



THE CHURCH

“Go and make disciples of all nations”

Texts from the

Catechism of the Catholic Church

THE CHURCH AND NON-CHRISTIANS

*"Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to
The People of God in various ways."*

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, “the first to hear the Word of God” (Good Friday Liturgy). 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”; “for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom 9:4-5; 11:29). (839)

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.” (Vatican II, the Church) (841)

The Church's bond with non-Christian religions

[This bond] 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...” (Vatican II, Declaration to non-Christian Religions) (842)

The search for the unknown God

The Catholic Church recognises 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” (Vatican II, the Church). (843)

Limits and errors that disfigure the image of God

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

“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.” (Vat II, the Church) (844)

The Church - where humanity rediscovers its unity and salvation

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 barque which “in the full sail of the Lord's cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world” (St Augustine). According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves from the flood. (845)

“OUTSIDE THE CHURCH THERE IS NO SALVATION”

The meaning of this affirmation

How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? 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.” (Vatican II, the Church) (846)

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.” (Vat II, the Church) (847)

“Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelise all men.” (Vatican II, the Missions) (848)



THE CHURCH IS MISSIONARY

The missionary mandate from Christ

“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” (Vat II, the Missions): “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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” (Mt 28:19-20). (849)

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”. 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. (850)

Missionary motivation.

It is from God's love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigour of her missionary dynamism, “for the love of Christ urges us on” ((2 Cor 5:14). Indeed, God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4); 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. (851)

Missionary paths

The Holy Spirit is the protagonist, “the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission”. It is he who leads the Church on her missionary paths. “This mission continues and, in the course of history, unfolds the mission of Christ, who was sent to evangelise 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.” (Vat II, the Missions) So it is that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians” (Tertullian). (852)

IN BRIEF

- **“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.” (Vatican II, the Church) (870)**

