

***Lumen Gentium***  
**The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church**  
**(21 Nov 1964)**

**Question 1: Who is the Church?**

**Answer 1: In Christ, she is a Mystery**

*“Christ loved the church  
and delivered himself up for her,  
that he might sanctify her,  
having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,  
so that he might present the church to himself in splendour,  
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,  
that she might be holy and without blemish”*  
(Eph 5:25-27)

**CHAPTER I. THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH      #1-8**

- The Church has existed in the mind and heart of the Father since ‘before the world was made’
- Fruit of the Son’s Redemption, perfected by work of the Holy Spirit
- She comes from the Blessed Trinity and is in Christ like a sacrament
- She ‘subsists’ in the Catholic Church.

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1. **Christ is the Light of nations.** Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, **by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church.** Since **the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race,** it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world **its own inner nature and universal mission.** This it intends to do following faithfully the teaching of previous councils. The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ.
2. **The eternal Father,** by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men to a participation of the divine life. ... All the elect, before time began, the Father “foreknew and pre-destined to become conformed to the image of His Son...”. He planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ. Already from the beginning of the world the foreshadowing of the Church took place. Prepared in a remarkable way throughout the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant. Constituted by the outpouring of the Spirit, and made manifest. At the end of time it will gloriously achieve completion, when... all the just, from Adam and “from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect,” will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church.
3. **The Son, therefore, came, sent by the Father.** It was *in Him, before the foundation of the world, that the Father chose us* and predestined us to become adopted sons, for in Him it pleased the Father to re-establish all things. ...Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom. By His obedience He brought about redemption. The Church, or, in other words, the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of a crucified Jesus... As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed, is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on, and... the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ is both expressed and brought about. All are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains.

4. **...The Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost** continually (to) sanctify the Church, and thus, all those who believe would have **access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father**.
- He is the Spirit of Life, a fountain of water springing up to life eternal. To those dead in sin, the Father gives life through Him, until, in Christ, He brings to life their mortal bodies.
  - The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple.
  - In them He prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons.
  - The Church, which the Spirit guides in way of all truth and which He unifies in communion and in works of ministry, He equips and directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts, and adorns with His fruits.
  - By the power of the Gospel He makes the Church keep the freshness of youth.
  - Uninterruptedly He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse.
  - The Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, "Come!"

**Thus, the Church has been seen as**  
***"a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit"***  
**(St Cyprian 4<sup>th</sup> C).**

5. **The mystery of the holy Church is manifest in its very foundation...** In the **word, in the works, and in the presence of Christ...** the Kingdom is clearly visible in the very Person of Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man... When Jesus, who had suffered the death of the cross for mankind, had risen... **He poured out on His disciples the Spirit promised by the Father.**

From this source **the Church**, equipped with the gifts of its Founder... **receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God** and to be, on earth, the **initial budding forth of that kingdom**. While it slowly grows, **the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom** and... desires to be united in glory with its Kings

6. In the **Old Testament the revelation of the Kingdom** is often conveyed by means of **metaphors**. In the same way **the inner nature of the Church is now made known to us in different images...**

The Church is a SHEEPFOLD ... PIECE OF LAND... That land, like a CHOICE VINEYARD, has been planted by the heavenly Husbandman. The TRUE VINE IS CHRIST who gives life and the power to... the branches, that is, to us, who through the Church remain in Christ without whom we can do nothing.

Often called THE BUILDING OF GOD. The Lord compared Himself to the STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED... On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles, and from it the Church receives durability and consolidation.

She is: THE HOUSE OF GOD in which dwells His family; THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD IN THE SPIRIT; the DWELLING PLACE OF GOD AMONG US; especially, THE HOLY TEMPLE...

### **The New Testament**

John contemplates the Church as a HOLY CITY coming down from heaven at the renewal of the world as a BRIDE made ready and adorned for her husband. ... She is "OUR MOTHER" ...

the SPOTLESS SPOUSE OF THE SPOTLESS LAMB, whom Christ

***"...loved and for whom He delivered Himself up that He might sanctify her",***

whom He unites to Himself by an unbreakable covenant,

and whom He unceasingly "nourishes and cherishes",

and whom, once purified, He willed to be cleansed and joined to Himself,

subject to Him in love and fidelity, and whom, finally,

He filled with heavenly gifts for all eternity, in order that we may know

the love of God and of Christ for us, a love which surpasses all knowledge.

The Church, while on earth, journeys in a foreign land away from the Lord, her life is an exile.

She seeks and experiences those things which are above...

where **the life of the Church is hidden with Christ in God until it appears in glory with its Spouse.**

7. In the human nature united to Himself the Son of God, by overcoming death through His own death and resurrection, redeemed man and re-fashioned him into a new creation. **By communicating His Spirit, Christ made His brothers, called together from all nations, MYSTICALLY THE COMPONENTS OF HIS OWN BODY.**

In that Body, **THE LIFE OF CHRIST is poured into the believers** who, through the **sacraments**, are **UNITED IN A HIDDEN AND REAL WAY TO CHRIST** who suffered and was glorified. Through **Baptism** we are formed in the likeness of Christ. **Really partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the eucharistic bread**, we are **TAKEN UP INTO COMMUNION with Him and with one another....**

Also, **in the building up of CHRIST'S BODY** various members and functions have their part to play. There is **only one Spirit who**, according to His own richness and the needs of the ministries, **gives His different gifts for the welfare of the Church.** What has a special place among these gifts is **the grace of the apostles** to whose authority the Spirit Himself subjected even those who were endowed with charisms...

**The HEAD OF THIS BODY IS CHRIST... He is the head of the Body which is the Church.**

All the members ought to be moulded in the likeness of Him, until Christ be formed in them...

On earth... we are made one with His sufferings like the body is one with the Head, suffering with Him, that with Him we may be glorified.

In order that we might be unceasingly renewed in Him, **He has shared with us His Spirit** who existing as one and the same being in the Head and in the members, gives life to, unifies and moves through the whole body....

8. **Christ, the one Mediator**, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as **an entity with visible delineation** through which He communicated truth and grace to all. However:

- the **society structured with hierarchical organs** and the **Mystical Body of Christ**,
- the **visible assembly** and the **spiritual community**,
- the **earthly Church** and the **Church enriched with heavenly things**

**are not to be considered as two realities;**

**they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element.**

For this reason, **by no weak analogy, (the Church) is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word.**

As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does **the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ**, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body.

This is **the one Church of Christ** which in **the Creed is professed as ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC**, which our Saviour, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd, and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority which He erected for all ages as *"the pillar and mainstay of the truth"*.

**This Church** constituted and organized in the world as a society, **subsists in the Catholic Church...** although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure.

These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.

- **Just as Christ** carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution,
  - **so the Church** is called to follow the same route that it might communicate the fruits of salvation....
- **Christ was sent by the Father** "to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart", "to seek and to save what was lost",
  - **so the Church** encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering....
- **While Christ**, holy, innocent and undefiled knew nothing of sin...
  - **the Church**, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal.
- **By the power of the risen Lord**,
  - **(the Church)** is given strength that it might, in patience and in love, overcome its sorrows and its challenges, both within itself and from without, and that it might reveal to the world, faithfully though darkly, **the mystery of its Lord** until, in the end, it will be manifested in full light.

**Question 1: Who is the Church?**

**Answer 2: She is the People of God**

*From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.  
Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.  
Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.  
All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself  
and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not  
counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation  
(2 Cor 15:14-19)*

## CHAPTER II. ON THE PEOPLE OF GOD #9-17

- All who 'fear God and do what is right' are pleasing to him; yet the Church is necessary
- She exists on earth as a people with a visible structure, a head and laws
- In Christ through the sacraments, all members share his 3-fold mission of priest, prophet and king
- One Church, her mission is to unite the whole world
- Being called to belong to her, all people are in some way related to her

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9. **At all times and in every race, God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right<sup>1</sup>.** God, however, **does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals**, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it **pleased Him to bring men together as one people**, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness<sup>2</sup>.

He **therefore chose the race of Israel as a people unto Himself**. ...set up a covenant... taught and prepared this people, making known in its history both Himself and the decree of His will and making it holy unto Himself. All these things, however, were done **by way of preparation and as a figure of that new and perfect covenant**, which was to be ratified **in Christ**, and of that fuller revelation which was to be given through the Word of God Himself made flesh...

Christ instituted this new covenant, the new testament, that is to say, **in His Blood, calling together a people made up of Jew and gentile**, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be **the new People of God...** "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people... who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God".

That messianic people has **Christ for its head**... The state of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in His temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us. Its end is the kingdom of God, which has been begun by God Himself on earth, and which is to be further extended until it is brought to perfection by Him at the end of time, when Christ, our life, shall appear, and "creation itself will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God".

**So it is that that messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race.** Established by Christ as a **communion of life, charity and truth**, it is also **used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all**, and is **sent forth into the whole world** as the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

...For He has bought (the Church) for Himself with His blood, has filled it with His Spirit and provided it with those means which befit it as a visible and social union.

**God gathered together as one** all those **who in faith look upon Jesus** as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and **established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity**.

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<sup>1</sup> See #16

<sup>2</sup> See #14

While it transcends all limits of time and confines of race, **the Church is destined to extend to all regions of the earth** and so enters into the history of mankind... but remain a bride worthy of her Lord, and moved by the Holy Spirit may never cease to renew herself, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows no setting.

10. **Christ the Lord, High Priest** taken from among men, **made the new people “a kingdom and priests to God the Father”**. The **baptized**, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a **spiritual house and a holy priesthood**... Therefore, all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them.

**Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated:**

**each of them in its own special way is a participation in THE ONE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST.**

The **ministerial priest**, by the **sacred power** he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people.

But **the faithful**, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.

11. **It is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation.** Incorporated in the Church through **baptism**... they are more perfectly bound to the Church by the sacrament of **Confirmation**, and the Holy Spirit endows them with special strength so that they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ. Taking part in the **Eucharistic sacrifice**, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with it. Thus, both by reason of the offering and through Holy Communion all take part in this liturgical service, not indeed, all in the same way but each in that way which is proper to himself...

Those who approach the **sacrament of Penance** obtain pardon from the mercy of God for the offence committed against Him and are at the same time reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins, and which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion.

By the **sacred anointing of the sick** and the prayer of her priests the whole Church commends the sick to the suffering and glorified Lord, asking that He may lighten their suffering and save them; she exhorts them, moreover, to contribute to the welfare of the whole people of God by associating themselves freely with the passion and death of Christ.

Those of the faithful who are consecrated by **Holy Orders** are appointed to feed the Church in Christ's name with the word and the grace of God.

Finally, Christian spouses, in virtue of the **Sacrament of Matrimony**, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church, help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children. By reason of their state and rank in life they have their own special gift among the people of God.... The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it, parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.

**Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect.**

12. **The holy people of God shares also in CHRIST'S PROPHETIC OFFICE**; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise... **The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief.** They manifest this special property by means of the **whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith** when **“from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful”** they show **universal agreement in matters of faith and morals.**

That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth.

It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God.

Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.

...The **Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God** and enriches it with virtues, "allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills", He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church.... These **charisms**... are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church.

Extraordinary gifts are not to be sought after, nor are the fruits of apostolic labour to be presumptuously expected from their use;

but judgment as to their genuineness and proper use belongs to those who are appointed leaders in the Church, to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good.

13. **All... are called to belong to the new people of God.** Wherefore this people, **while remaining one and only one**, is to be spread throughout the whole world...

In the beginning God made human nature one and decreed that all His children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one...

He it is who brings together the whole Church and each and every one of those who believe, and who is the well-spring of their unity in the teaching of the apostles and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers.

It follows that though there are **many nations there is but one people of God**, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly rather than of an earthly nature. All the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit, and so, 'he who dwells in Rome knows that the people of India are his members' (Cf. John Chrysostom).

...This **characteristic of UNIVERSALITY** which adorns the people of God is a gift from the Lord Himself. By reason of it, the Catholic Church strives constantly and with due effect to bring all humanity and all its possessions back to its source in Christ, with Him as its head and united in His Spirit.

In virtue of this **catholicity**, **each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church**.

**All... are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God which in promoting universal peace presages it.**

**And there belong to or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, for all are called by the grace of God to salvation.**

14. This Sacred Council wishes to turn its attention firstly to **THE CATHOLIC FAITHFUL**. Basing itself upon Sacred Scripture and Tradition, it teaches that **the Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation**<sup>3</sup>.

Christ, present to us in His Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique way of salvation. In explicit terms He Himself affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through baptism as through a door, men enter the Church.

Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved.

**They are fully incorporated** in the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and are united with her as part of her visible bodily structure and through her with Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. The bonds which bind men to the Church in a visible way are profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government and communion.

**He is not saved, however, who, though part of the body of the Church, does not persevere in charity.** He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but, as it were, only in a “bodily” manner and not “in his heart.” All the Church’s children should remember that ... if they fail moreover to respond to that grace in thought, word and deed, not only shall they not be saved but they will be the more severely judged.

**Catechumens** who, moved by the Holy Spirit, seek with explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church are by that very intention joined with her. With love and solicitude Mother Church already embraces them as her own.

15. The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being **BAPTIZED**, are honoured with the **NAME OF CHRISTIAN**, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter.

For there are many who honour Sacred Scripture, taking it as a norm of belief and a pattern of life, and who show a sincere zeal.

They lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Saviour. They are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ.

They also recognize and accept other sacraments within their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities.

Many of them rejoice in the episcopate, celebrate the Holy Eucharist and cultivate devotion toward the Virgin Mother of God.

They also share with us in prayer and other spiritual benefits.

Likewise, we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces ....operative among them with His sanctifying power.

Some indeed He has strengthened to the extent of the shedding of their blood.

In all of Christ’s disciples, the Spirit arouses the desire to be peacefully united, in the manner determined by Christ, as one flock under one shepherd,

and He prompts them to pursue this end.

Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope and work that this may come about.

She exhorts her children to purification and renewal

**so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the earth.**

16. Finally, those who **HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED THE GOSPEL** are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place we must recall **(THE JEWS)** the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.

But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the **MOSLEMS** who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind.

Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images **SEEK THE UNKNOWN GOD**, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all men be saved. **Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience<sup>4</sup>.**

Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have **NOT YET ARRIVED AT AN EXPLICIT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD** and with His grace strive to live a good life. **Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel.** She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.

But often men, **deceived by the Evil One**, ...have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, servicing the creature rather than the Creator. Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair.

**Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these,  
and mindful of the command of the Lord,**

**“Preach the Gospel to every creature”,  
the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.**

17. As the Son was sent by the Father, so He too sent the Apostles, saying: *“Go, therefore, 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 things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world”*.

The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth...

For **the Church is compelled by the Holy Spirit<sup>5</sup> to do her part that God’s plan may be fully realized**, whereby He has constituted Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world....

Through (the Church’s) work,  
**whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men,**  
**whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples,**  
is not only **saved from destruction**  
but is also **cleansed, raised up and perfected unto the glory of God,**  
**the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man...**

In this way the Church both prays and labours in order that  
**the entire world may become**  
**the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit,**  
and that in Christ, the Head of all,  
all honour and glory may be rendered to the Creator and Father of the Universe.

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<sup>5</sup> "The love of Christ impels us" 2 Cor 5:14;

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” 2 Cor 5:18