



GOD'S SALVATION: LAW AND GRACE

5. The Church: Mother and Teacher

Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

THE CHURCH, MOTHER AND TEACHER

From the Church we receive the Word of God and the law of Christ

It is in the Church, in communion with all the baptized, that the Christian fulfils his vocation. From the Church he receives the Word of God containing the teachings of “the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). From the Church he receives the grace of the sacraments that sustains him on the “way”. From the Church he learns the *example of holiness* and recognizes its model and source in the all-holy Virgin Mary; he discerns it in the authentic witness of those who live it; he discovers it in the spiritual tradition and long history of the saints who have gone before him and whom the liturgy celebrates in the rhythms of the sanctoral cycle. (2030)

The moral life is spiritual worship.

We “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1), within the Body of Christ that we form and in communion with the offering of his Eucharist. In the liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments, prayer and teaching are conjoined with the grace of Christ to enlighten and nourish Christian activity. As does the whole of the Christian life, the moral life finds its source and summit in the Eucharistic sacrifice. (2031)

MORAL LIFE AND THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH

The Church has the right and duty to teach moral principles

The Church, the “pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), has received this solemn command of Christ from the apostles to announce the saving truth. To the Church belongs the right always and everywhere to announce moral principles, including those pertaining to the social order, and to make judgements on any human affairs to the extent that they are required by the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls. (2032)

Handing on the deposit of Christian moral teaching

The *Magisterium of the Pastors of the Church* in moral matters is ordinarily exercised in catechesis and preaching, with the help of the works of theologians and spiritual authors. Thus from generation to generation, under the aegis and vigilance of the pastors, the “deposit” of Christian moral teaching has been handed on, a deposit composed of a characteristic body of rules, commandments and virtues proceeding from faith in Christ and animated by charity. Alongside the Creed and the *Our Father*, the basis for this catechesis has traditionally been the Decalogue which sets out the principles of moral life valid for all men. (2033)

Authentic teachers with the authority of Christ

The Roman Pontiff and the bishops are “authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people entrusted to them, the faith to be believed and put into practice” (Vatican II). The *ordinary* and universal *Magisterium* of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him teaches the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice, the beatitude to hope for. (2034)

The charism of infallibility includes doctrine and morals

The supreme degree of participation in the authority of Christ is ensured by the charism of *infallibility*. This infallibility extends as far does the deposit of divine Revelation; it also extends to all those elements of doctrine, including morals, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, explained, or observed. (2035)

This authority extends to the precepts of the natural law

The authority of the *Magisterium* extends also to the specific precepts of the *natural law*, because their observance, demanded by the Creator, is necessary for salvation. In recalling the prescriptions of the natural law, the *Magisterium* of the Church exercises an essential part of its prophetic office of proclaiming to men what they truly are and reminding them of what they should be before God. (2036)

The right to be instructed and the duty to observe these instructions

The law of God entrusted to the Church is taught to the faithful as the way of life and truth. The faithful therefore have the *right* to be instructed in the divine saving precepts that purify judgement and, with grace, heal wounded human reason. They have the *duty* of observing the constitutions and decrees conveyed by the legitimate authority of the Church. Even if they concern disciplinary matters, these determinations call for docility in charity. (2037)

The faithful experience life ‘in Christ’

In the work of teaching and applying Christian morality, the Church needs the dedication of pastors, the knowledge of theologians and the contribution of all Christians and men of good will. Faith and the practice of the Gospel provide each person with an experience of life “in Christ”, (Cf. 1 Cor 2:10-15) who enlightens him and makes him able to evaluate the divine and human realities

according to the Spirit of God. Thus the Holy Spirit can use the humblest to enlighten the learned and those in the highest positions. (2038)

Conscience cannot be set against the Magisterium

Ministries should be exercised in a spirit of fraternal service and dedication to the Church, in the name of the Lord. (Cf. Rom 12:8, 11) At the same time the conscience of each person should avoid confining itself to individualistic considerations in its moral judgements of the person's own acts. As far as possible conscience should take account of the good of all, as expressed in the moral law, natural and revealed, and consequently in the law of the Church and in the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium on moral questions. Personal conscience and reason should not be set in opposition to the moral law or the Magisterium of the Church. (2039)

A filial spirit towards the Church

Thus a true *filial spirit toward the Church* can develop among Christians. It is the normal flowering of the baptismal grace which has begotten us in the womb of the Church and made us members of the Body of Christ. In her motherly care, the Church grants us the mercy of God which prevails over all our sins, and is especially at work in the sacrament of reconciliation. With a mother's foresight, she also lavishes on us day after day in her liturgy the nourishment of the Word and Eucharist of the Lord. (2040)

THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

The very necessary minimum of prayer and effort

The precepts of the Church are set in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical life. The obligatory character of these positive laws decreed by the pastoral authorities is meant to guarantee to the faithful the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbour: (2041)

The first precept ("*You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and rest from servile labour*") requires the faithful to sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints; in the first place by participating in the Eucharistic celebration, in which the Christian community is gathered, and by resting from these works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days.

The second precept ("*You shall confess your sins at least once a year*") ensures preparation for the Eucharist by the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, which continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness.

The third precept ("*You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season*") guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord's Body and Blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and centre of the Christian liturgy. (2042)

The fourth precept ("*You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church*") ensures the times of asceticism and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts and help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart.

The fifth precept ("*You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church*"); means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his abilities. (2043)

MORAL LIFE AND MISSIONARY WITNESS

The fidelity of the baptized and the Church's mission to the world

The fidelity of the baptized is a primordial condition for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the *Church's mission in the world*. In order that the message of salvation can show the power of its truth and radiance before men, it must be authenticated by the witness of the life of Christians. "The witness of a Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God" (Vatican II). (2044)

Because they are members of the Body whose Head is Christ, (Cf. Eph 1:22) Christians contribute to building up the Church by the constancy of their convictions and their moral lives. The Church increases, grows and develops through the holiness of her faithful, until "we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13) (2045)

A kingdom of justice, love and peace

By living with the mind of Christ, Christians hasten the coming of the Reign of God, "a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (Roman Missal, Preface of Christ the King). They do not, for all that, abandon their earthly tasks; faithful to their master, they fulfil them with uprightness, patience and love. (2046)

IN BRIEF

- **The moral life is a spiritual worship. Christian activity finds its nourishment in the liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments. (2047)**
- **The precepts of the Church concern the moral and Christian life united with the liturgy and nourished by it. (2048)**
- **The Magisterium of the Pastors of the Church in moral matters is ordinarily exercised in catechesis and preaching, on the basis of the Decalogue which states the principles of moral life valid for every man. (2049)**
- **The Roman Pontiff and the bishops, as authentic teachers, preach to the People of God the faith which is to be believed and applied in moral life. It is also incumbent on them to pronounce on moral questions that fall within the natural law and reason. (2050)**
- **The infallibility of the Magisterium of the Pastors extends to all the elements of doctrine, including moral doctrine, without which the saving truths of the faith cannot be preserved, expounded or observed. (2051)**