



THE CHURCH

Names and Images

Texts from the

Catechism of the Catholic Church

NAMES OF THE CHURCH

The meaning of the word “Church”

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.

Ekklesia is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the Chosen People before God, above all for their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the Law and was established by God as his holy people.

By calling itself “Church”, the first community of Christian believers recognised 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 *Kyriake*, from which the English word Church and the German Kirche are derived, means “what belongs to the Lord”. (751)

Three meanings in Christian usage

In Christian usage, the word “Church” designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable.

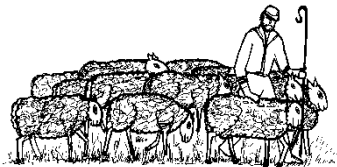
- “The Church” is the People that God gathers in the whole world.
- She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly.
- She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ’s Body. (752)

IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

Basis in Scripture

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 Testament, all these images find a new centre because Christ has become the head of this people, which henceforth is his Body. Around this centre 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”. (Vatican II, the Church) (753)



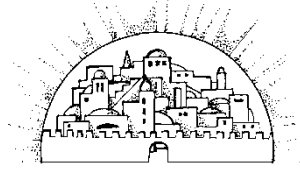
Sheepfold and flock

“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.” (Vat II, the Church) (754)



Cultivated field

“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.” (Vat II, the Church) (755)



Building, family, temple

“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, symbolised 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.” (Vat II, the Church) (756)



Holy city, our mother, the spouse of the spotless lamb

“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’.” (Vat II, the Church) (757)

IN BRIEF

- **The word “Church” means “convocation”. It designates the assembly of those whom God's Word “convokes”, i.e. gathers together to form the People of God, and who themselves, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ. (777)**

