VATICAN COUNCIL II
THE BASIC SIXTEEN DOCUMENTS

VATICAN COUNCIL II

CONSTITUTIONS
DECREES
DECLARATIONS

A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language

GENERAL EDITOR
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Latin Titles of Council Documents

Each council document has two Latin titles. One of these is made up of the first two or three words of the document's Latin original, the other being its descriptive title — eg *Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia*: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. English authors usually use the English version of a document's descriptive title, or a shortened version of it. However, "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" is frequently given the title *Gaudium et spes*, the first words of the Latin original, as is "The Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life" (*Perfectae caritatis*). "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," however, is sometimes referred to as *Lumen gentium*, sometimes as *De Ecclesia*.

*Ad gentes divinitus*: Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.

*Apostolicam actuositatem*: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.

*Christus Dominus*: Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church.

*Constitutio de Sacra Liturgia*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: see *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

*Constitutio Dogmatica de Divina Revelatione*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: see *Dei verbum*.

*Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: see *Lumen gentium*.

*Constitutio Pastoralis de Ecclesia in Mundo huius Temporis*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: see *Gaudium et spes*.

*Declaratio de Ecclesiae Habitudine ad Religiones Non-Christianas*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions: see *Nostra aetate*.

*Declaratio de Educatione Christiana*, Decree on Christian Education: see *Gravissimum educationis*.

*Declaratio de Libertate Religiosa*, Declaration on Religious Liberty: see *Dignitatis humanae*.
Decretum de Accomodata Renovatione Vitae Religiosae, Decree on the Up-do-date Renewal of Religious Life: see Perfectae caritatis.

Decretum de Activitate Missionali Ecclesiae, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity: see Ad gentes divinitus.

Decretum de Apostolatu Laicorum, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People: see Apostolicam actuositatem.

Decretum de Ecclesiis Orientalibus Catholicis, Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches: see Orientalium Ecclesiarum.

Decretum de Instrumentis Communicationis Socialis, Decree on the Mass Media: see Inter mirifica.

Decretum de Oecumenismo, Decree on Ecumenism: see Unitatis redintegratio.

Decretum de Pastorali Episcoporum Munere in Ecclesia, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church: see Christus Dominus.

Decretum de Presbyterorum Ministerio et Vita, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests: see Presbyterorum ordinis.

Dei verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.

Dignitatis humanae: Declaration on Religious Liberty.

Gaudium et spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

Gravissimum educationis: Declaration on Christian Education.

Inter mirifica: Decree on the Mass Media.

Lumen gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

Nostra aetate: Declaration on the Church’s Relations with non-christian religions.

Optatam totius: Decree on the Training of Priests.

Orientalium Ecclesiarum: Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches.

Perfectae caritatis: Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life.

Presbyterorum ordinis: Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests.

Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

Unitatis redintegratio: Decree on Ecumenism.
# Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td><em>Apostolicam actuositatem</em>: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAS</td>
<td><em>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</em>: the Vatican gazette, carries the original text (mostly Latin) of the more important official Vatican documents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGD</td>
<td><em>Ad gentes divinitus</em>: Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASS</td>
<td><em>Acta Sanctae Sedis</em>: the name of the Vatican gazette (see AAS) up to 1 January, 1909.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CChr</td>
<td><em>Corpus Christianorum</em>, Turnhout, 1953-.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td><em>Christus Dominus</em>: Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td><em>Concilium Tridentinum. Diariorum, actorum, epistularum, tractatum nova collectio</em>, ed. Goerresian Society, Freiburg, 1901-.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSEL</td>
<td><em>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</em>, Vienna, 1866-.</td>
</tr>
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<td>DH</td>
<td><em>Dignitatis humanae</em>: Declaration on Religious Liberty.</td>
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<td>DV</td>
<td><em>Dei verbum</em>: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funk</td>
<td>F. X. Funk, <em>Patres Apostolici</em>, two volumes, Tübingen, 1901.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCS</td>
<td><em>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte</em>, Leipzig and Berlin, 1897-.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GE</td>
<td><em>Gravissimum educationis</em>: Declaration on Christian Education.</td>
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GV 

Gaudium et spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

IM

Inter mirifica: Decree on the Media of Communication.

LG

Lumen gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

Mansi

J. D. Mansi, Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio. L. Petit and J. B. Martin, 60 volumes, 1899-1927.

NA

Nostra aetate: Declaration on the Church's Relations with non-christian religions.

OE

Orientalium ecclesiarum: Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches.

OT

Optatam totius: Decree on the Training of Priests.

PC

Perfectae caritatis: Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life.

PG


PL


PO

Presbyterorum ordinis: Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests.

SC

Sacrosanctum concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

SCh

H. de Lubac and J. Danielou, editors, Sources Chrétienes, Paris, 1942-.

Tanner


UR

Unitatis redintegratio: Decree on Ecumenism.

Vatican Collection


Vorgrimler

Introduction

The first session of Vatican Council II was held in Saint Peter’s basilica, Rome, on 11 October, 1962. It was attended by some 2,450 churchmen, out of a total of 2,908 who were entitled to attend. Some bishops were too old or too infirm to attend, and the majority of bishops in Communist countries were refused permission to travel, though restrictions were somewhat eased for subsequent sessions.

The other Christian churches had been invited to send “observers”, who would be free to attend all sessions, but not to speak or to vote. Thirty-five observers from other Christian churches attended the first session and their numbers increased in subsequent sessions.

The work of the council was spread over four years, about ten weeks being devoted to it in the autumn months of 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1965, with a great deal of work being done each year in the intervening periods by the various conciliar commissions.

1995 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the closing of the Vatican council. It seemed an appropriate time to publish this volume devoted exclusively to the sixteen conciliar texts. In fact, the suggestion that I publish the sixteen council documents on their own was first put to me a few years ago by Father Richard McCullen, CM, who was then Superior General of the Vincentians.

When we published the sixteen conciliar texts twenty years ago, in 1975, they were accompanied by many other official Vatican texts, rightly entitled “postconciliar” texts, since so many of them spelled
out the manner in which a number of the conciliar texts were to be implemented.

The translation of the text of the Vatican documents in the present volume differs from that in the previous publication in two respects. It has been very considerably revised and, in places, corrected. It is also, to a very large extent, in inclusive language.

I say ‘to a very large extent’, because we have used inclusive language in passages about men and women, but not however in passages about God, except where the use of the masculine pronoun was easily avoidable.

Concern about exclusive language has grown very much since Vatican II, a concern now shared by many men as well as women. My co-workers and I have done our best to render the documents in inclusive language, on the horizontal level, as it were. This is sometimes done by translating *hominès*, for example, as “men and women”, *filii*, as “sons and daughters”, *fratres*, as “brothers and sisters”. Naturally, one does this only where it is clear that the text has women in mind, as well as men. This is the case in the majority of passages and in fact there are many passages where it would be heretical to deny that they apply to women too, as with the phrase in the second paragraph of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: “The eternal Father . . . chose to raise up men to share in his divine life”. To add “and women” after the word “men” in that phrase is not to change its meaning but to put it beyond dispute.

A similar procedure was adopted where, for example, the Latin original uses the word *homo* in the collective sense, this is usually rendered as “men and women”. To sum up: wherever a document clearly means both women and men, while using words such as man and mankind, laymen, sons, brothers, frater-
nal, we have used words which make the document’s meaning clear.

We have done our best to make the translation as accurate as possible, but I know from experience that mistakes can occur. *Quod potest deficere, aliquando deficit.*

However, it has to be accepted that there will be no pleasing everybody, for the simple reason that there are words and phrases—less important words and phrases—which, quite legitimately, can be rendered in different ways.

The following is a phrase from the *Church in the Modern World* (no 36): “*per oblivionem Dei ipsa creatura obscuratur.*” In this volume, it is rendered: “once God is forgotten, the creature itself is left in darkness.” Our other edition has: “once God is forgotten, the creature is lost sight of as well.” Tanner has “if God is ignored, the creature is impoverished.” An Italian version has “*l’oblio di Dio priva di luce la creatura stessa:* forgetfulness of God deprives the creature itself of light.” A French version has “*l’oubli de Dieu rend opaque la créature elle-même:* forgetfulness of God renders the creature itself opaque”.


I have compared notes with both Tanner and Abbot, with the French version *Concile Oecuménique Vatican II: Constitutions, Décrets, Déclarations, Messages,*

AUSTIN FLANNERY, OP
+ October 21, 2008
DOGOMATIC
CONSTITUTION ON
THE CHURCH

Lumen Gentium
21 November, 1964

Chapter Ia
THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

1. Christ is the light of the nations and consequently this holy synod, gathered together in the holy Spirit, ardently desires to bring to all humanity that light of Christ which is resplendent on the face of the church, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature (see Mk 16:15). Since the church, in Christ, is a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race—it here proposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the entire world, to describe more clearly, and in the tradition laid down by earlier council, its own nature and universal mission. The present situation lends greater urgency to this duty of the church, so that all people, who nowadays are drawn ever more closely together by social, technical and cultural bonds, may achieve full unity in Christ.

2. The eternal Father, in accordance with the utterly free and mysterious design of his wisdom and goodness, created the entire universe. He chose to raise up men and women to share in his own divine life; and when they had fallen in Adam, he did not
abandon them, but at all times offered them the means of salvation, bestowed in consideration of Christ, the Redeemer, “who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15). All those chosen, the Father “foreknew” before time began “and also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son that he should be the firstborn of a large family” (Rom 8:29). He determined to call together in the holy church those who believe in Christ. Already prefigured at the beginning of the world, this church was prepared in marvellous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and in the ancient alliance. Established in this last age of the world, and made manifest in the outpouring of the Spirit, it will be brought to glorious completion at the end of time. At that moment, as the Fathers put it, all the just from the time of Adam, “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, accordingly, came, sent by the Father, who before the foundation of the world chose us and predestined us in him to be his adopted sons and daughters. For it is in him that it pleased the Father to restore all things (see Eph 1: 4-5 and 10). To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed his mystery to us; by his obedience he brought about the redemption. The church—that is, the kingdom of Christ already present in mystery — grows visibly in the world through the power of God. The origin and growth of the church are symbolized by the blood and water which issued from the open side of the crucified Jesus (see Jn 19:34), and were foretold in the words of the Lord referring to his death on the cross: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:32; Greek text). As often as the sacrifice of the cross by which “Christ our Pasch is sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7) is
celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out. Likewise, in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ (see 1 Cor 10:17), is both expressed and achieved. All are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we come, through whom we live, and towards whom we direct our lives.

4. When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth (see Jn 17:4) was completed, the holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost to sanctify the church continually and so that believers might have access to the Father through Christ in the one Spirit (see Eph 2:18). This is the Spirit of life, the fountain of water springing up to eternal life (see Jn 4:14; 7:38-39), through whom the Father gives life to human beings dead in sin, until the day when, in Christ, he raises to life their mortal bodies (see Rom 8:10-11). The Spirit dwells in the church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple (see 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), prays and bears witness in them that they are his adopted children (see Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15-16 and 26). He guides the church in the way of all truth (see Jn 16:13 ) and, uniting it in fellowship and ministry, bestows upon it different hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs it and adorns it with his fruits (see Eph 4 11-12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 5:22). By the power of the Gospel he rejuvenates the church, constantly renewing it and leading it to perfect union with its spouse.³ For the Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, Come! (see Apoc 22:17). Hence the universal church is seen to be “a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son and the holy Spirit.”⁴

5. The mystery of the holy church is already brought to light in the manner of its foundation. For the Lord Jesus inaugurated his church by preaching the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God,
promised over the ages in the scriptures: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15; see Mt 4:17). This kingdom shines out before humanity in the words, the works and the presence of Christ. The word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field (see Mk 4:14); those who hear the word with faith and form part of the little flock of Christ (see Lk 12:32) have received the kingdom itself. Then, by its own power the seed sprouts and grows until the harvest (see Mk 4:26-29). The miracles of Jesus also demonstrate that the kingdom has already come on earth: "If I cast out devils by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk 11:20; see Mt 12:28). But principally the kingdom is revealed in the person of Christ himself, Son of God and Son of Man, who came "to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45).

When Jesus, having died on the cross for humanity, rose again from the dead, he appeared as Lord, Christ, and priest established for ever (see Acts 2:36; Heb 5:6; 7:17-21), and he poured out on his disciples the Spirit promised by the Father (see Acts 2:23). Henceforward the church, equipped with the gifts of its founder and faithfully observing his precepts of charity, humility and self-denial, receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom. While it slowly grows to maturity, the church longs for the completed kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its king.

6. In the Old Testament symbols are often used to convey the revelation of the kingdom and similarly the inner nature of the church is now made known to us in various images. Taken either from pastoral life, agriculture, construction work, or from family life and betrothal, these images are prepared in the books of
the prophets.

The church is, accordingly, a sheepfold, the sole and necessary entrance to which is Christ (see Jn 10:1-10). It is also a flock, of which God foretold that he would himself be the shepherd (see Is 40:11; Ez 34:11 ff.), and whose sheep, although watched over by human shepherds, are nevertheless at all times led and brought to pasture by Christ himself, the Good Shepherd and prince of shepherds (see Jn 10:11; 1 Pet 5:4), who gave his life for his sheep (see Jn 10:11-15).

The church is God's farm or field (see 1 Cor 3:9). In this field the ancient olive tree grows whose holy root were the patriarchs and in which the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles has been achieved and will continue to be achieved (see Rom 11:13-16). The church has been planted by the heavenly farmer as a choice vineyard (see Mt 21:33-43 and parallels; Is 5:1 ff.). The true vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us, who through the church abide in Christ without whom we can do nothing (see Jn 15:1-5).

Often, too, the church is called God's building (see 1 Cor 3:9). The Lord compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone (see Mt 21:42 and parallels; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7; Ps 117:22). On this foundation the church is built by the apostles (see 1 Cor 3:11) and from this it receives stability and cohesion. This edifice is given various names: the house of God (see 1 Tim 3:15) in which his family lives; the household of God in the Spirit (see Eph 2:19-22); "the dwelling-place of God among mortals" (Apoc 21:3); and, especially, the holy temple. This temple, represented in sanctuaries built of stone, is praised by the Fathers and is rightly compared in the liturgy to the holy city, the new Jerusalem. As living stones we here on earth are built into it (see 1 Pet 2:5). It is this holy city which John con-
templates as it comes down out of heaven from God when the world is made anew, “prepared like a bride adorned for her husband” (Apoc 21:1 f.).

Moreover, the church which is called “that Jerusalem which is above” and “our mother” (Gal 4:26; see Apoc 12:17), is described as the spotless spouse of the spotless lamb (Apoc 19:7; 21:2 and 9; 22:17), whom Christ “loved . . . and for whom he delivered himself up that he might sanctify her” (Eph 5:26). It is the church which he unites to himself by an unbreakable alliance, and which he constantly “nourishes and cherishes” (Eph 5:29). It is the church which, once purified, he willed to be joined to himself, subject in love and fidelity (see Eph 5:24), and which, 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 understanding (see Eph 3:19). While on earth it journeys in a foreign land away from the Lord (see 2 Cor 5:6), the church sees itself as an exile. It seeks and is concerned about those things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, where the life of the church is hidden with Christ in God until it appears in glory with its Spouse (see Col 3:1-4).

7. In the human nature united to himself, the son of God, by overcoming death through his own death and resurrection, redeemed humanity and changed it into a new creation (see Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17). For by communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body his brothers and sisters who are called together from every nation.

In this body the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ in his passion and glorification. Through Baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). In this
sacred rite our union with Christ's death and resurrection is symbolized and effected: "For we were buried with him by Baptism into death"; and if "we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be so in the likeness of his resurrection also" (Rom 6:4-5). Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another. "Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread" (I Cor 10:17). In this way all of us are made members of his body (see 1 Cor 12:27), "individually members one of another" (Rom 12:5).

As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also do the faithful in Christ (see 1 Cor 12:12). A diversity of members and functions is engaged in the building up of Christ's body, too. There is only one Spirit who, out of his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his various gifts for the welfare of the church (see 1 Cor 12:1-11). Among these gifts the primacy belongs to the grace of the apostles to whose authority the Spirit subjects even those who are endowed with charisms (see 1 Cor 14). The same Spirit who of himself is the principle of unity in the body, by his own power and by the interior cohesion of the members produces and stimulates love among the faithful. From this it follows that if one member suffers in any way, all the members suffer, and if one member is honored, all the members together rejoice (see 1 Cor 12:26).

The head of this body is Christ. He is the image of the invisible God and in him all things came into being. He is before all creatures and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body which is the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might hold the primacy (see
Col 1:15-18). By the magnitude of his power he rules heaven and earth, and with his all-surpassing perfection and activity he fills the whole body with the riches of his glory (see Eph 1:18-23).

All the members must be formed in his likeness, until Christ is formed in them (see Gal 4:19). For this reason we, who have been made like to him, who have died with him and risen with him, are taken up into the mysteries of his life, until we reign together with him (see Phil 3:21; 2 Tim 2:11; Eph 2:6; Col 2:12, etc.). On earth, still as pilgrims in a strange land, following in trial and in oppression the paths he trod, we are associated with his sufferings as the body with its head, suffering with him, that with him we may be glorified (see Rom 8:17).

From him “the whole body, supplied and built up by joints and ligaments, attains a growth that is of God” (Col 2:19). He constantly makes available in his body, which is the church, gifts of ministries through which, by his power, we provide each other with the helps needed for salvation so that, doing the truth in love, we may in all things grow into him who is our head (see Eph 4:11-16, Greek.).

In order that we might be unceasingly renewed in him (see Eph 4:23), he has shared with us his Spirit who, being one and the same in head and members, gives life to, unifies and moves the whole body. Consequently, his work could be compared by the Fathers of the church to the function that the principle of life, the soul, fulfills in the human body.

Christ loves the church as his bride, making himself the model of a man loving his wife as his own body (see Eph 5:25-28); the church, in its turn, is subject to its head (Eph 5:23-24). “Because in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9), he fills the church, which is his body and his fullness, with his divine gifts (see Eph 1:22-23) so that it may
increase and attain to all the fullness of God (see Eph 3:19).

8. The one mediator, Christ, established and constantly sustains here on earth his holy church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible structure through which he communicates truth and grace to everyone. But, the society equipped with hierarchical structures and the mystical body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly church and the church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality comprising a human and a divine element. For this reason the church is compared, in no mean analogy, to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature, inseparably united to him, serves the divine Word as a living instrument of salvation, so, in somewhat similar fashion, does the social structure of the church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the body (see Eph 4:16).

This is the unique church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic which our Saviour, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care (Jn 21:17), commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it (see Mt 28:18, etc.), and which he raised up for all ages as the pillar and mainstay of the truth (see 1 Tim 3:15). This church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, 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. Since these are gifts belonging to the church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards catholic unity.

Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the church is called to fol-
low the same path if it is to communicate the fruits of salvation to humanity. Christ Jesus, "though he was by nature God . . . emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave" (Phil 2:6-7), and "being rich, became poor" (2 Cor 8:9) for our sake. Likewise, the church, although it needs human resources to carry out its mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, and this by its own example, humility and self-denial. Christ was sent by the Father "to bring good news to the poor . . . to heal the broken hearted" (Lk 4:18), "to seek and to save what was lost" (Lk 19:10). Similarly, the church encompasses with its love all those who are afflicted by human infirmity and it recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the likeness of its poor and suffering founder. It does all in its power to relieve their need and in them it endeavours to serve Christ, who, "holy, innocent and undefiled" (see Heb 7:26) knew nothing of sin (see 2 Cor 5:21), but came only to expiate the sins of the people (see Heb 2:17). The church, however, clasping sinners to its bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal.

The church, "like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God," announcing the cross and death of the Lord until he comes (see 1 Cor 11:26). But by the power of the risen Lord it is given strength to overcome, in patience and in love, its sorrows and its difficulties, both those that are from within and those that are from without, so that it may reveal in the world, faithfully, although with shadows, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it shall be manifested in full light.

a. This chapter was translated by the late Colman O'Neill, OP, University of Fribourg, Switzerland. It was revised for this edition by Henry Peel, OP, Dublin and AF.
1. See St Cyprian, Epist. 64, 4: PL 3, 1017, CSEL (Hartel) III B,


12. See *Apostles’ Creed*: Denz. 6-9 (10-13); *Nicene-Constant. Creed*: Denz. 86 (150), compare *Tridentine profession of faith*: Denz. 994 and 999 (1862 and 1868).


THE PEOPLE OF GOD

9. At all times and in every nation, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to him (see Acts 10:35). He has, however, willed to make women and men holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness. He therefore chose the people of Israel to be his own people and established a covenant with them. He instructed them gradually, making both himself and his intentions known in the course of their history, and made them holy for himself. All these things, however, happened as a preparation and figure of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ, and of the fuller revelation which was to be given through the Word of God made flesh. "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts, and they shall be my people . . . For they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord" (Jer 31:31-34). Christ instituted this new covenant, the new covenant in his blood (see 1 Cor 11:25); he called a people together made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and it would be the new people of God. For those who believe in Christ, who are reborn, not from a corruptible but from an incorruptible seed, through the word of the living God (see 1 Pet 1:23), not from flesh, but from water and the holy Spirit (see Jn 3:5-6), are finally established as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession
... who in times past were not a people, but now are the people of God” (1 Pet 2:9-10).

That messianic people has as its head Christ, “who was delivered up for our sins and rose again for our justification” (Rom 4:25), and now, having acquired the name which is above all names, reigns gloriously in heaven. This people possesses the dignity and freedom of the daughters and sons of God, in whose hearts the holy Spirit dwells as in a temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us (see Jn 13:34). Its destiny is the kingdom of God which has been begun by God himself on earth and which must be further extended until it is brought to perfection by him at the end of time when Christ our life (see Col 3:4), will appear and “creation itself also will be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons and daughters of God” (Rom 8:21). Consequently, this messianic people, although it does not, in fact, include everybody, and at times may seem to be a little flock, is, however, a most certain seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all; as the light of the world and the salt of the earth (see Mt 5:13-16) it is sent forth into the whole world.

Just as the people of Israel in the flesh, who wandered in the desert, were already called the church of God (see 2 Esd 13:1; Num 20:4; Deut 23:1 ff.), so too, the new Israel, which advances in this present era in search of a future and permanent city (see Heb 13:14), is also called the church of Christ (see Mt 16:18). It is Christ indeed who had purchased it with his own blood (see Acts 20:28); he has filled it with his Spirit; he has provided it with organs suited to its visible and social unity. All those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as