

Carey, Raymond G.

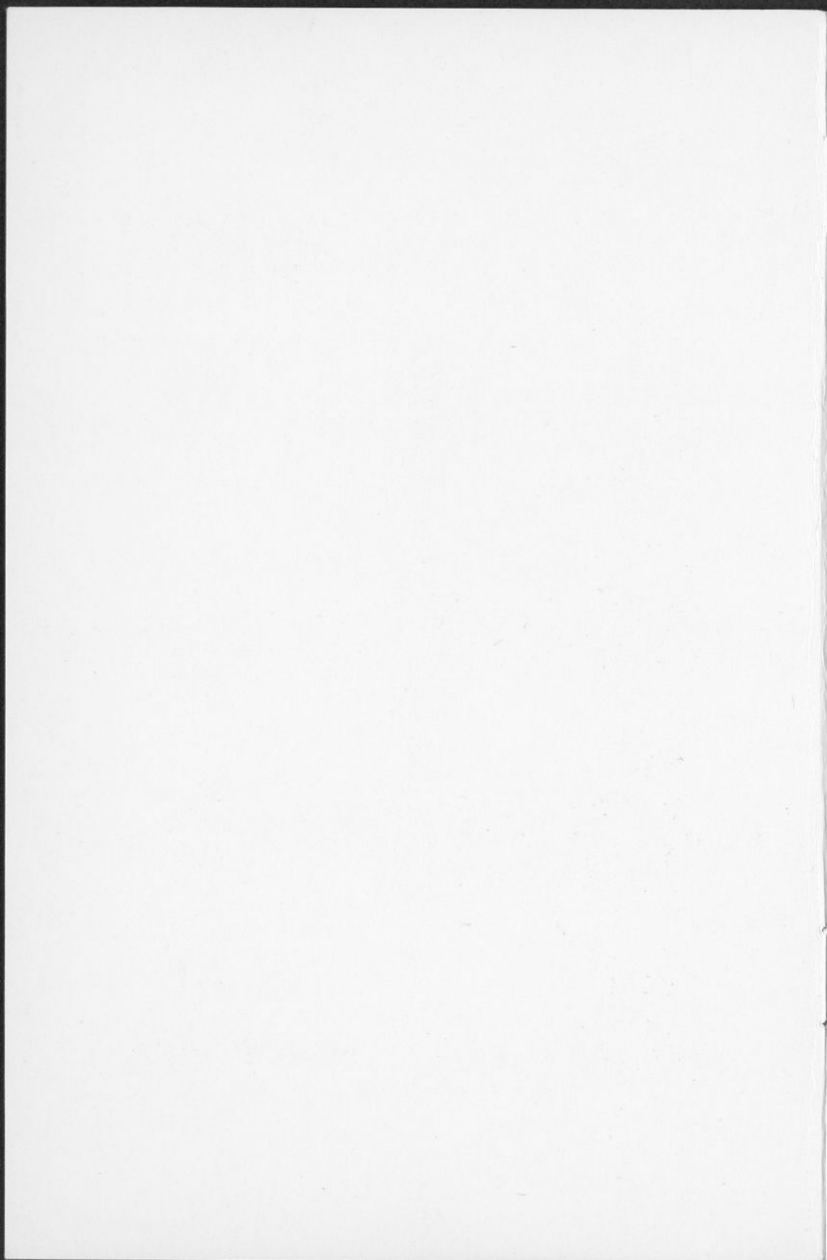
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WHAT IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Rev. Raymond G. Carey

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NEW VISION SERIES



NEW VISION SERIES

WHAT IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

The Problems and
Challenges of Vatican II

By Rev. Raymond G. Carey

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This excellent new series has been prepared and edited by Ronald Wilkins, Director of Teacher Training for the Chicago Archdiocesan Confraternity of Christian Doctrine for ten years. Co-author of the popular TO LIVE IS CHRIST high school religion series, he has also written TEACHING IN THE C.C.D. HIGH SCHOOL and TRAINING LAY TEACHERS FOR THE PARISH HIGH SCHOOL OF RELIGION.

INTRODUCTION

A healthy confusion and anxiety may have been one of the first results of the Second Vatican Council. One might hear it expressed this way:

"I used to think that I knew what it meant to be a Catholic, but since the Vatican Council, I'm not sure any more. We used to talk of the Church as 'The Mystical Body of Christ'; now everyone is talking about the 'new People of God.' What is my relationship to Christians of other communions? What is the difference between being a layman and a cleric? Does 'collegiality' mean that the pope no longer exercises authority over the bishops? Are we supposed to de-emphasize our devotion to Mary to win the friendship of the Protestant Christians? Is there any point in encouraging conversion to the Roman Catholic Church any more? Does it make any difference to which Christian Church we belong?"

This pamphlet represents an approach toward resolving these confusions. It is not meant to be a complete treatise on the Church, nor is it addressed to theologians. It is addressed to parents, teachers, and anyone who is interested in Christian education, with the hope that it may give them some clear and precise ideas on the Church.

Part I presents the basic doctrine on the Church as envisioned by the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Church*. It contains a discussion of six key themes in understanding the nature of the Church.

- I. The Church: The New People of God.
- II. Who Belongs?
- III. Relationship of the Pope, Bishops and Priests Within the People of God.



IV. Relationship Between the Laity, Clergy and Religious of the People of God.

V. Universal Vocation to Holiness.

VI. Mary's Relationship to the People of God.

In *Part II*, there is a presentation of three challenges involved in relating the doctrine on the Church to real-life situations. They are challenges that did not exist 10 years ago, but have arisen from the Church's deeper understanding of itself.

I. Convert-Making Versus Ecumenical Dialogue.

II. Dialogue With Honesty and Charity.

III. The Challenge of Artificial Renewal.



PART I

KEY THEMES IN UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

I. The Church: The New People of God

What is wrong with the old images of the Church? Is it wrong now to speak of the Church under the image of the vine and the branches, the shepherd and his flock, the Mystical Body of Christ? Certainly not. But the *Constitution on the Church* of the Second Vatican Council chooses the scriptural image of the "new People of God" for several reasons.

First of all, it places the Church in the *context of salvation history*; that is, it shows the relationship of the Church to the Old Testament and to the Second Coming of Christ. This is important because it shows how God deals with His people, and consequently with us, individually and collectively. Chapter two of the Constitution explains how God chose to make men holy and to save them, not merely as individuals, but as a community. He, therefore, chose the people of Israel to be His people, with whom He made a covenant, to whom He revealed His love, from whom He expected a response of love, through whom He would prepare a new and a more perfect covenant.

Christ fulfilled this prophecy, instituting the new covenant, the New Testament, and including in this "new People of God" not just the Jew, but also Gentile. The new messianic people, with Christ as its head, calls all men to itself, ". . . although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock. . . ." As the People of God in the Old Covenant looked forward to

the first coming of Christ, so now the new People of God look forward to the Second Coming of Christ. The People of God still retain their characteristic of being a pilgrim people.

Secondly, the image of the People of God brings out more clearly the *family character* of the Church. The Church is not divided into two sections, the clergy and the laity, because prior to the distinction brought about by the sacrament of Holy Orders, the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation constitute the faithful as a brotherhood, a single people of brothers. Chapter two of the Constitution emphasizes that the entire brotherhood, and not just the clergy, participate in the priesthood of Christ, the teaching office of Christ, the prophetic ministry of Christ. This is not to deny, however, that through the sacrament of Holy Orders some of the brotherhood receive a fuller share in the priesthood of Christ and are entrusted with the responsibility of guiding the Church in fulfilling its teaching role. But the bishops fulfill this role as servants of the brotherhood, not as ecclesiastical bureaucrats in a spiritual power structure.

Thirdly, the image of the People of God has *greater ecumenical appeal*, as will be seen in the following pages. The use of this image enables the Church to explain its relationship to the other Christian communities in a way that is more in keeping with the scriptural basis on which the idea of the Church is founded.

II. Who Belongs?

A change in emphasis has taken place since the encyclical on the *Mystical Body* of Pope Pius XII with regard to the historical existence of Christ's body. According to Father Gregory Baum, O.S.A., a peritus of Vatican II, in his commentary on the *Constitution on the Church*, Pius XII identified, without any qualifications, the Mystical Body of Christ with the Catholic Church. But the Constitution, beginning with membership in the Mystical Body as

communion of life with Christ, does not come to the same conclusion. "Instead of simply identifying the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church," Father Baum asserts, "the Constitution rather says more carefully that the Church of Christ 'subsists in' the Catholic Church. The body of Christ is present in the Catholic Church, but, at the same time, without losing its historical and incarnate character, transcends it."

This new, enlarged view of the Church of Christ is of the greatest importance in understanding our relationship to other Christians. Whereas Pius XII spoke of those who are "really" members of the Church (Roman Catholics) and those who belonged to the Church "by desire," the Constitution speaks of those who are "fully incorporated" into the Church of Christ (Roman Catholics), and those who are not fully incorporated. Therefore, Father Baum concludes that the Constitution teaches that ". . . only the Catholic Church perfectly embodies the Church of Christ on earth, but, because of the transcendence of Christ's Church, this does not preclude the possibility that there may be partial realizations of this Church among men."

Regarding the status of separated Christians, the Constitution says that "The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, . . . do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter."

Regarding non-Christians, the Constitution says that ". . . those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the People of God." Here, mention is made of the Jews, Moslems, and finally those who without blame on their part have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God but strive to lead a good life.

The Constitution warns Catholics against presuming they will be saved just because they have the privilege of being fully incorporated into the Church of Christ. "If they fail to respond to that grace in thought, word and deed, not only shall they not be saved but they will be the

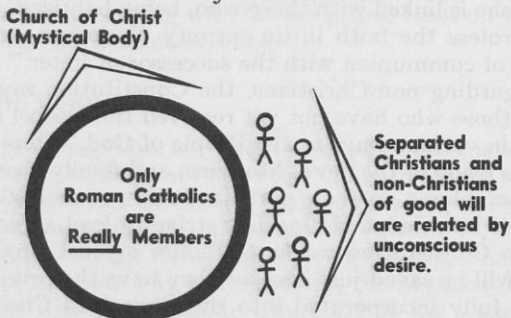
more severely judged." Catholics, therefore, may be considered to have a greater spiritual *potential*, objectively speaking, and may expect a just God to reward them accordingly, *if they live up to that opportunity*. But they can expect a greater punishment if they fail to respond to God's love.

Finally, who does not belong to the Church of Christ in any sense of the word? The Constitution does not explicitly say, but we are left to conclude that those do not belong who, either through pride, laziness, or selfishness, never make an effort to seek God or His will, but seek only their own personal fulfillment in this world. "Some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are left finally in a state of hopelessness."

The following diagrams summarize the change in emphasis and terminology from the encyclical on the *Mystical Body* to the *Constitution on the Church*:

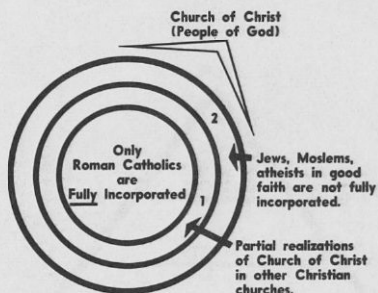
Who Are Members of the Church?

- A. In the encyclical on the *Mystical Body*, Pope Pius XII taught that only Catholics are *really members* of the Church of Christ. Others may be saved by being related to the Church by "unconscious desire."



- B. The *Constitution on the Church* of Vatican Council II teaches that the Church of Christ transcends the his-

torical entity of the Roman Catholic Church. Only Catholics are *fully incorporated*. But there are degrees of incorporation.



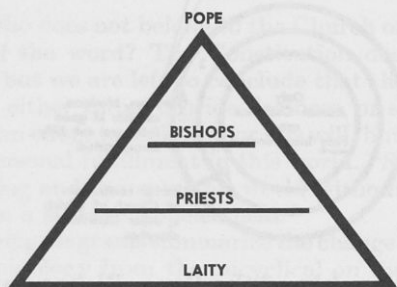
III. Relationship of the Pope, Bishops and Priests

The doctrine of *collegiality* was one of the sharply contested issues of the Vatican Council. Understanding the meaning of collegiality is essential to understanding the governmental structure of the Church. *It means that the bishops of the Church together with the pope constitute a body, or a college, that succeeds the College of Apostles.* Jesus chose the College of Apostles, with Peter as its head, to teach, sanctify and govern the People of God on earth. While the Pope is the supreme head of this College, every bishop shares with him the care of the whole Church. In addition to sharing the care of the universal Church, each bishop receives jurisdiction over a part he serves.

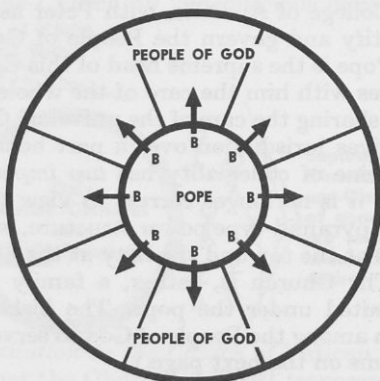
The doctrine of collegiality has *two important conclusions*. First, it is no longer correct to view the universal Church as a pyramid-type power structure, with the pope and bishops at the top and the laity at the bottom of the pyramid. The Church is, rather, a family of episcopal churches united under the pope. The bishops are men chosen from among the People of God to serve the family. (See diagrams on the next page.)

Monarchical Versus Collegial Concept of Church

- A. In the monarchical concept, the pope is the head of a pyramid-type power structure with the laity at the bottom.



- B. In the doctrine of collegiality, the Episcopal College is at the center of the People of God—entrusted with the care of the whole Church. The pope is the center and head of the College, while each bishop governs a small family of his own.



The second important conclusion of the doctrine of collegiality affects the Curia, the pope's administrative body, made up of the heads of various departments of ecclesiastical government. From now on, the members of the Curia will no longer be the sole advisers of the pope, no longer be alone in formulating Church policy with the pope. The bishops, whose concern extends to the universal Church, will, through the Senate of Bishops (to be established), share more intimately with the pope in formulating universal Church policy.

In the diagram it should be noted that the bishop (B) is located in the inner circle surrounding the pope to show that each bishop must share the concern of the pope and other bishops for the whole Church. And the individual diocesan family entrusted to a particular bishop (arrow) must also share with their bishop his care for the needs and problems of the universal Church.

Thus far we have considered the laity and the bishops in this renewed concept of the Church. What is the role of the priest? The *priest is the representative* of the bishop in the various parish families within a particular episcopal family. At various liturgical celebrations, the President's chair is really representative of episcopal authority, and the priest presides over the assembly in the bishop's name. He receives his jurisdiction directly and immediately from the bishop.

IV. Relationship Between the Laity, Clergy and Religious of the People of God

There was a time in the not too distant past when a layman thought it was his job to save his own soul, while it was up to the priests to look to missionary and conversion work. The *Constitution on the Church* makes it clear that the *layman* is a person who has been incorporated into the People of God by his Baptism, who shares the priestly,

prophetic and teaching office of Christ, and who will save his soul by working to spread the kingdom of God on earth. The work of Christianizing a secular world is his; the work of conversion is his; the work of unifying the People of God is his.

The *clergy*, that is, the bishop and diocesan priests, have been chosen from among the People of God to serve the People of God, so that all Christians will be closely united to Christ and better enabled to fulfill their task of Christianizing the world. The diocesan priesthood is the sacrament of spiritual service to the Christian people.

The *religious* are those among the People of God who practice the counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience in the stable form of a community life. According to their own particular vocation, through prayer or active works, they strive to spread Christ's kingdom. But their unique contribution is the prophetic sign they give through the practice of their vows: that the good things of this life will eventually all pass away; that we do not have a lasting city here on earth; that our true hope for happiness is our future resurrection with Christ and the glory of a heavenly kingdom.

V. Universal Vocation to Holiness

"How can I have eternal happiness with the least amount of suffering, with the least amount of effort?" is perhaps the question that not a few of the People of God ask themselves. "I'm never going to be a saint. But I try not to hurt anyone. I'm certainly better than a lot of people I see around me. Just what does God expect?"

The answer to that question in one word is— "Holiness!" Jesus said, "This is the will of God, your sanctification." This was addressed to all the People of God, not just a few. And the *Constitution on the Church* felt this idea was important enough to set aside a separate chapter on the "Universal Vocation to Holiness."

False Humility

A spiritual laziness can hide behind the facade of humility. We can lower our eyes and strike our breast, saying, "Lord, I know that I was not called to sanctity like the priests, brothers and nuns. I am just an ordinary man. I will be pleased if I can just avoid mortal sin, as the moralists of the Church have explained it to me." But behind these "pious" feelings can lurk a laziness that makes us unwilling to put out the effort and sacrifice to love God and our neighbor with our whole heart. The Constitution says ". . . all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity. . . . They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor."

But there will be many and varied forms of holiness. Each person has his own special gifts and his own special duties through which he will serve God with faith, hope and love. Holiness does not consist in performing a special series of actions, but in faithfully performing the duties of our state in life. The bishop's program for personal holiness will differ somewhat from that of his priests, and the path to holiness for a Christian parent will still be different. Single people and widows will each have their own special opportunities for holiness.

The Constitution singles out two paths to holiness for special commendation: martyrdom and the celibate state of life. "The Church, then, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the fullest proof of love. Though few are presented such an opportunity, nevertheless, all must be prepared to confess Christ before men in the midst of persecutions. . . . Likewise, the holiness of the Church is fostered in a special way by the observance of the counsels. . . . An eminent position among these is held by virginity or the celibate state . . . a special source of spiritual fecundity in the world."

This statement regarding the life of the counsels, and

celibacy in particular, is not meant to relegate the laity to the state of "second-class citizens." The war to recognize the importance of the laity in the People of God is now over. But the Council does not want to overlook the sacrifices of those who have taken vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience so that they might serve the People of God with undivided attention.

It might also be observed that vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience are not necessarily restricted to the religious state of life—but can and are taken privately by laity in special conditions of life. And finally, in a broader sense, the spirit of the counsels can and should be practiced by everyone within the People of God.

Perhaps the biggest danger in the pursuit of holiness is the *danger of legalism*. This attitude is represented by such questions as, "What am I strictly obliged to do by Church law in this matter? I'll do that, but no more"; or, "How far can I go before it is a mortal sin?" The motive most worthy of a Christian is a generous love of God, not a servile fear of punishment. We should be less concerned with theological hair-splitting, and more concerned about increasing our spirit of sacrifice and generosity. We should be less concerned with avoiding mortal sin, and more concerned about the positive practice of virtue. The relaxation of the laws of fast and abstinence for Lent in 1966 should be seen in this light: as a move toward abolishing the spirit of legalism, and fostering a voluntary and generous spirit of prayer, penance, and a positive practice of virtue.

One final important point on the pursuit of holiness is this: that *holiness is not a turning away from, but an involvement in, society*. True love of God demands the effort to bring the world to Christ and Christ to the world. To remain indifferent to and fatalistic about the evil in the world, is neither to love God nor the world. There is challenge in helping the poor to help themselves—the challenge of racial justice, the challenge of honesty in business, the challenge of integrity in political life. In some

way, according to our ability and opportunity, we have to make the effort to bring Christian principles to bear on modern problems.

This will involve an element of risk. There is a risk that we will have our own principles watered down by the very people we are trying to help. There is the risk of hostility from people who do not enjoy having their consciences awakened. There is the risk of personal discouragement and despair when our efforts produce little in the way of results. But these are the risks of love; these are the risks of Christianity.

VI. Mary's Relationship to the People of God

In the post-Vatican Council era, is the Church now attempting to "play down" the traditional honor and cult that she has rendered to the Blessed Mother? By a very narrow margin, the Council Fathers voted against treating Marian doctrine in a separate schema and voted to include it as a chapter in the *Constitution on the Church*. What is the significance of this? On the parish level, novenas are being eased out and Bible vigils are now "in." What does it all mean?

The Constitution says that the work of the Council on the subject of the Blessed Mother is not meant to be exhaustive or final. It did not wish to decide those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified. However, the Council makes a statement in three areas: Mary's Role in the Economy of Salvation; Mary's Relationship to the Church; Veneration to Mary.

Mary is the chosen member of our human race through whom the expectation and promise of the Old Testament is fulfilled. When the Son of God came into the world to accomplish our Redemption, it was from Mary that He took His human nature. The *motherhood* of Mary is, therefore, the central privilege from which all devotion, honor and praise to Mary is derived. All other privileges, such

as the Assumption and Immaculate Conception, are hinged on Mary's divine motherhood. Her titles of "co-redemtrix" and "mediatrix" must be interpreted in terms of her motherhood.

Mary's motherhood is also the key to *her relationship to the Church*. The Constitution says that Jesus is the one unique Mediator between God and men. "The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ. . . ." But Mary ". . . conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ, she presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him by compassion as He died on the Cross. In this singular way she cooperated in the work of the Saviour by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace." Many writers and authors have used the expression "through Mary to Jesus," but this must not be interpreted in a way that we are in need of a mediator to come to Jesus, but rather that Mary deepens and intensifies the direct union between Jesus and the believer. Our devotion to Mary must not obscure the centrality of Jesus in the plan of salvation history; our main emphasis is always "through Jesus to God the Father."

As regards our *veneration of Mary*, the Constitution says that the motherhood of Mary is the criterion with which all cult must be evaluated. We are encouraged to foster the devotion and exercises of piety toward Mary that the Church has recommended throughout the centuries. We are warned against the extremes, that is, false exaggeration as well as too great narrowness of mind considering the singular dignity of the mother of God. Without being specific, the Constitution indicates that certain practices have led our separated brethren into error regarding the true devotion of the Church to Mary.

PART II

CHALLENGES IN CHURCH REUNION

I. Convert-Making Vs. Ecumenical Dialogue

In his last Lenten pastoral letter to the people of Chicago (1964), the late Albert Cardinal Meyer posed the problem: In view of the growing success of the ecumenical movement, should we relax in our efforts to obtain converts to the Catholic Church? He answered the question by saying that the "contradiction" between convert-making and the fruitful ecumenical dialogue is only an apparent one. To answer this question satisfactorily, he said that we ought to distinguish several levels of religious discussion:

1) First, there is the ecumenical dialogue, whose purpose is mutual understanding and removal of prejudices. At this level, attempts at conversion are entirely out of place.

2) Secondly, there is the level of the formal negotiations for reunion among churches. Here the problem is that of corporate reunion and no form of proselytism should interfere with the discussions which are conducted only by responsible authorities acting as representatives of their respective churches, not merely as individuals.

3) Finally, there is the level of the direct apostolate to individual persons. "*It would be a great mistake for Catholics to cease to carry on the apostolate to individuals on the grounds that it hinders the ecumenical movement* (my italics). . . . Undoubtedly our apostolate should be especially directed to those who know little of the gospel and who are not affiliated to any Christian group, but we should also

make available to Christian inquirers from any Church the opportunity to hear what the Catholic Church teaches. At the same time, we must scrupulously avoid attacking other religious groups. Let us not open old wounds, nor let us drive others away by an attitude of arrogance as if we had nothing to learn from them. It is true that in the Catholic Church is contained the whole of Christ's teachings, but non-Catholics often teach us much by their example . . . to which we Catholics perhaps have paid too little attention."

Chapter two of the *Constitution on the Church* reminds us of the Church's missionary mandate, and says that "The obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his state." But we do not engage in missionary work as though eternal damnation were at stake, but rather so that the grace of God which may already be present may come to full fruition. As Father Baum says, ". . . the action of God outside the Church is a preparation for the full presence of the Gospel and hence invites the action of the Church to supply the cooperation necessary that the divine initiative come to its full fruition." Through missionary work we are fulfilling the explicit command of Christ to preach the Gospel to all nations.

II. Dialogue With Honesty and Charity

In an effort to engage in dialogue on the nature of the Church with those of other faiths, it will require great tact and delicacy to be gentle, humble and understanding—while at the same time being firm, clear and honest with respect to our differences. In his encyclical letter, *His Church* (1964), Pope Paul expresses some apprehension that there may be a tendency to seek peace at the cost of hiding real differences. The pope presents as his principle for dialogue: ". . . Let us stress what we have in common rather than what divides us . . . But we must add that it is not in our power to compromise with the integ-

rity of the faith or requirements of charity. We foresee that this will cause misgiving and opposition. . . ."

"Honesty compels us to declare openly our conviction that there is but one true religion, the religion of Christianity," which we hope all men might one day joyfully and freely share with us. (This does not mean that non-Christian religions are "false" in the sense that they have no moral or spiritual values that we can admire, defend and promote. But it means that God's public revelation of himself reached its complete and full form in Christianity alone.) We must not hide our belief that full incorporation in the Church of Christ is experienced only in the Catholic Church. (And that Catholics, therefore, may be considered to have a greater *potential*, objectively speaking, and may expect a just God to reward them accordingly, *if they live up to that opportunity*.)

We must not hide our belief that the pope is the successor to Peter, the Vicar of Christ on earth, who enjoys a primacy not only of honor, but of jurisdiction. We must not hide that we owe religious assent even to those teachings of the Holy Father that are not infallibly pronounced "ex cathedra." True and lasting unity can be reached only by facing these differences in a spirit of charity, not by pretending that they do not exist.

III. The Challenge of Artificial Renewal

Pope Paul, in the above mentioned encyclical, also expresses his concern about "many faithful who think that the reform of the Church should consist primarily in adapting its sentiments and habits to those of the world." The pope says this is evident in the field of philosophy, and also in the practical field, where it is becoming more and more uncertain and difficult to point out the line of moral rectitude and right conduct. "Relativism, which justifies everything and treats all things as of equal value, assails the absolute character of Christian principles. The tendency of throwing overboard every restraint

and inconvenience from the conduct of life finds the discipline of Christian asceticism burdensome and futile . . . ? Is it not perhaps true that often the young clergy or indeed even some zealous religious, moved by the good intention of penetrating the masses or particular groups, tend to get mixed up with them instead of remaining apart?"

The Pope says the Church will renew herself, not so much by changing her exterior laws or adapting herself to moral relativism that will please others, but "by interiorly assimilating her true spirit of obedience to Christ and accordingly by observing those laws which the Church prescribes for herself with the intention of following Christ." The principal needs of renewal he then singles out for special mention are an increased appreciation for the spirit of poverty, and the spirit of charity toward God and neighbor.

Summary

In this pamphlet, we have presented several key themes on the nature of the Church as envisioned by the Second Vatican Council: The Church is the new People of God preparing for the Second Coming of Christ; the Church of Christ transcends the historical entity of the Roman Catholic Church, although only Catholics are fully incorporated; the pope is at the center of the Episcopal College entrusted with the care of the whole Church, not at the top of a pyramid-type power structure; the layman shares the priestly, prophetic and teaching office of Christ; all the faithful are called to holiness, which consists in fulfilling the duties of their respective states in life out of love for God; and, Mary's motherhood is the key to understanding her relationship to the Church.

On the practical level, we do not engage in missionary work as though eternal damnation were at stake, but rather so that the grace of God which may already be

present may come to full fruition. We must not seek peace at the cost of hiding real religious differences, but exercise tact and gentleness in discussing them. Finally, interior renewal is even more important than revising laws and practices.

Questions for Further Discussion

1. What is the significance of the title, the "new People of God"? Does this mean we should forget about the images of the Church as the vine and the branches or the shepherd and his flock?
2. Who does the *Constitution on the Church* claim are members of the Church? How are all other people, Christian and non-Christian, related to her?
3. What does the doctrine of collegiality mean for the bishops? For the Church as a whole? Does it have anything to do with the laity? Should it be thought of only in terms of government, but also in terms of broadening the base of responsibility, initiative and service?
4. What does it mean that the laity "shares the priestly, prophetic and teaching office of Christ"? Give some examples of how they can do this most effectively?
5. How would you define "holiness" in the world today? What are the dangers and advantages of a kind of withdrawal from the world? Of an involvement in it?
6. What does it mean that Vatican Council II considered the Blessed Mother in terms of her relationship to the People of God? Does this indicate a lessening of devotion to her?
7. Is "dialogue" with other Christians something different from trying to "convert" them?

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