; it is in these and
formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church
exists."³¹⁴

834 Particular Churches are fully catholic through their com-
munion with one of them, the Church of Rome "which presides in
charity."³¹⁵ "For with this church, by reason of its pre-eminence, 882, 1369
the whole Church, that is the faithful everywhere, must necessarily
be in accord."³¹⁶ 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."³¹⁷

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 puts 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."³¹⁸ 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 1202
undivided Church."³¹⁹

312 LG 26.

313 Cf. CD 11; CIC, cann. 368-369; CCEO, cann. 177, 1; 178; 311, 1; 312.

314 LG 23.

315 St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Rom.* 1, 1: *Apostolic Fathers*, II/2, 192; cf. LG 13.

316 St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 3, 2: PG 7/1, 849; cf. Vatican Council I: DS 3057.

317 St. Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theo.*: PG 91:137-140.

318 Paul VI, *EN* 62.

319 LG 23.

Who belongs to the Catholic Church?

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
 831 Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all
 mankind, called by God’s grace to salvation.”³²⁰

837 “Fully incorporated into the society of the Church are
 those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of
 771 salvation given to the Church together with her entire organiza-
 815 tion, 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 perse-
 882 vere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the
 Church, but ‘in body’ not ‘in heart.’”³²¹

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
 818 profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity
 or communion under the successor of Peter.”³²² Those “who be-
 lieve in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain,
 1271 although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.”³²³
With the Orthodox Churches, this communion is so profound “that
 it lacks little to attain the fullness that would permit a common
 1399 celebration of the Lord’s Eucharist.”³²⁴

The Church and non-Christians

856 839 “Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related
 to the People of God in various ways.”³²⁵

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,³²⁶
 63 “to whom the Lord our God spoke first.”³²⁷ The Jewish faith, unlike
 147 other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God’s reve-

320 LG 13.

321 LG 14.

322 LG 15.

323 UR 3.

324 Paul VI, Discourse, December 14, 1975; cf. UR 13-18.

325 LG 16.

326 Cf. NA 4.

327 *Roman Missal*, Good Friday 13: General Intercessions, VI.

lation 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";³²⁸ "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."³²⁹

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. 674 597

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."³³⁰

842 *The Church's bond with non-Christian religions* is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race: 360

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

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."³³² 28 856

844 In their religious behavior, however, men also display the limits and errors that disfigure the image of God in them: 29

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,

328 Rom 9:4-5.

329 Rom 11:29.

330 LG 16; cf. NA 3.

331 NA 1.

332 LG 16; cf. NA 2; EN 53.

living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair.³³³

845 To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin,
the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his
30 Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must
953 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."
1219 According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves from the flood.³³⁴

"Outside the Church there is no salvation"

846 How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers?³³⁵ Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body:

161, 1257 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.³³⁶

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.³³⁷

848 "Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to
1260 that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church

333 LG 16; cf. *Rom* 1:21, 25.

334 St. Augustine, *Serm.* 96, 7, 9: PL 38, 588; St. Ambrose, *De virg.* 18, 118: PL 16, 297B; cf. already 1 *Pet* 3:20-21.

335 Cf. Cyprian, *Ep.* 73.21: PL 3, 1169; *De unit.:* PL 4, 509-536.

336 LG 14; cf. *Mk* 16:16; *Jn* 3:5.

337 LG 16; cf. DS 3866-3872.

still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men."³³⁸

Mission—a requirement of the Church's catholicity

849 *The missionary mandate.* "Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men".³³⁹ "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; and Lo, I am with you always, until the close of the age."³⁴⁰ 738, 767

850 *The origin and purpose of mission.* The Lord's missionary mandate is ultimately grounded in the eternal love of the Most Holy Trinity: "The Church on earth is by her nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, she has as her origin the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit."³⁴¹ The ultimate purpose of mission is none other than to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of love.³⁴² 257 730

851 *Missionary motivation.* It is from God's love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigor of her missionary dynamism, "for the love of Christ urges us on."³⁴³ Indeed, God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth";³⁴⁴ that is, God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the prompting of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth. Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary. 221, 429 74, 217 2104 890

852 *Missionary paths.* The Holy Spirit is the protagonist, "the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission."³⁴⁵ It is he who leads the Church on her missionary paths. "This mission 2044 2473

338 AG 7; cf. Heb 11:6; 1 Cor 9:16.

339 AG 1; cf. Mk 16:15.

340 Mt 28:19-20.

341 AG 2.

342 Cf. John Paul II, *RMiss* 23.

343 2 Cor 5:14; cf. AA 6; *RMiss* 11.

344 1 Tim 2:4.

345 John Paul II, *RMiss* 21.

continues and, in the course of history, unfolds the mission of Christ, who was sent to evangelize the poor; so the Church, urged on by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ himself walked, a way of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice even to death, a death from which he emerged victorious by his resurrection."³⁴⁶ So it is that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians."³⁴⁷

853 On her pilgrimage, the Church has also experienced the "discrepancy existing between the message she proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted."³⁴⁸ Only by taking the "way of penance and renewal," the "narrow way of the cross," can the
1428 People of God extend Christ's reign.³⁴⁹ For "just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to
2443 follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to men."³⁵⁰

854 By her very mission, "the Church . . . travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world: she is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God."³⁵¹ Missionary endeavor requires *patience*. It begins with the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples
2105 and groups who do not yet believe in Christ,³⁵² continues with the establishment of Christian communities that are "a sign of God's presence in the world,"³⁵³ and leads to the foundation of local churches.³⁵⁴ It must
1204 involve a process of inculturation if the Gospel is to take flesh in each people's culture.³⁵⁵ There will be times of defeat. "With regard to individuals, groups, and peoples it is only by degrees that [the Church] touches and penetrates them, and so receives them into a fullness which is Catholic."³⁵⁶

855 The Church's mission stimulates efforts *towards Christian unity*.³⁵⁷ Indeed, "divisions among Christians prevent the Church from
821 realizing in practice the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her sons who, though joined to her by Baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her. Furthermore, the Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all its aspects."³⁵⁸

346 AG 5.

347 Tertullian, *Apol.* 50, 13: PL 1, 603.

348 GS 43 § 6.

349 LG 8 § 3; 15; AG 1 § 3; cf. *RMiss* 12-20.

350 LG 8 § 3.

351 GS 40 § 2.

352 Cf. *RMiss* 42-47.

353 AG 15 § 1.

354 Cf. *RMiss* 48-49.

355 Cf. *RMiss* 52-54.

356 AG 6 § 2.

357 Cf. *RMiss* 50.

358 UR 4 § 8.

856 The missionary task implies a *respectful dialogue* with those who do not yet accept the Gospel.³⁵⁹ Believers can profit from this dialogue by learning to appreciate better “those elements of truth and grace which are 839 found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God.”³⁶⁰ They proclaim the Good News to those who do not know it, in order to consolidate, complete, and raise up the truth and the goodness that God has distributed among men and nations, and to purify them from 843 error and evil “for the glory of God, the confusion of the demon, and the happiness of man.”³⁶¹

IV. THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

857 The Church is apostolic because she is founded on the 75 apostles, in three ways:

— she was and remains built on “the foundation of the Apostles,”³⁶² the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself;³⁶³

— with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and 171 hands on the teaching,³⁶⁴ the “good deposit,” the salutary words she has heard from the apostles;³⁶⁵

— 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 880 of Peter, the Church’s supreme pastor”:³⁶⁶ 1575

For you, eternal Shepherd, do not desert your flock,
but through the blessed Apostles
watch over it and protect it always,
so that it may be governed
by those you have appointed shepherds
to lead it in the name of your Son.³⁶⁷

The Apostles’ mission

858 Jesus is the Father’s Emissary. From the beginning of his ministry, he “called to him those whom he desired; . . . And he 551

359 Cf. *RMiss* 55.

360 *AG* 9.

361 *AG* 9.

362 *Eph* 2:20; *Rev* 21:14.

363 Cf. *Mt* 28:16-20; *Acts* 1:8; *1 Cor* 9:1; *15:7-8*; *Gal* 1:1; etc.

364 Cf. *Acts* 2:42.

365 Cf. *2 Tim* 1:13-14.

366 *AG* 5.

367 *Roman Missal*, Preface I of the Apostles.

appointed twelve, whom also he named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach."³⁶⁸ From then on, they would also be his "emissaries" (Greek *apostoloi*). In them, Christ continues his own mission: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."³⁶⁹
 425, 1086 The apostles' ministry is the continuation of his mission; Jesus said to the Twelve: "he who receives you receives me."³⁷⁰

859 Jesus unites them to the mission he received from the Father. As "the Son can do nothing of his own accord," but receives everything from the Father who sent him, so those whom Jesus sends can do nothing apart from him,³⁷¹ from whom they received both the mandate for their mission and the power to carry it out. Christ's apostles knew that they were called by God as "ministers
 876 of a new covenant," "servants of God," "ambassadors for Christ," "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."³⁷²

860 In the office of the apostles there is one aspect that cannot be transmitted: to be the chosen witnesses of the Lord's Resurrection and so the foundation stones of the Church. But their office also has a permanent aspect. Christ promised to remain with them
 642 always. The divine mission entrusted by Jesus to them "will continue to the end of time, since the Gospel they handed on is the
 765 lasting source of all life for the Church. Therefore, . . . the apostles
 1087 took care to appoint successors."³⁷³

The bishops—successors of the apostles

861 "In order that the mission entrusted to them might be continued after their death, [the apostles] consigned, by will and
 77 testament, as it were, to their immediate collaborators the duty of completing and consolidating the work they had begun, urging them to tend to the whole flock, in which the Holy Spirit had appointed them to shepherd the Church of God. They accordingly
 1087 designated such men and then made the ruling that likewise on their death other proven men should take over their ministry."³⁷⁴

368 Mk 3:13-14.

369 Jn 20:21; cf. 13:20; 17:18.

370 Mt 10:40; cf. Lk 10:16.

371 Jn 5:19, 30; cf. Jn 15:5.

372 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 5:20; 1 Cor 4:1.

373 LG 20; cf. Mt 28:20.

374 LG 20; cf. Acts 20:28; St. Clement of Rome, *Ad Cor.* 42, 44: PG 1, 291-300.

862 “Just as the office which the Lord confided to Peter alone,
as first of the apostles, destined to be transmitted to his successors,
is a permanent one, so also endures the office, which the apostles 880
received, of shepherding the Church, a charge destined to be
exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops.”³⁷⁵ 1556
Hence the Church teaches that “the bishops have by divine insti-
tution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in
such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and
whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent
Christ.”³⁷⁶

The apostolate

863 The whole Church is apostolic, in that she remains,
through the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, in
communion of faith and life with her origin: and in that she is “sent 900
out” into the whole world. All members of the Church share in this
mission, though in various ways. “The Christian vocation is, of its
nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well.” Indeed, we call an 2472
apostolate “every activity of the Mystical Body” that aims “to
spread the Kingdom of Christ over all the earth.”³⁷⁷

864 “Christ, sent by the Father, is the source of the Church’s
whole apostolate”; thus the fruitfulness of apostolate for ordained
ministers as well as for lay people clearly depends on their vital 828
union with Christ.³⁷⁸ In keeping with their vocations, the demands
of the times and the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, the apostolate
assumes the most varied forms. But charity, drawn from the Eucha- 824
rist above all, is always “as it were, the soul of the whole aposto- 1324
late.”³⁷⁹

865 The Church is ultimately *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic* in
her deepest and ultimate identity, because it is in her that “the
Kingdom of heaven,” the “Reign of God,”³⁸⁰ already exists and will 811, 541
be fulfilled at the end of time. The kingdom has come in the person
of Christ and grows mysteriously in the hearts of those incorpo-
rated into him, until its full eschatological manifestation. Then all
those he has redeemed and made “holy and blameless before him
in love,”³⁸¹ will be gathered together as the one People of God, the

375 LG 20 § 2.

376 LG 20 § 2.

377 AA 2.

378 AA 4; cf. Jn 15:5.

379 AA 3.

380 Rev 19:6.

381 Eph 1:4.

"Bride of the Lamb,"³⁸² "the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God."³⁸³ For "the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the *twelve apostles of the Lamb*."³⁸⁴

IN BRIEF

- 866 The Church is one: she acknowledges one Lord, confesses one faith, is born of one Baptism, forms only one Body, is given life by the one Spirit, for the sake of one hope (cf. *Eph* 4:3-5), at whose fulfillment all divisions will be overcome.
 - 867 The Church is holy: the Most Holy God is her author; Christ, her bridegroom, gave himself up to make her holy; the Spirit of holiness gives her life. Since she still includes sinners, she is "the sinless one made up of sinners." Her holiness shines in the saints; in Mary she is already all-holy.
 - 868 The Church is catholic: she proclaims the fullness of the faith. She bears in herself and administers the totality of the means of salvation. She is sent out to all peoples. She speaks to all men. She encompasses all times. She is "missionary of her very nature" (AG 2).
 - 869 The Church is apostolic. She is built on a lasting foundation: "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (*Rev* 21:14). She is indestructible (cf. *Mt* 16:18). She is upheld infallibly in the truth: Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops.
 - 870 "The sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, . . . subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines" (LG 8).
-

382 *Rev* 21:9.

383 *Rev* 21:10-11.

384 *Rev* 21:14.