



What Catholics Believe



Section 7:

The Holy Catholic Church



To Luke E. Hart, exemplary evangelizer and Supreme Knight from 1953-64, the Knights of Columbus dedicates this Series with affection and gratitude.

*The Knights of Columbus presents
The Luke E. Hart Series
Basic Elements of the Catholic Faith*

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

PART ONE • SECTION SEVEN OF
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

*What does a Catholic believe?
How does a Catholic worship?
How does a Catholic live?*

Based on the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

*by
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A WORD ABOUT THIS SERIES

This booklet is one of a series of 30 that offer a colloquial expression of major elements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope John Paul II, under whose authority the *Catechism* was first released in 1992, urged such versions so that each people and each culture can appropriate its content as its own.

The booklets are not a substitute for the *Catechism*, but are offered only to make its contents more accessible. The series is at times poetic, colloquial, playful, and imaginative; at all times it strives to be faithful to the Faith.

The Catholic Information Service recommends reading at least one Hart series booklet each month to gain a deeper, more mature understanding of the Faith.

PART I: WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE
(THEOLOGY)

SECTION 7: THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. THE CHURCH IS TOTALLY CHRISTOCENTRIC

“[T]he article of faith [in the Creed] 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” (CCC 748).* True ecclesiology is always totally Christocentric.

2. THE CHURCH WAS FOUNDED BY CHRIST

The fundamental reason for being a Catholic is the historical fact that the Catholic Church was founded by Christ, was God’s “invention,” not man’s – unless Christ, her founder, is not God – in which case not just Catholicism but Christianity itself is false. To be a Christian is to believe that “Jesus Christ is Lord.” To acknowledge him as Lord is to obey his will. And he willed the Catholic (“universal”) Church for all his disciples, for all Christians. We are Catholics because we are Christians.

*CCC = *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Many Protestants become Catholics for this reason: they read the “Church Fathers” (earliest Christian writers) and discover that Christ did not establish a Protestant Church that later became Catholic, but the Catholic Church, parts of which later broke away and became Protestant (“*protesting*”).

3. WHY DID CHRIST ESTABLISH THE CHURCH?

Suppose he hadn’t. Suppose he had left it up to us. Suppose the Church was our invention instead of his, only human and not divine. Suppose *we* had to figure out the right doctrine of the Trinity, and the two natures of Christ, and the sacraments, and Mary, and controversial moral issues like contraception and homosexuality and euthanasia. Who then could ever know with certainty the mind and will of God? How could there then be one Church? There would be 20,000 different churches, each teaching its own opinion.

Instead, we have one Church, with divine authority. As the Father gave authority to Christ (John 5:22; Matthew 28:18-20), Christ passed it on to his apostles (Luke 10:16), and they passed it on to the successors they appointed as bishops. After 2000 years of unbroken “apostolic succession,” we Catholics have the immense privilege of knowing the mind and will of God through the teaching authority (“Magisterium”) of the Church visibly incarnated in the bishops. (A very early formula was: “Where the bishop is, there is the Church.”)

4. THE CHURCH’S AUTHORITY

The Church is not a democracy. She is the Body of the Christ who “taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:27).

“Authority” does not mean “power” but “right” – “author’s rights.” The Church has authority only because she is *under*

authority, the authority of her Author and Lord. “No one can give himself the mandate and the mission to proclaim the Gospel. The one sent by the Lord does not speak and act on his own authority, but by virtue of Christ’s authority” (CCC 875).

This authority of the Church, then, is not arrogant but humble, both a) in its *origin*, as *received* from Christ, under Christ; and b) in its *end*, which is to *serve*, as Christ served (see John 16) – if necessary, to the point of martyrdom.

Mother Teresa’s most oft-quoted saying describes these two things, the source of the Church’s authority and her essential mission as well as every Christian’s: “God did not put me on earth to be successful, he put me here to be faithful.”

5. “TRADITION”

The word “tradition” comes from the Latin word *tradere*, meaning to give, to hand over, or hand down. When the Church uses the term “Tradition,” she understands it as referring especially to the teaching of the apostles as a deepening of faith; the communion among the members of the Church that derives from union in faith and gets expressed by care for the poorer members and by holding all goods in common; sharing in the Eucharist; and the many ways in which the Church prayed, especially under the presidency of the apostles, most notably again in the Eucharist (see Acts 2:42). These are the elements that the Church “hands down” from one generation to the next.

6. CHURCH AUTHORITY THE BASIS FOR OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRINITY

The authority of the Church was necessary for us to know the truth of the Trinity. This most distinctively Christian doctrine of all, the one that reveals the nature of God himself, the

nature of ultimate reality, was revealed by God clearly only to the Church. It was not revealed to his chosen people the Jews. It is not clearly defined in the New Testament. God waited to reveal it to the Church.

Scripture contains the data for the doctrine of the Trinity; but that is not enough, for every heretic throughout history has appealed to Scripture too. As a matter of historical fact, it has proved impossible for humanity to know the nature of the true God without the true Church. The dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation (and the two natures of Christ) were in fact derived from the faith of the Catholic Church.

7. CHURCH AUTHORITY THE BASIS FOR OUR KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

No Christian has ever learned of Christ except through some ministry of the Church. This is not a controversial opinion but a simple historical fact. We know Christ only because the Church has witnessed to us about him: by passing down through the centuries the Gospel (“good news”) of the historical events of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection that the apostles witnessed; by teaching true doctrine about him; by living his supernatural life, his love, and his Spirit; and by celebrating his sacred rites, making him really present in the sacraments. Christ lived on earth two thousand years ago; who brings him across the millennia to us? Who makes us contemporaries with Christ? The Church.

8. CHURCH AUTHORITY THE BASIS FOR BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

Saint Augustine wrote, “I would not believe the authority of the Scriptures except for the authority of the Catholic Church.”

It is unreasonable to believe, as many Protestants do, that the Bible is infallible but the Church is not. For:

- 1) Why would God leave us an infallible book in the hands of fallible teachers and interpreters? That would destroy the whole purpose of an infallible book: to give us certainty about the things God knew we needed to know.
- 2) It is a matter of historical fact that the Church (the Apostles) wrote the New Testament. But a fallible cause can't produce an infallible effect.
- 3) It is also a historical fact that the Church "canonized" the Bible (defined which books belong to it). If the Church is fallible, how can we be sure what this infallible book is?
- 4) The Bible itself calls the Church, not the Bible, "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).
- 5) Scripture never teaches the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). Thus *sola scriptura* contradicts itself.

9. THE POPE

One visible Church needs one visible head. Christ appointed Peter the head of the apostles. Peter's successors, the popes, are the heads of the apostles' successors, the bishops.

"The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Savior, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care [John 21:15-19; Matthew 16:13-19].... This Church...subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him"²⁶⁷ (CCC 816).

"The *Pope*, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, [in an unbroken chain of historical continuity] 'is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.'⁴⁰² 'For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar [servant-representative] of Christ,

and as pastor [shepherd] of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church...”⁴⁰³ (CCC 882, quoting Vatican II). “The *college or body of bishops* has no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, as its head...”⁴⁰⁴ (CCC 883).

10. INFALLIBILITY

Vatican Council I defined what Catholics have always believed: that the Pope, when he speaks authoritatively in virtue of his office, like the Ecumenical (worldwide) Councils that speak in union with him, is infallible (preserved by God from error) when defining doctrine or morality for the whole Church. He is not infallible when he speaks personally, only when he speaks authoritatively in virtue of his office.

God did not let us wonder and wander in darkness about the most important truths we had to know in order to fulfill our most important task in life, union with him. No human lover would allow that if he could help it. Neither did God. Papal infallibility, like every other Catholic dogma, is properly understood only by the primacy of love.

Infallibility is God’s loving gift in response to our need to persevere in the unity of love and truth – which is what God wants above all because that is what he is: love (1 John 4:18) and truth (John 6:14). Without infallibility, uncertainties and schisms are inevitable among us fallen and foolish humans for whom Christ designed his Church.

The gift of infallibility flows from God’s character. He is so generous that he does not hold back anything that we need. He is not a stingy God! The creation of the world, the Incarnation and death of Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist, and Heaven are six spectacular examples of God’s unpredictable and

amazing generosity. The gift of infallibility to the Church fits this same pattern.

11. WHEN THE CHURCH IS INFALLIBLE

1) “The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful...he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals...”⁴¹⁸ (CCC 891).

2) “The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter’s successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium [teaching authority],⁴¹⁸ above all in an Ecumenical Council” (CCC 891).

3) Even doctrines not explicitly labeled infallible can be binding on Catholic belief because “[d]ivine assistance is also given to the successors of the apostles, teaching in communion with the successor of Peter...when, without arriving at an infallible definition and without pronouncing in a ‘definitive manner,’ they propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching...of faith and morals. To this ordinary teaching the faithful ‘are to adhere to it with religious assent’...”⁴²² (CCC 892). Wise and good parents do not explicitly label everything they say to their children as “infallible,” yet wise and good children trust them. Similarly, we should trust “Holy Mother Church,” the Church of the apostles, saints, and martyrs, the Church with a two thousand year long memory, much more than we trust our own opinions.

4) The sign the Church attaches to an infallible teaching is Christocentric: “When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine ‘for belief as being divinely revealed,’⁴¹⁹ and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions ‘must be adhered to with the obedience of faith’”⁴²⁰ (CCC 891).

12. WHY THE CHURCH IS INFALLIBLE

The Church is infallible because she is faithful. Our faith in the Church is grounded in the Church's faithfulness to Christ. Infallibility is Christocentric.

The Church does not have authority over the Deposit of Faith because she is not its author. Its author is Christ. She can interpret it, and draw out its inner meanings, but never correct it. She can add to it, but never subtract from it; and when she adds, she adds from within, organically, as a tree adds fruit, not mechanically, as a construction crew adds another story to a house.

Because she does not claim to have the authority other churches claim to have, to change "the Deposit of Faith" entrusted to her by Christ, she cannot allow such things as divorce, or priestesses, or sodomy (*or* the hating of sodomites), however fashionable these things may become in society. Her Lord is not 'society,' or the world, but Christ.

13. THE CHURCH NECESSARY FOR SALVATION

Since we have no salvation without Christ,
and we do not know Christ without the Church,
it follows that there is no salvation without the Church.

This traditional formula of the Church Fathers, "[o]utside the Church there is no salvation"³³⁵ (CCC 846), does not mean that Protestants and others are not saved, because this formula is not an answer to the mind's curiosity about the populations of Heaven and Hell, but an answer to the sincerely seeking heart's questions, "Where is salvation? Where is the road? What has God done to show me how to be saved?" Similarly, Christ's words to his disciples about "many" choosing the "broad" road to

destruction and only “few” finding the “narrow” road to life (Matthew 7:14) are not the words of a statistician spoken to a census taker, but the words of a loving Heavenly Father to his beloved children warning them of danger. To the Good Shepherd even one out of a hundred sheep is too many to lose and 99 too few to save (Matthew 18:12).

In fact the Church explicitly teaches that many who call themselves non-Catholics are saved. Vatican Council II said that “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 (CCC 846), but also that “[t]hose 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 (CCC 847) – not because conscience is an adequate substitute for the Church but because conscience is a contact with God too.

14. WHY THE CHURCH SENDS OUT MISSIONARIES IF NON-CATHOLICS CAN BE SAVED

We do not know exactly *how* God saves non-Catholics or how *many* are saved; but we *do* know *who* they are saved by: the One who said, “No man comes to the Father but by me” (John 6:14). Therefore the Church “has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men”³³⁸ (CCC 848) – not because of *consequences* but *commandments*: not because she knows how many would be lost if they did not hear the Gospel, but because Christ has commanded her to preach it (Matthew 28:19).

Fundamentalists send out missionaries because they claim to know that all are damned except those who consciously know

and accept Christ. Modernists send out missionaries, if they do, just to do good human works. They also claim to know the number of the damned: none. Catholics make neither claim. They just preach the truth.

“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” (CCC 851).

Two things are needed, not just one: seeking the truth and finding it. Each individual must supply the first by himself, but the Church is needed to supply the second, because divine revelation is needed for us to know God’s plan of salvation.

15. THE CHURCH AND MARY

The Church is like Mary in pointing beyond herself to Christ. Her last word recorded in Scripture is: “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

The Church is also like Mary in being a womb in which Christ’s body grows. “Mother Church” brings forth the mature Christ as Mary did, having first received him as a seed. She brings forth words (creeds), having first received the Word by her faith, her *fiat* (Yes), just like Mary (Luke 1:38).

And the Church is holy in the same way Mary is holy: by receiving Christ, divine Love incarnate. “In the Church this communion of men with God, in the ‘love [that] never ends,’ is the purpose which governs everything in her....¹⁹² ‘[The Church’s] structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ’s members...¹⁹³ Mary goes before us all in the holiness which is the Church’s

mystery.... This is why the ‘Marian’ dimension of the Church [holiness] precedes the ‘Petrine’ [authority]”¹⁹⁵ (CCC 773).

16. THE CHURCH AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

“The article [of the Creed] concerning the Church also depends entirely on the article about the Holy Spirit, which immediately precedes it.... The Church is, in a phrase used by the Fathers, the place ‘where the Spirit flourishes’”¹³⁷ (CCC 749). It is the fireplace for the fire of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the Church’s spirit. “What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church”²⁴³ (CCC 797).

Though the Spirit is not *limited* to the Magisterium of the Church, the Spirit never works *contrary* to the Church. Those who claim the inspiration of the Spirit when they denounce official Church teachings that they do not like – for instance, those who in the name of the so-called “spirit of Vatican II” reject the actual teachings of Vatican II – are judging and “correcting” the teachings of the Church by their own desires and opinions instead of letting their desires and opinions be instructed and corrected by the Church. That is not the work of the Holy Spirit. That is the work of an unholy spirit.

17. WHY BE A CATHOLIC?

If you want to invent your own religion, don’t be a Catholic. If you want to teach the Church rather than letting the Church teach you, there are plenty of other churches for you, churches that welcome theologies without miracles, moralities without absolutes, and liturgies without adoration. Please don’t be a Catholic unless you believe the Church’s claim to speak in these areas in the name of Jesus Christ.

There is no such thing as a “cafeteria Catholic.” Catholics do not pick and choose among the Church’s doctrines and laws; we receive them gratefully from God. In matters of faith and morals, we “eat all the food Mother puts on our plate.”

A “cafeteria Catholic” or a half Catholic or a 95 percent Catholic is a contradiction in terms. If the Catholic Church does not have the divine authority and infallibility she claims, then she is not half right or 95 percent right, but the most arrogant and blasphemous of all churches, a false prophet claiming “thus says the Lord” for mere human opinions. It must be either/or, as with Christ himself: if Christ is not God, as he claims, then he is not 95 percent right, or half right, or just one of many good human prophets or teachers, but the most arrogant and blasphemous false prophet who ever lived. Just as a mere man who claims to be God is not a fairly good man but a very bad man, so a merely human church that claims divine authority and infallibility is not a fairly good church but a very bad church.

The only honest reason to be a Christian is because you believe Christ’s claim to be God incarnate. The only honest reason to be a Catholic is because you believe the Church’s claim to be the divinely authorized Body of this Christ.

18. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The Church is not something man makes after he is saved, but something God makes to save man. We are not first saved as individuals, then form a Church; we are saved *by* getting aboard the one Ark of salvation. (Noah’s Ark was a favorite image of the Church for the Fathers.)

“The word ‘church’ (Latin, *ecclesia*, from the Greek *ek-ka-lein*, ‘to call out of’) means [a] a convocation or an assembly” (CCC 751) that is b) called out of the world to be “holy” (“set apart”), c) by

Christ himself d) to be Christ's own Body on earth, "the extension of the incarnation."

The Church was founded *by* Christ, the Church *is* the Body of Christ, and the Church's purpose is to make us *into* little Christs, to spread Christ's life. Christ is the whole key to the Church's origin, nature, and end – and to ours.

19. IS THE CHURCH VISIBLE OR INVISIBLE?

The Church is much more than what we can see. The Church is "the mystical [invisible] Body of Christ."

But it is also "the [visible] People of God."

As man is both invisible (soul) and visible (body), so is Christ, and so is his Church. "The Church is at the same time a 'society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ; the visible society and the spiritual community; the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches'"¹⁸⁵ (CCC 771).

Two common opposite errors are 1) to reduce the Church to what is visible in human history, and 2) to reduce the Church to an invisible community of souls.

20. THE CHURCH AS THE ULTIMATE REASON FOR CREATION

"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 [our] communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by...the Church.... '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 (CCC 760).

The Church is the reason for creation, the reason for the "Big Bang." The universe is a Church-making machine and the Church is a saint-making machine.

21. THE CHURCH AS THE “SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE”

The consummation of all human history, according to Scripture (Revelation 21), is a marriage between Christ and the Church, his bride. Saint Paul sees a husband and wife becoming “one flesh” as a symbol of Christ’s and the Church’s becoming one Body: “The two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5:31-32). What the Church is ultimately for, what all the bibles and creeds and priests and sacraments and music and fund-raising and social service and commandments and buildings are for – the one ultimate purpose of everything the Church is and does, right down to each sweep of the janitor’s broom, is lovemaking: the love relationship, the life of love, between Christ and his bride (us!). The Catholic Church is the Church of Love.

This parallel between the Church and a marriage shows why there can be only one true Church: because Christ is no polygamist. The parallel also shows why this Church is not merely invisible, any more than a bride is – or any more than the Bridegroom (Christ) is!

22. THE CHURCH AS THE TOTAL CHRIST

“Christ and the Church...together make up the ‘whole Christ’” (CCC 795), as head and body are one person. Christ is not the “head” of the Church the way Henry Ford was the “head” of Ford Motor Company, but the way that round hairy thing between your shoulders is the head of your body. He is the head of a *corpus*, not a corpse; something living, not something dead; a real organic body, not a legal fiction.

Saint Augustine writes, “Let us rejoice then and give thanks that we have become not only Christians, but Christ himself. Do you understand and grasp, brethren, God’s grace

toward us? Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members; he and we together are the whole man... But what does ‘head and members’ mean? Christ and the Church”²³⁰ (CCC 795).

Saint Thomas Aquinas writes: “‘Head and members form as it were one and the same mystical person’”²³² (CCC 795). That is why Christ says: “Whatever you did to the least of these my brethren, you did to me” (Matthew 25:40) – because “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5) of one organism, with one life, one blood. This vine has its roots in Heaven and its foliage on earth. The Church is an upside down tree.

“A reply of Saint Joan of Arc to her judges sums up the faith of the holy doctors and the good sense of the believer: ‘About Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they’re just one thing, and we shouldn’t complicate the matter’”²³³ (CCC 795).

23. THE CHURCH AND THE EUCHARIST

The Church is “the People of God...who themselves, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ” (CCC 777). “The Body of Christ” means both the Church and the Eucharist. The Church “makes” the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church. The Church is where we “eat” Christ and Christ “eats” us, assimilates us to his life. The Eucharist is not just one of the many things the Church does but the one thing she essentially *is*: Christ’s Body.

24. HOW DOES ONE ENTER THE CHURCH?

“One becomes a *member* of this people not by a physical birth, but by being ‘born anew,’ a birth ‘of water and the Spirit’²⁰³ [John 3:3-5], that is, by [a] faith in Christ, and [b] Baptism” (CCC 782). Since the Church is both invisible and visible, one

enters it by both an invisible, inner act of sincere faith and a visible, public rite of Baptism.

25. THE THREE OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

In ancient Israel God established prophets, priests, and kings.

Christ fulfills all three “job descriptions”: the perfect prophet (the Word of God himself), the perfect priest (offering the perfect sacrifice on the Cross), and “Christ the King” of the whole universe.

Christ then established these three offices in his Church: (prophetic) teaching, (priestly) sacraments, and (kingly) apostolic authority. These offices are both special and general: in a sense every Christian is a prophet, a priest, and a king, for “[t]he whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ...” (CCC 783).

26. THE MEANING OF CHRIST’S KINGSHIP – AND THE CHURCH’S

Christ the King ruled by serving (John 12:32). Therefore his Church too rules by serving, as does each Christian. “For the Christian, ‘to reign is to serve him,’ particularly when serving ‘the poor and the suffering, in whom the Church recognizes the image of her poor and suffering founder’”²¹³ (CCC 786).

Most of God’s Chosen People, the Jews, did not recognize and accept Christ as the promised Messiah when he came because they misunderstood this kingly office. The prophets had promised that the Messiah would deliver God’s people from their “enemies.” God was testing his people’s hearts by the very ambiguity of these prophecies; for those whose hearts were set on worldly success interpreted these enemies as the Romans, and did not recognize Christ as Messiah because he was apolitical; but those whose hearts were set on God and holiness knew their

enemies were really their own sins, and recognized Christ as their Savior. All who sought him (i.e. sought what he was: holiness, not power) found him, just as he promised (Matthew 7:7-8).

27. THE “FOUR MARKS OF THE CHURCH”

The Nicene Creed mentions four “marks of the Church:” “I believe in one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church.” If anyone wonders which of the 20,000 different churches that claim to be Christ’s true church is really the one Christ established, this is how to recognize it. Only one church has all four marks: the Catholic Church.

It is found by both faith and reason. “Only faith can recognize that the Church possesses these properties from her divine source [as opposed to a merely human source]. But their historical manifestations are signs that also speak clearly to human reason” (CCC 812).

28. THE FIRST MARK OF THE CHURCH: ONENESS

How is the Church one?

- 1) Essentially, the Church is one *because Christ her Head is one*. A head with many bodies is a monstrosity, like a body with many heads. For the Church is an organic unity (though spiritual rather than biological), not just a legal one. A CEO can head many companies, but your head can’t have two bodies.
- 2) Scripture tells us that the Church is one because she has “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*” (Ephesians 4:5). Because it is Christ her Lord that makes her one, the Church insists on right faith – creedal orthodoxy – so that we know who Christ is. The “one faith” identifies the “one Lord.” So does the “one baptism,” which begins that

Lord's divine life in the soul of the baptized. The creeds define, and the sacraments communicate, this "one Lord."

- 3) The Church is also one in *charity*. Her Lord's essential command is charity (John 15:9-12), for "God is charity" (1 John 4:16). Therefore "above all, charity binds everything together" (1 Corinthians 3:14).
- 4) "But the unity of the...Church is also assured by visible bonds of communion:
 - [a] profession of one faith received from the Apostles;
 - [b] common celebration of divine worship, especially of the sacraments;
 - [c] apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders...." (CCC 815) For it is a matter of historical fact that "the apostles took care to appoint successors"³⁷³ (CCC 860).

29. UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH

"From the beginning, this one Church has been marked by a great *diversity*... 'Holding a rightful place in the communion of this Church there are also particular Churches that retain their own traditions'"²⁶³ (CCC 814).

A body is both one *and many*. "For as the body is one and has many members [organs, limbs...], yet all the members, though many, are one body, so also is Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Pennies in a pile are neither profoundly one (they are not dependent on each other) nor profoundly different (they are identical and replaceable). Organs in a body are both profoundly one (for they are dependent on each other for life and working

together for the health of the whole body) and profoundly different (e.g., the lung and the kidney).

30. SOLIDARITY

The unity in a body is so great that “if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with him, and if one member is honored, all the members together rejoice” (1 Corinthians 12:26) – for instance, in a family or a nation. The assassinations of Lincoln and Kennedy harmed all of America, and thus all Americans.

There is a Russian word for this kind of unity: *sobornost* (usually translated as “universality” or catholicity). A similar Polish word is *solidarinosc*: solidarity. It is the basis in objective reality for the life of charity. Charity is realistic. It is how bodies stay alive.

All prayers help all members of Christ’s Body, not just the ones consciously prayed for. Every good deed makes the whole Body stronger. And every evil deed makes it weaker. All sins harm all members of the Body, not only the ones visibly and immediately banned. There are no private sins, no victimless crimes. Every failure of love to anyone harms everyone.

31. ECUMENISM AND “OTHER CHURCHES”

Though there are particular Churches and various rites within the one Church, there are no “other churches;” there is but one Church. Christ has only one Body, one Bride. He is not a bigamist.

However, his one Body is torn and wounded. Though its essential unity is indestructible, its visible signs of unity are not. Already in New Testament times there were divisions: schisms, heresies, and apostasies. The Apostle Paul found this not merely

unfortunate but intolerable. No one can read 1 Corinthians 1-3 and be in doubt what Paul would say about our far worse and wider divisions today.

These wounds *must* be healed. Working and praying for ecumenical reunification is not an option but a requirement (so said Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*).

We can find the right road, back to unity, only by retracing our path back to where the wrong road, the road to divisions, began. They began with sin. We are not one with each other because we are not one with God. “The ruptures that wound the unity of Christ’s Body... do not occur without human sin.... [O]ften enough, men of both sides were to blame” (CCC 817). Therefore our divisions will be undone only if sin is conquered. And only Christ can conquer sin. Reunion will come when all Christians put Christ’s will above their own. Only when all the instrumentalists follow the conductor’s baton does the orchestra play in harmony. The key to ecumenism is the same as the key to all Catholic ideas: the lordship of Christ.

32. HOW TO WORK FOR REUNION

“The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit”²⁷⁹ (CCC 820). “Certain things are required to respond adequately to this call:

- [1] “A permanent *renewal* of the Church in greater fidelity to her vocation....” [note the paradox here: the re-*new*-al comes by *fidelity*, i.e. faithfulness to the old, the origin, the marriage vows between Christ and the Church. All significant ecumenical progress so far has come about through a return to common sources, as Vatican II called for: the Church Fathers, the Bible, and ultimately Christ himself];

- [2] “*Conversion of heart* as the faithful ‘try to live holier lives according to the Gospel’, for it is the unfaithfulness of the members which causes divisions” [if it took sin to cause the divisions, it will take sanctity to heal them];
- [3] “*Prayer in common*...should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name ‘spiritual ecumenism’” [when Catholics and Protestants put their knees together in common prayer, God will put their heads together to understand common truths];
- [4] “*Fraternal knowledge of each other*” [for many divisions arose and are maintained from mutual ignorance and misunderstanding];
- [5] “*Ecumenical formation* of the faithful and especially of priests;
- [6] “*Dialogue* among theologians and...among Christians of the different churches....
- [7] “*{C}ollaboration* among Christians in various areas of service to mankind....”²⁸⁶ [Protestants and Catholics who share a jail cell for trying to save lives by protesting abortion, or who run inner city homeless shelters or drug rehabilitation programs, have often found that their common orthopraxy (right action) has opened their eyes to a common orthodoxy (right belief). The heart and the hands can sometimes lead and educate the head] (CCC 821).
- [8] “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’”²⁸⁸ (CCC 822). We can no more save the

Church from the divisions our sins caused than we can save ourselves. Only Christ can save us from sin and only Christ can save his Church from divisions.

33. ARE PROTESTANTS TO BLAME FOR CHURCH DIVISIONS?

Yes. And so are Catholics.

“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 those who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ...”²⁷² (CCC 818). They are our “separated brethren.”

“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” (CCC 819). The Protestant limbs that broke off from the Catholic tree can still have enough life-giving sap (God’s truth and grace) from the root (Christ) through the trunk (the Catholic Church) to be the means of salvation for their members. The Church of Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church.

34. THE SECOND MARK OF THE CHURCH: HOLINESS

The Church is “holy” in a way her members are not. Her doctrine, her moral principles, and her sacraments are pure because they are from Christ. But her human members, clergy as well as laity, are far from pure in their understanding of those doctrines, in their living according to those principles, and in their participation in those sacraments. For Christ established his Church not as a museum for saints but as a hospital for sinners. “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

The Church's perfect Head (Christ) is perfectly holy. "The Church, however, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance [repentance] and renewal."²⁹⁹ All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners"³⁰⁰ (CCC 827).

"The Church is therefore holy, though having sinners in her midst, because she 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..."³⁰² (CCC 827).

35. SAINTS

In the most important sense – the sense used in the New Testament – all members of Christ's Body are "saints:" that is, they are "holy" (not *perfect* but "set apart"), taken out of the "world" (not the *earth*) and the "flesh" (not the *body*), thus made to share in the very life of Christ, and constantly being "sanctified," or made more saintly, by "sanctifying grace." Who are the saints? All the faithful – i.e., all who have faith in Christ and remain faithful to him.

In a more specific sense, "[b]y *canonizing* [listing] some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue..." (CCC 828), the Church singles out a few thousand men and women as ideals for the rest of us – not merely as heroes for our reverence but as models for our lives.

The Church also canonizes saints to assure us publicly that they will intercede for us from Heaven, and to encourage us to pray to them.

36. SOCIETY'S NEED FOR SAINTS

Society needs saints. A society is unified only by sharing a common end, a common value, a common love; and this is concretized in its heroes and in shared stories about them. Without true heroes there is no true society. And the saints are the truest heroes.

The early Church won the world mainly through her saints. She can win it back only in the same way. This means you and I must do it, we must become saints – not only for our own sakes but also for the sake of our society, i.e. all those we love.

37. PRAYING TO SAINTS

Protestants usually criticize the Catholic practice of praying to saints because they think it is idolatry to pray to anyone but God.

Catholics do not worship saints; we worship God alone. The Church distinguishes *latria* (adoration, due to God alone), *hyperdulia* (the greatest human respect, which is due to Mary as the only sinless saint), and *dulia* (great human respect, which is due to all the saints).

However, Catholics “pray” to saints as they “pray” to holy friends on earth: that is, they ask these friends to pray to God for them. It is no more idolatrous to ask another human being to pray for you after he dies than before. The issue that divides Protestants and Catholics here is not idolatry but the “communion of saints,” the interaction between the Church on earth and the Church in Heaven.

38. THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The Catholic vision differs from the Protestant not about whether there is a real communion of saints on earth, who pray for each other, but about whether this communion extends to Heaven.

The Catholic Church exists in three places: “the Church militant” on earth, “the Church suffering” in Purgatory, and “the Church triumphant” in Heaven.

We on earth and those in Heaven can pray for the souls in Purgatory, that their purification in preparation for Heaven be hastened. This is Biblical: “It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins” (2 Maccabees 12:45). And those in Purgatory and Heaven can pray for us, and we can ask them to do so. Death itself cannot sever the unity of the Church.

The communion of saints is far more powerful than we imagine. Our prayers to God for the souls in Purgatory help them much more than we know. And the saints in Heaven and also those in Purgatory help us by their prayers much more than we know. Saint Dominic said, when dying, “Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life”⁴⁹⁴ (CCC 956). Saint Thérèse of Lisieux wrote, “I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth.”⁴⁹⁵

39. THE THIRD MARK OF THE CHURCH: “CATHOLIC”

“Catholic” means “universal,” one-in-many, like the “universe” itself. The Church is one Church, though spread over many places on earth and spread over earth, Purgatory, and Heaven.

Just as the Church is one because Christ her Head is one, so the Church is universal because Christ is universal. “[T]he Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. ‘Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church’”³⁰⁷ (CCC 830, quoting Saint Ignatius of Antioch, the disciple of Saint John the Evangelist).

“Second, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race” (Matthew 28:19; CCC 831).

Where Christ is, there is the Catholic Church, his Body; therefore insofar as Christ is present in churches Orthodox, Anglican, Evangelical, Reformed, Pentecostal, etc., they are parts of the Catholic Church, partially “catholic,” for they share the Church’s Scripture, the Church’s baptism, and above all the Church’s Lord.

40. WHO BELONGS TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

The Church answers this question in degrees.

First, baptized, believing and practicing Roman Catholics are “[f]ully incorporated into the society of the Church...”³²¹ (CCC 837).

However, “[e]ven though incorporated into the Church, one who does not...persevere in [faith, hope, and] charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but ‘in body’ not ‘in heart’”³²¹ (CCC 837).

Second, “[t]hose ‘who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, 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 celebration of the Lord’s Eucharist’”³²⁴ (CCC 838). The only significant difference concerns papal jurisdiction.

Third, Protestant churches, “separated brethren,” are parts of Christ’s Mystical Body if they are Christians, though they are separated from his visible Body on earth in various degrees. “The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized

who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter”³²² (CCC 838).

Fourth, “those who have not yet received [believed] the Gospel are related to the People of God [the Church] in various ways”³²⁵ – most of all, the Jews, “the first to hear the Word of God.”³²⁷ The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God’s revelation in the Old Covenant” (CCC 839). Biblical Judaism is divinely revealed, and the foundation for Christianity; the Jews are our “fathers in the faith,” for they taught us who the true God is. But Judaism is incomplete without its capstone, Christ. Jews who accept Christ as the Messiah and become Christians today usually see themselves as completed Jews, just as the first Christian converts did.

Fifth, “[t]he 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 (CCC 841). Christians, Jews, and Muslims worship the same God.

Sixth, “[t]he Church’s bond with non-Christian religions [especially Hinduism and Buddhism] is [a] in the first place the common origin and end of the human race [in God as the Alpha and Omega]” (CCC 842). [b] “The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near...” [this is true even of pagan polytheism; see Acts 17:22-23]. c) “Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as ‘a preparation for the Gospel...’”³³² (CCC 843) – prophets outside Israel, so to speak, though not infallible ones.

But though there may be profound truth and goodness in other religions, they are incomplete because they lack the fullness of Christ. The Church's claim of superiority is not for herself but for her Lord. And therefore she "...still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men"³³⁸ (CCC 848), as Christ commanded her.

41. THE FOURTH MARK OF THE CHURCH: "APOSTOLIC"

The Church is apostolic 1) because of her mission, her "apostolate" to evangelize [preach the Gospel] and 2) because she is "built upon the foundation of the apostles" (Ephesians 2:20), who ordained their successors (bishops) as Christ ordained *them*. "The bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them listens to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ" (Luke 10:16; CCC 862).

Not only the bishops, the successors of the apostles, but "[t]he whole Church is apostolic... [a]ll members of the Church share in this mission, though in various ways" (CCC 863).

Notes from the Catechism in Order of Their Appearance in Quotations Used in this Section

²⁶⁷ LG 8 § 2.

⁴⁰² LG 23.

⁴⁰³ LG 22; cf. CD 2, 9.

⁴⁰⁴ LG 22; cf. CIC, can. 336.

⁴¹⁸ LG 25; cf. Vatican Council I: DS 3074.

⁴¹⁸ LG 25; cf. Vatican Council I: DS 3074.

⁴²² LG 25.

⁴¹⁹ DV 10 § 2.

⁴²⁰ LG 25 § 2.

- 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 3866-72.
338 AG 7; cf. *Heb* 11:6; *1 Cor* 9:16.
192 *1 Cor* 13:8; cf. LG 48.
193 John Paul II, *MD* 27.
195 Cf. John Paul II, *MD* 27.
137 St. Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 35: SCh 11, 118.
243 St. Augustine, *Sermo* 267, 4: PL 38, 1231D.
185 LG 8.
153 *Pastor Hermae*, 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, 508-09.
155 Clement of Alex., *Paed.* 1, 6, 27: PG 8, 281.
230 St. Augustine, *In Jo. ev* 21, 8: PL 35, 1568.
232 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STb* III, 48, 2.
233 Acts of the Trial of Joan of Arc.
203 *Jn* 3:3-5.
213 LG 8; cf. 36.
373 LG 20; cf. *Mt* 28:20.
263 LG 13 § 2.
279 Cf. *UR* 1.
286 Cf. *UR* 12.
288 *UR* 24 § 2.
272 *UR* 3 § 1.
299 LG 8 § 3; cf. *UR* 3; 6; *Heb* 2:17; 7:26; *2 Cor* 5:21.
300 Cf. *1 Jn* 1:8-10.
302 Paul VI, *CPG* § 19.
494 St. Dominic, dying, to his brothers.
495 St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Final Conversations*, tr. John Clarke (Washington: ICS, 1977), 102.
307 St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Smyrn.* 8, 2: *Apostolic Fathers*, II/2, 311.
321 LG 14.
321 LG 14.
323 *UR* 3.
324 Paul VI, Discourse, December 14, 1975; cf. *UR* 13-18.

³²² LG 15.

³²⁵ LG 16.

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

³³⁰ LG 16; cf. NA 3.

³³² LG 16; cf. NA 2; EN 53.

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

“Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response.”

– United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

About the Knights of Columbus

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