

this is  
the Catholic  
Church



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## *Why the Knights of Columbus Advertise Catholic Faith*

The reason is simple. We Catholics want our non-Catholic friends and neighbors to know us as we really are and not as we are sometimes mistakenly represented.

We are confident that when our religious Faith is better understood by those who do not share it, mutual understanding will promote the good-will which is so necessary in a predominantly Christian country whose government is designed to serve all the people—no matter how much their religious convictions may differ.

American Catholics are convinced that as the teachings of Christ widely and firmly take hold of the hearts and conduct of our people, we shall remain free in the sense that Christ promised (John VIII, 31-38), and in the manner planned by the Founding Fathers of this republic.

Despite the plainly stated will of the Good Shepherd that there be "one fold and one shepherd," the differences in the understanding of Christ's teaching are plainly evident. It has rightfully been called "the scandal of a divided Christianity."

If there is anything which will gather together the scattered flock of Christ, it is the nationwide understanding of the Savior, what He did and how He intended mankind to benefit by the Redemption.

To this end, we wish our fellow-Americans to become acquainted with the teachings of Christ as the Catholic Church has faithfully presented them, since the day the apostles invaded the nations of the world in willing and courageous obedience to Christ's command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. XXVIII, 19).

**SUPREME COUNCIL  
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS  
Religious Information Bureau  
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# What Is The Catholic Church?

"What is the Catholic Church?" may sound like an unnecessary question, yet it is asked every day of priests, heads of information centers and of ordinary Catholic men and women.

For some people such a question is necessary, and is asked in all sincerity. They want to know about this thing which seems to mean so much to Catholics, because they are curious about what Catholics believe and what lies behind some of the practices they have noted in their Catholic neighbors. They know that behind it all is this thing called the Catholic Church. Hence they ask, "What is the Catholic Church?"

The question is easy to ask, but not so easy to answer. What shall we say to those who ask us this question sincerely? What shall we tell them, and how can we hope to convey to them all that this Church means to us? What troubles us is not a lack of something to say—rather, there is so much to say that we do not know where to begin. For how can we put into a few words what amounts to a way of life, a philosophy, a religion, an



outlook, a frame of mind, all rolled into one? We cannot do so, of course, but we shall try to explain here the basic components of which the Church consists. We shall first of all explain our "Constitution," as we call it, which is the Creed. It is this, officially and for the record, that determines what

we are. Then we shall describe the means by which Catholics enter the Church, by which they continue their life in the Church, and through which they pass into the life of heaven. These are the Sacraments.

The laws of any society, such as the Church is, are important to understanding that society. The laws of Christ's Church we shall sum up under the heading of the Ten Commandments, by which Catholics are expected to govern their lives.

Vital to all Catholic life is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Church's year is rounded about the Mass. It is in the Mass that we perform what is our most important single duty, the worship of God.

It is important to understand the

organization of the Church. The Church is a divine institution, but existing among men and composed of them. Inevitably, therefore, there must be much in the government of the Church which parallels human institutions. This aspect of the Church is the one to which the non-Catholic is most exposed, and of which he is often most critical, especially by those who do not know

the Church in other ways and misunderstand its real nature.

What the Church means to her members is something that only a Catholic can know by experience, and none can describe. But we can, in these pages, give the interested non-Catholic a quick picture of the Church that will be both interesting and conducive to a deeper and better understanding.

When the Catholic speaks of the Holy Catholic Church he is not thinking of any society of men formed as a result of human effort or human organization, but of that society formed by Christ and the Holy Ghost. It is a visible society, because the Church exists on earth, and its foundation and building up is the final achievement of Christ's work of salvation which began with the Incarnation. This Church is the Body of Christ in a very real sense. Christ is the Head of the Church and the divine Spirit is its soul or life-giving principle in this sense, that, though the Church is composed of weak and fallible human beings, yet in its essence it is exclusively formed and determined by Christ and the Holy Ghost. Whatever in the Church is the result of Christ's work of construction and preservation can in no way be corrupted by man. The Church is the Body in which, and by means of which, Christ continues His work of salvation to the end of time. By virtue of her nature she must be unique; one society composed of believers, visible, sharply defined, clearly recognizable.

"THE CHRISTIAN DILEMMA"—Van De Pol

*Here We Stand . . .*

## **THE CATHOLIC CREED**

The Creed is, in a manner of speaking, the "Constitution" of the Catholic Church.

It is our statement of fundamental beliefs, our confession of principles. One may object to some things about the Catholic Church, but one of those is not vagueness. What the Catholic Church teaches—her attitude toward God, toward man, toward the world—is matter of public record, inscribed in her Creed.

There are some Christians who shy away from creeds, which they say, are the formulations of men and not the work of God. The Bible alone is their rule of faith, they say, and they would have nothing else.

But this is just playing with words. When a man says, "I believe," he has formulated a creed. The word "creed" is derived from the Latin word "credo," which means "I believe." No one can escape having a creed, because no one can escape believing things, accepting things on faith. This is as inevitable in human affairs as it is in religion. We act on assumptions, principles and ideas which



we have accepted on faith—assumptions and principles that the earth is round, for example, though few of us could prove it if called upon to do so. We commonly say such things as "two plus two equal four," though we have to take the mathematicians' word for it that two plus two do not occasionally equal five. Scientific facts that we claim to "know", we have simply accepted on faith, not personal experience.

This is also true in religion. Whether we are dealing with religious truths taught by the Bible or by tradition, we have facts which in most cases we cannot prove. We may be able to give a reasonable justification for our belief, to show that we are acting sensibly in believing, and to show that what we believe is reasonable, but we cannot do more. What we accept, we accept as matters of faith, as truths taught us by God Himself. He has revealed these truths to us; we did not reason them out for ourselves.

When a man accepts the Bible as the word of God, therefore, or any other particle of religious teaching, that very acceptance is his creed.

It is, consequently, idle for anyone to say that he has no creed. Everyone has a creed; every religious person especially. Some creeds are complex. Perhaps none is more complicated, and certainly not more absolute, than the creed of the agnostic, or, as he may call himself, the "free-thinker." This creed includes not only principles incapable of proof, but usually some that contradict human experience—"miracles don't happen," for instance.

Man, indeed, is a creed-making animal, as G. K. Chesterton once said. And there is nothing extraordinary in the fact that the Catholic Church has a Creed. But there is something extraordinary about the Creed of the Catholic Church.

The first thing that sets the Creed of the Catholic Church apart from all others is that it is definite. By this we mean it is honest. It is honest because it is permanent. It is a definite commitment, unequivocal, meaning the same for one man as for another, and—what is more important—the same for one generation as for another.

### They Disagree

The man who says, "I believe that the Bible is the word of God," has uttered a creed, and a very important one. But it is not definite. The "word of God" meant one thing to Martin Luther, but something quite different to a modern religious thinker like Albrecht Schweitzer. One person thinks that the "word of God" means the body of religious truth which the one God has revealed in the Bible. Another believes that there are many "words

of God," that God is found equally in the Bible, in the Hindu *Upanishads*, in other "holy books." Hence while two men may use the same creed in the same words, they may mean vastly different things.

Some people, of course, are content with this vague kind of creed. The honest person stands up to be counted. When a person hides his religious convictions behind ambiguous words, one of two things must be true. Either he has no clear belief, or he is unwilling to give a clear testimony to his belief. Neither position is possible in a person of religious sincerity.

### Positive Creed

Nor is such obscurity possible in the Catholic Creed. It is true that parts of the Catholic Creed are used by other religions which have separated from the Catholic Church, and that in these other religions the words of the Creed may have taken on other significances or have ceased to have any real meanings at all. But *as used by the Catholic Church which formulated the Creed*, every word is clearly defined and in the public record.

Catholics believe that truth is one, absolute and unchanging. That is merely to say that Catholics believe that things are what they are. A thing is what it is, and it is nothing else. A thing either is, or it is not. There are no other alternatives. If a thing is true, it cannot also be false. Truth, therefore, cannot change. What God revealed as truth through Jesus Christ must, in consequence, be the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our ac-

ceptance of these truths—which we express in the Creed—must, therefore, be unchanging. Granted that one or another of us may know a truth better than his neighbor, or one generation may have a deeper knowledge than an earlier one, the fact remains that the truth that is accepted must in all essentials be the same.

### Things Change

Cardinal Newman has said that the sign of life in this world is change—that when we see a thing that has ceased to change and is motionless, we know that it is dead. But the change is in us, who live in this world, not in the unchanging God. The change is in our appreciation of truth, not in the truth itself which is the revelation of God's unchanging intellect. The Church, as a body of men, does change with a changing world. It finds new problems and advances new solutions for them. It gathers into itself new peoples, with different mentalities and different approaches. It therefore enlists new techniques in its service. All this is as should be.

The Church grows in wisdom with the ages. Better ways of saying things are devised. What Christians of the first century believed implicitly, the Church in a later generation may find it necessary to state explicitly, as the need arises. This is only being honest and faithful to the truth. It is in such occasions that we have what is called a definition of doctrine—an explicit explanation of the Creed—expressed through general councils of the

whole Church or through its visible head, the Pope.

Take the matter, for example, of Mary as Mother of God. The first Christians believed this, though they never stated it in so many words. They did state in so many words that Mary was the true Mother of Christ, and that Christ was the true Son of God. It was only a deduction, therefore, to call Mary the Mother of God. In 431 at the Council of Ephesus the Church found it necessary to state this in so many words. It would no longer have been honest or faithful to the truth not to state this, for by refraining from a statement the Church would have seemed to have agreed with those who were denying either that Mary was Christ's true Mother, or that Christ was God's true Son. The first Christians, who had never doubted either of these truths, had not been obliged to come out and say that Mary was the Mother of God—just as, for example, I may never throughout my life be obliged to state explicitly that the woman whom I call "mother" was my father's wife. The later Church was obliged to take thought on the matter, and to affirm what it knew to be the truth.

### Church Changes, Too

It is by this process of twenty centuries of thought and meditation on the divine truths revealed through Christ that the Church has acquired an understanding of them that goes far beyond that possessed by the earliest Christians. The teaching of Christ, though given in part in the New Testament, is not bound

to the New Testament. Christian doctrine is a living thing, not to be confined to the powers of expression of the few writers who created this inspired document. "Christianity," wrote A. T. Robertson, "is not buried in a book. It existed before the New Testament was written. It made the New Testament. It is just because Christianity is of the great democracy that it is able to make universal appeal to all ages and all lands and all classes."

### Better Understanding

The process by which the teaching of Christ has become better appreciated, more explicit and detailed, and expressed in the language of all ages and all lands and all classes, is what we call the development of doctrine. Change there certainly has been, but the change has been in man and in his understanding. Christ's teaching has not changed; it has just become better known.

Nor has the Creed changed, for the Creed is simply the expression of the basic truths of Christianity. But the Creed also has become better understood and more explicit, along with the doctrines it states.

The basic Creed of the Catholic Church, as most familiarly known, is called the Apostles' Creed. It has received this title because of its great antiquity; it dates from very early times in the Church, a half century or so from the last writings of the New Testament. The Apostles' Creed is as follows:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and

earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

This Creed has been adequate to the ordinary needs of the Church, as is witnessed by its constant use down to our time. Every infant baptized into the Church has these words repeated for him by his godparents. When a convert is received into the Church as an adult, he is still asked to express his allegiance to Christ's religion in the terms of this Apostles' Creed.

### Beliefs Defined

As special needs arose however, various articles in the Creed have been expanded for greater clarification. The most noteworthy of these clarifications were made during the general council of the Church at Nicea in the year 325 A.D., and in the council of Constantinople in 381. Each of these councils gave unequivocal answers defining the belief of true Christians against heretical movements which threatened the life of Christ's teaching. For example, the Council of Nicea



had to make clear the truth of the eternity of Christ's existence, as taught in the gospel of John, 1:1, against the Arian heresy which held that there was a time before which the Word was not. This clarification was in the form of a longer version of the Creed, which is recited each day during the Catholic Mass and at other times. It is called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, or, more simply, the Nicene Creed.

## The Fundamentals

As one can easily see, the Creed consists of two essential themes—one is concerned with belief in the Holy Trinity, and the other deals with our profession of faith in Christ. These are the two fundamental principles of Christianity, upon which all the rest of our doctrines are based. For the sake of convenience, we generally divide the Creed into "articles."

In the first article we say, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." We say what every reasoning man must say, if he is faithful to his reason. "Since the creation of the world God's invisible attributes are clearly seen—especially his everlasting power and divinity, which are understood through the things that are made" (Romans 5:20). As Paul rightly says, reason itself tells us that there must be a Cause of what we see about us in the world, and that if we see goodness and beauty in the world, then its Cause must be Good and most supreme Beauty.

But we believe much more about

God than mere reason tells us. Our faith is founded on reason, but it goes far beyond what reason unaided can know. Our faith depends upon God's own revelation of Himself. Faith, in a sense, means sharing God's own thoughts; for what God alone can know of Himself He has made known to us. We know His own intimate nature—that He exists in three divine Persons Who possess the one divine nature; the fact that we call the Trinity. There is no possible way that we could know this unless He had told us. We have it from the lips of God's own Son that the relation that exists between the divine Persons is mirrored in the relation which He permits us to share with Him. If we keep faith with Him, we share somehow in His own life.

## God's Love

"You will come to understand (says our Lord) that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I in you. He who accepts my commandments and treasures them—he is the one that loves me. And he that loves me will, in turn, be loved by my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:20 f.). For how many centuries did the greatest philosophers and thinkers of the world before Christ yearn for just this knowledge, that there is a God who cares for His creatures, Who wants to love them and be loved by them!

When we say, "I believe... in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin

Mary," we testify to our belief in the greatest single event of the world's history, the Incarnation. The Incarnation means, literally, "the taking-on-of-flesh." The eternal Son of God, the *only* Son of God to whom this word may be properly applied, took on human nature and became the man whom history knows as Jesus. Without ceasing to be God, this divine Person became also one of us, like us "in all things except sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Already bound to us as Creator, He assumed a perfect unity with mankind through the Incarnation, and by His death was able to free us from sin. In His glorious existence in heaven He gave us a share in His own life: "He was delivered up for our sins, and rose again for our sanctification" (Romans 4:25).

### Mother of God

As a divine Person, Jesus could in no way be begotten by man. His Virgin Mother Mary conceived Him through the divine power. Because He is divine, she is the Mother of God—not the Mother of God the Father, or of God the Holy Spirit, but the Mother of God's eternal Son Who is also God. This title, "Mother of God," is Mary's chief glory, of which she may not be deprived by any true Christian. That is the meaning of the Creed. The General council of Ephesus in the year 431 put the Church on record for all time, certifying this fact, that Mary is rightly called *Theotokos*, i. e. "God-bearer." This again illustrates how unequivocal

is the Creed of the Church as held by Catholics.

Jesus, we say, "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead." In this we say that He redeemed us, that His suffering and death have freed us from sin. "There is but one God and one Mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus, himself man, who gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:5). In Christ and in Christ only do we have a certain refuge of hope—apart from Him there is none. He is our judge now and in our final counting.

"I believe in the Holy Spirit" professes our belief in the third Person of the Trinity, the Spirit of the Father and Son, Whom Christ promised to send to watch over His Church, to guide and strengthen it, to keep it in the ways of truth. "I will ask the Father and he will grant you another Advocate to be with you for all time to come, the Spirit of Truth!" (John 14:16).

### The Holy Spirit

Therefore the article, "I believe in... the Holy Catholic Church," is already half-explained. The Church is holy because it exists for a holy purpose, to make men holy. It is holy because it is directed by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. It is the projection of Christ into all time, which is why St. Paul so frequently refers to it as Christ's

Body. Christ, after His death and resurrection, has returned to the Father from Whom He came. But Christ's work goes on. The salvation which He made possible to all men must be brought into contact with all human lives between Christ's going away and His glorious return at the end of time. This is the function of the Church. "To as many as welcomed him (Christ), he gave the right to become children of God—those who believe in his name," wrote St. John (1:12). The sanctifying work of the Church we shall see more fully when we speak of the Mass and the Sacraments.

### Only One "Catholic"

The Church is Catholic because it is universal, independent of time and of place. There is no American Church, or English Church, or French or Irish or African Church, except insofar as we use those terms to refer to the Catholic Church in America or England, France, etc. We belong to the Church not as Americans or Englishmen, but as Christians. Being a Catholic, of course, does not erase one's nationality. Allegiance to the Church is entirely different from the allegiance we owe our country or our people, an allegiance which does not conflict with these but which is superior to them. It is our allegiance to God, which we share with all other Catholics throughout the world, and which binds us together with them in the one Body of Christ. The Church is the same everywhere in the world today, and

is the same as it was in the days of the Apostles.

There is even a larger unity that we share in the Church. "I believe in . . . the communion of saints" states that we participate in the union of the faithful on earth, the blessed in heaven, and the souls in purgatory—with all those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. We believe that we can help one another, that the prayers of the faithful on earth can assist the souls in purgatory and that the prayers of those in heaven can assist both those in purgatory and us on earth. Thus we pray to the saints in heaven for their help, just as we ask one another on earth for their prayers and good works from which we can all benefit. This is the true "social" religion which we profess, in which we know that we do not stand alone, but that we are bound up with our fellow men in Christ's love, "surrounded as we are by such a throng of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1).

### Body and Soul

"The forgiveness of sin" we shall see more fully in the consideration of the Sacraments of the Church. "The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting" are the two final articles of the Creed. We profess, unchanged and unadulterated, the biblical teachings of a physical resurrection, at the end of time. For all eternity, united as they were on earth, the body and soul of each person will rejoice in eternal life with God or suffer in eternal punishment in hell.

# CHRIST Gave Us The Seven Sacraments

In ancient Roman days, a *sacramentum* was a solemn oath which a man took according to law. Literally, the word meant "a sacred act," for an oath was considered to be a sacred thing, as the poet says, "Man's word is God in man."


The early Christians adopted this word to apply to certain sacred acts of the Christian religion, acts which were external signs of some deep spiritual significance, such as the taking of an oath. The external acts to which the word "sacrament" was applied were those which Christ Himself had instituted for the sacred purpose of applying to men's souls the grace of His redemption.


The sacraments are seven—baptism, confirmation, holy communion, penance or confession, matrimony, holy orders, and the final anointing. All of them consist of some material fact—water, oil, bread, wine—and some external act—pouring, anointing, laying on of hands, uttering words, and all of them by these means symbolize the application of Christ's redemptive grace to men's souls and *actually confer this grace*.

Baptism 

Confirmation 

Penance 

Holy Eucharist 

Matrimony 

Holy Orders 

Extreme Unction 

Why did Christ institute sacraments? Why, indeed, did Christ redeem us by His life, suffering, death and resurrection, when a simple act of the divine will could have accomplished the same result? Sufficient for us to know that He did this—the fullness of the reason for it is hidden within the divine mind.

Yet we can see, at least partially, why the redemption was effected as it was. It was fitting that God should deal with His creature according to the manner in which He had created him. It was fitting that He should show His love for man by sending His own Son to become man. It was fitting that the human nature which He created and called good should have been sanctified by the presence of the divine Christ, that the human flesh which He assumed should have been redeemed from within, so to speak, by this presence.

And similarly, we can see why the redemption, once won through Christ's life and death would be made available to men through the sacraments of the Church.

Such is God's way of dealing with the free human beings whom He has created. He has permitted man to share in all His works. He does not create men individually from nothing, but brings men into existence through the cooperation of others of their kind, through human parents. He does not govern His universe directly, but through the agency of men. He has not made salvation something automatic, depriving man of his freedom. He has established a Church in which the grace of salvation will be distributed by man to man.

### Water and Wine

By this means He has renewed and blessed once more the creation which "was made subject to vanity not by its own choice but by the will of him who made it subject" (Romans 8:20). Through the sin of man all creation was thrown into disorder, pitted against itself. In the sacramental order which Christ established, even the inanimate things of creation are "delivered from slavery to corruption to enjoy the freedom that comes with the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). Water and wine, oil and bread, become part of God's great plan of salvation, assisting in their own way the glory of the children of God.

This plan of salvation follows the example set by our Lord. Christ taught by signs—signs of fact and signs of word. His most sublime teachings were cloaked in parables: signs in words. He worked cures by means of signs. Remember, for

example, His cure of the man blind from birth. He could have simply willed that the man see. But instead, "he spat on the ground, and by means of the spittle made a lump of clay, and then spread the clay over his eyes, and said to him: 'Go, and wash in the pool of Siloam'—a word which in our language means 'Ambassador.' So he went, and washed, and came back able to see" (John 9:6 f.). Not only this, but the very cure itself was a sign, to illustrate what Jesus had said of Himself immediately before: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Christ should have decided to distribute salvation to man down through the ages by means of the signs which we call sacraments.

### Conferred By Signs

Each of the sacraments has some visible sign. This is what is called the *matter*—that is, a thing, such as water in baptism and oil in the last anointing; and in the *form*, that is, certain words. In baptism, as is well known, the words are: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

In each case, therefore, the matter and form *signify* the spiritual good that is being worked in the soul of the recipient—that is why they are called signs. Water suggests washing, oil suggests healing, and the words of the minister of the sacrament determine what kind of washing and healing is being done.

If the sacraments were merely of human origin, they could be nothing more than signs of our hope or our prayers. We could not assure ourselves that we were *really* washing a soul clean of sin in baptism, for example, as only the divine power can do this. But because the sacraments have been instituted by Christ for the express purpose of doing what they symbolize, we know that they are more than mere signs. What they signify, they actually accomplish. Baptism does cleanse a soul from sin. Confirmation does strengthen the life of the spirit and bring it to spiritual adulthood. Communion is not merely a sign of Christ's body and blood, it *is* these things.

### Means To Grace

This does not mean, of course, that the sacraments are magical or automatic. They must be administered by someone qualified by Christ to do so who is really intending to administer one of Christ's sacraments. The recipient must be prepared and capable of receiving the sacrament. If the sacrament is to him only an idle gesture, it will do him no good. God does not require us to receive the Sacraments; to each is given the free will to choose, but in rejecting the Sacraments, we reject the means to grace which God freely offers us.

The sacraments were meant to be administered by Christians to Christians in the Church. They are the chief title which the Church has to her claim to be "holy." The Christian living the life of Christ in the Church has these means con-

stantly at his disposal to preserve, to restore, to increase the kind of life which Christ has made it possible for him to live. They are, as it were, so many arteries by which the life blood is brought to the members of Christ's Body. Accordingly as the sacraments are worthily and prayerfully received, the members grow up to the likeness of Christ.

### "Absolute Authority"

Before His ascension into heaven, our Lord gave His Apostles the great commission to baptize. This is, in a sense, the Church's charter of sanctification. "Absolute authority in heaven and on earth has been conferred upon me," He said. "Go, therefore, and initiate all nations in discipleship: baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commandments I have given you" (Matthew 28:18 f.).

Baptism, the sign of membership in Christ's Church, is more than a sign; it is an absolute necessity. "Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God," were Christ's words to Nicodemus (John 3:5). The importance of baptism was stressed above all by our Lord's first priests and bishops, the leaders of the Church, the Apostles. "Get up and have yourself baptized and your sins washed away," were almost the first words that Paul the Apostle was to hear in his new-found Christian faith (Acts 22:16). And it is Paul who has best of all expressed the traditional Christian

faith in the power of this sacrament of Christ:

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into union with Christ Jesus have been baptized into union with his death? Yes, we were buried in death with him by means of baptism, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, so we also may conduct ourselves by a new principle of life. Now since we have grown to be one with him through a death like his, we shall also be one with him by a resurrection like his. We know that our old self has been crucified with him, in order that the body enslaved to sin may be reduced to impotence, and we may no longer be slaves to sin; for he who is dead is once for all quit of sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him, since we know that Christ, having risen from the dead, will die no more; death shall no longer have dominion over him. The death that he died was a death to sin once for all, but the life that he lives is a life for God. Thus you too must consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:3-11).

### Baptism Saves

Baptism puts us in union with Christ, causes us to share His life, to the extent that His death is our own and His resurrection ours. We are dead to sin, alive to the life of God. We are new persons. It is no wonder that St. Peter says simply, "Baptism . . . saves you" (1 Peter 3:21).

This does not mean, of course, that baptism is an automatic guarantee of salvation. God saves man without destroying man's freedom. There is no such thing as an absolute, infallible certainty of salvation during this life, because at any time man has it in his power to turn his back on God and reject Him. So is it with baptism. Baptism has the power, given it by Christ, to perform the marvelous thing that Paul has described above. But it is a power that can be resisted. It is a sad, but true fact, that in some cases a baptized person may be undistinguished from one unbaptized, simply because he has not chosen to live as one who has been put in union with Christ. Whenever we commit a serious sin, in fact, we are to that extent departing from our union with Christ and returning to the slavery from which He has set us free.

### Way of All Flesh

Christ knew that the members of His Church would sin, and thereby break the bond that had united them to Him in baptism. Such was the divine mercy that God would not permit this bond to be broken forever, and to assure this, He provided another channel of grace. When a person has committed sin, he has a sure way to return to the salvation of Christ, through the sacrament of penance.

The matter of this sacrament is the sins of the penitent, duly confessed to Christ's minister. The form is the words of absolution, uttered by the priest of the Church in the name of Christ. This sacramental

sign of confession and forgiveness is more than a symbol; it is the true absolution given the sinner by Christ Himself.

Why is confession to a mere human being necessary? Why cannot the sinner simply go to God directly and obtain forgiveness? Because God has determined that it is through confession to His priest and absolution given by the same priest that He will forgive our sins. We do not decide for ourselves how we shall obtain forgiveness, any more than we decide for ourselves how we shall obtain Christ's salvation in the first place. If the priest can act for God in the matter of baptism, which cleanses us of sin, why should we doubt his commission from God to transmit forgiveness of sin through the equally valid Christ-instituted Sacrament of Penance?

### "Receive Ye . . ."

For God did certainly give the power to forgive sins to His Apostles. Listen to the solemn way in which He conferred this power—again using signs in a way that was most sacramental—when He appeared to them after His resurrection: "Then Jesus said to them again: 'Peace be to you! As the Father has made me his ambassador, so I am making you my ambassadors.' With this, he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever you remit anyone's sins, they are remitted; when you retain anyone's sins, they are retained'" (John 20:21 ff.).

This power, be it noted, He gave to them just as He gave the great

commission of baptism—to be with the Church for all time. It is a power He gave them as His ambassadors, as those who are to represent Him among men until He returns. It is a power given the Church in the person of its leaders, His priesthood. It is the power which He had previously given the chief of His Apostles, St. Peter, at the time He promised him headship over His Church: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

### God's Way

By what right then shall anyone despise this power which Christ has given His Church? Who will presume to say that this power does not exist, or that it is not necessary to have recourse to it? Whoever says that he *prefers* to go to God directly to have his sins forgiven is not doing what God wants, but what he chooses. He is saying, in effect, "Forgive me, God—but not in the way You have determined that I should be forgiven. Forgive me in the way I want to be forgiven."

The Apostles were given the power not merely to forgive sin, but also to *retain* it. In other words, they were given the power to judge which sins should be forgiven and which should not. This judgment could not be exercised unless there is confession of sin. "Confess your sins to one another," said St. James, "and pray for one another that you may be healed" (James 5:16). From time immemorial God has



provided a means of forgiveness only through confession of sins (see Leviticus 5:5, etc.). Without confession, how is the minister of Christ to judge the state of the sinner's soul, and to determine if forgiveness is justified?

Penance is no more an automatic proposition than is baptism. If a sinner were to ask forgiveness without a true and sincere sorrow for his sins, and without a firm purpose of amendment, then he could not receive forgiveness. He might be able to deceive the priest to whom he confesses, but he would not deceive God. The priest's absolution is effective only to the extent that the penitent places no obstacles in its way, just as the rite of baptism would be meaningless if there were no true intention of accepting Christ's salvation.

### Sins Forgiven

But when confession is rightly made, with true sorrow and a change of heart, then the judgment of the priest expressed in absolution has behind it the guarantee of Christ's words: "Whenever you remit anyone's sins, they are remitted." That is a great consolation which we have as Catholics, to know that sure and certain forgiveness is always available. This is the guarantee of Christ. The voice of the priest in the confessional is the voice of God, for as our Lord told His emissaries: "He who listens to you listens to me, and he who despises you despises me; but whoever despises me despises him whose ambassador I am" (Luke 10:16).

For reasons that should now be evident, the sacraments of baptism and penance are called "sacraments of the dead." They are the sacraments to which we have recourse in spiritual death, to free us from the death of sin and restore us to the life of God. The other sacraments are called "sacraments of the living," that is, sacraments whose function is to increase and strengthen the spiritual life which we share as members of Christ's Body, the Church.

### Stronger Faith

First among these is confirmation. As the name indicates, the purpose of this sacrament is to confirm or strengthen the Christian in his Christian calling. It is therefore sometimes called the sacrament of spiritual adulthood—though the Christian may receive the sacrament as a small child. Maturity of soul is quite different from maturity of the body. A little child may give an example of spiritual growth that will shame his elders, and some people attain a venerable age without ever departing from the infancy of the spirit. In confirmation the Holy Spirit is given anew to the baptized person, that he may be strengthened to carry his faith about with him in the world, that he may labor well for his own salvation and that of others.

Just when our Lord established this sacrament, we do not know. That he did establish it, however, and instruct His Apostles and their successors to administer it, we see from the apostolic practice in the New Testament.

"Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. On their arrival they prayed for the Samaritans, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. As yet he had not come on any of them, because they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14 ff.).

"Paul, after passing through the upper districts came to Ephesus and found certain disciples. 'Did you,' he asked them, 'receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' 'What kind of baptism then did you receive?' asked Paul. They replied, 'John's.' 'John baptized the people,' Paul answered, 'with a baptism of repentance, telling them to believe in him who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy" (Acts 19:1-6).

### Symbols Used

Confirmation is still given by the laying on of hands, just as the Apostles gave it. The Church has surrounded the rite with additional symbols. Oil is used, for just as athletes in ancient times were thoroughly anointed before entering the contests of the arena, the Christian is supposed by this sacrament to be prepared for the struggles of

life touching on his faith. To symbolize the same thing the Bishop who confirms strikes the confirmed person lightly on the cheek.

In the part of the Catholic Church which uses Latin in its ceremonies, the administration of the sacrament of confirmation has been traditionally reserved to the Bishops, although under certain conditions ordinary priests are permitted to confirm. In the Eastern part of the Church, however, the part which uses Greek and other oriental languages in its rites, priests regularly confirm through a special concession granted by the Pope.

### The Eucharist

The most familiar of all the sacraments of the living is doubtless holy communion, and in a certain sense it is uniquely important because of its continual necessity for all true Christians.

Almost everyone is familiar with the gospel story of the Last Supper and knows about the institution of this sacrament (in Matthew 26:26 ff., Mark 14:22 ff., and Luke 22:19 f.). Besides these passages, there is an entirely independent account of the institution given by St. Paul (1 Corinthians 11:23-29), which agrees with the gospels throughout.

It is not from the account of the institution, however, that we have our best information about what Christ intended this sacrament to be, and the importance He attached to it. This we find in St. John's gospel, when the evangelist relates Christ's promise of the sacrament,

given a full year before its actual institution.

"I am the bread of life," Jesus told His followers at that time. "Your fathers ate the manna in the desert, and they died. The bread which I speak of, which comes down from heaven, is such that no one who eats of it will ever die. I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and furthermore, the bread which I shall give is my flesh given for the life of the world" (John 6:48-51).

Christ clearly told us, therefore, that what He was going to give mankind was His own flesh and blood, His own body "given for the life of the world," and that this gift would be an instrument of eternal life. This was perhaps the most extraordinary promise that He ever made, and it was greeted with the same kind of reaction that the same teaching frequently receives today.

### Couldn't Believe

"The Jews then had a violent discussion among themselves. 'How,' they argued, 'can this man give us his flesh to eat?' (John 6:52). A fair question, surely, and one that Catholics are often asked today: "How can you believe that in holy communion you actually receive the flesh of Christ?"

Now there are many Christians who claim that Christ never meant His words to be taken literally. They insist that the bread and wine of the sacrament are symbols, nothing more. But this would mean that there would not even be a real

sacrament. A sacrament is not merely an empty sign, but a sign that symbolizes a spiritual reality. The bread and wine symbolize Christ's body and blood, it is true, but the body and blood which they symbolize are also actually truly present.

And what did Christ say on the occasion of this promise? Did He hasten to assure His listeners that He meant nothing more than that He would give a symbol of His body and blood? On the contrary: listen to what He went on to say:

### Christ Made Clear

"Resuming, therefore, Jesus said to them: 'What I tell you is the plain truth: unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood is in possession of eternal life; and I will raise him up from the dead on the last day; for my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood is united with me, and I am united with him. As the living Father has appointed me his ambassador, and I live because of the Father, so, too, he who eats me will have life because of me. This is the bread that has come down from heaven. It is not what your fathers ate; they ate and died. He who eats this bread will live forever'" (John 6:53-58).

"My flesh is real food...my blood is real drink...he who eats *me*..." There is surely no softening of Christ's statements in these words. Christ lost many disciples on this occasion, because they said:

"Such language is hard to bear; who can listen to it!" (John 6:60). And He did nothing to stop them. That the words are hard, no one can deny. But they must be accepted by any true Christian. In this passage our Lord has clearly told us that this gift of his body and blood is a necessity to us, that the eating of it brings eternal life. It is, therefore, a most important sacrament, one which should truly be the daily bread of Christians. Many Catholics do, in fact, receive holy communion every day.

### Bread and/or Wine

Again there is a difference in the customs that are followed by the Western or Latin Church and the Eastern Church. For a long time it has been the practice in the West to give communion under the single form of bread, while the Eastern Church has preserved the older custom of using both bread and wine. This difference does not touch in any way on the essential of the sacrament, it is just a question of practicality. Since we know that the sacrament actually contains Christ's body and blood, and since Christ has a living, not a dead body, we know that wherever His body is, there is His blood also. Communion may thus be received, whole and entire, under either the form of bread or the form of wine. Paul said as much in his account of the institution of the sacrament:

"Whoever eats this bread *or* drinks the chalice of the Lord unworthily will be held responsible for a sin against the body *and* blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:

27). (Note, this is the correct translation of this passage, as it appears in the Revised Standard Version and other modern Protestant as well as Catholic translations of the New Testament.)

There are two sacraments of the living which are intended each for only a part of the Body of Christ which is the Church. In the Church, Paul says, "There is a distribution of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There is a distribution of ministrations, but it is the same Lord to whom we minister. There is a distribution of activities, but it is the same God who activates them all in everyone" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). The two fundamental divisions of the faithful for which the Holy Spirit provides grace through the sacramental order are the clergy (Holy Orders) and the laity, (Matrimony.)

The clerical state began to exist when Christ selected the Apostles to be His successors and the continuers of His work. To them He committed responsibilities and powers which He did not give to the rest of His disciples—the power and responsibility to continue the sacrament of the Last Supper (Luke 22:19f.), to forgive or retain sins (John 20:21 ff.), and the like; in short, to administer the sacraments of His Church and to govern it in His name.

### Holy Orders

This responsibility requires the abundant grace of God, and to provide that grace Christ instituted the sacrament of Holy Orders. It was in reference to this sacrament that

Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy whom he has set over the Church at Ephesus: "Do not neglect the grace of office you have, which was granted to you by inspired designation with the imposition of the presbyter's hands" (1 Timothy 4:14).

Laying on of hands was the customary way of imparting this sacrament in the apostolic Church, as we see in this passage from 1 Timothy, as also from Paul's further word to his disciple, "Do not hastily impose hands on anyone" (1 Timothy 5:22), "I remind you to stir up God's grace of office which you have through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6), and from the Acts of the Apostles in the appointment of the seven men who were to assist the Apostles in their functions (Acts 6:5 f.).

### The Early Church

In the early Church there was a distinction in the various offices inherent in the sacrament of holy orders, and specific names were used for the different functions. The word *presbyter* was used (Acts 20:17, for example) and also the word *episcopos* (translated "bishop" in Acts 20:28). Evidently there was no sharp distinction made between the two titles in the beginning, but gradually the word *episcopos* came to be used for one who had received the fullness of orders, a successor of the Apostles in the fullest sense, whereas the *presbyter* was considered to be one who had the *ordinary* powers of Holy Orders. The word *episcopos* became *bishop* in Old

English, and finally "bishop," and *presbyter*, first shortened to *prester*, resulted in "priest." Thus we have our "modern" names, clearly derived from New Testament origins. Similarly the lesser ministers of the Church, the deacons. In 1 Timothy 3:8 ff., for example, Paul advises Timothy concerning the qualifications that should be possessed by those who have the office of *diaconos*, an order clearly distinct from that of the *episcopos* or *presbyter*.

### Priests of Christ

The fact that our traditional English names have developed from the New Testament terms establishes a continuity between the offices as we find them in the Apostolic Church and as they are found in the traditional Christian Church throughout history. The word *presbyter*, it is true, in Greek means "elder," and *episcopos* means "overseer," just as *diaconos* means "servant." Paul and the other Apostles deliberately refrained from using for Christian ministers the customary words for "priest" and the like which were applied to pagan or Jewish priests. They invented a new set of titles. But the *presbyters* about which Paul speaks possessed the office which yet remains in the Catholic Church, to which we still give the same title, in the English form "priests."

The other large class of the members of the Church is the laity. For these is the Sacrament of Matrimony. Not every layman receives the sacrament, it is true, yet it is the sacrament of "office" which is

most characteristic of the laity as a whole.

Not every marriage is a sacrament, but only the marriages of Christians. The Catholic Church teaches that the marriage of two baptized Protestants, however, is just as much a sacrament as that of two Catholics.

Every marriage is a contract entered into in the presence of God and, as a contract, it is indissoluble. This is equally true of the Marriage of two pagans, two atheists, or two infidels. As long as the parties intend to contract true marriage, they contract an unbreakable contract.

### Marriage A Sacrament

But Christian marriage is in addition a sacrament. Baptized persons find in their wedded state a source of grace, a grace "of office," to give them the necessary helps in fulfilling their responsibilities. The most beautiful description given of the significance of Christian marriage is that of Paul (Ephesians 5:25-33):

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church, and delivered himself for her, that he might sanctify her by cleansing her in the bath of water with the accompanying word, in order to present to himself the Church in all her glory, devoid of blemish or wrinkle or anything of the kind, but that she may be holy and flawless. Even so ought husbands to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself. Now no one ever hates his own flesh; on the contrary, he nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the

Church, because we are members of his Body. 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and cling to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery—I mean in regard to Christ and the Church. Meanwhile, let each of you love his wife just as he loves himself, and let the wife reverence her husband."

The fact that Paul could compare the union of man and woman in Christian marriage with the union of Christ and His Church shows the esteem he attached to it. Similarly, from apostolic times the Catholic Church has insisted that in Christian marriage there is grace given by the Holy Spirit just as the grace of the Spirit unites the Christian to Christ.

Paul clearly distinguished this Christian, sacramental marriage, from other marriages. He wrote, for example, with regard to the marriage of a Christian with a non-Christian:

### God Gives Grace

"If any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, she must not divorce him. Why? Because the unbelieving husband is consecrated by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated by the believing husband. If it were not so, your children would be defiled, but, as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever is minded to depart, let him go. A brother or sister is under no obligation in such cases. God has

called us to live in peace. As a matter of fact, how do you, the wife, know that you will save your husband? Or how do you, the husband, know that you will save your wife?" (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

Such a marriage, Paul says, is valid and true. It cannot be broken by divorce. The unbelieving partner should be accepted—it is, as it were, a union in which the unbelieving partner is made acceptable, "consecrated," because of the believing partner. For the sake of the peace of the Christian family that results, the marriage should be continued. The children of such unions are "holy," that is, they pertain to the Christian community.

### **Priest Is Witness**

The sacrament of matrimony is administered by the two partners in marriage one to the other. That is why both parties must be baptized Christians for there to be a sacramental marriage. If one of them is incapable of receiving a sacrament, then there can obviously be no sacrament, for there is but the one marriage between them. When the two actually consent to one another and exchange their vows, the sacrament is conferred. The priest who must assist at Catholic marriages by the law of the Church is, actually, the Church's official witness to the marriage. He does not administer the sacrament, he simply sees that it is administered.

What of the marriage of a baptized Christian with an unbaptized person? This cannot be a sacramental marriage, though it may be

a perfectly valid and holy union for all that. If, however, such a marriage later changes its character, that is, if the unbaptized person is later baptized and becomes a Christian, it is a logical conclusion that the marriage which began as non-sacramental now becomes a sacrament. It is now a marriage between two Christians, with all the marvelous qualities which Paul attributes to such a union.

### **The Last Anointing**

The last sacrament that we shall consider is that called extreme unction, or, the last anointing. It is called the "last" anointing because the ordinary Christian has received other anointings during his lifetime—at baptism, confirmation, etc.

It is not always "last" in the sense that it is intended only for those about to die. That is a common misunderstanding. The last anointing, it is true, may be given only when the person is in danger of death. It is primarily intended to ready him for death, if this be God's will. But it is also intended to restore the sick person to health, if God so will. Any priest who has consistently administered this sacrament in a parish or hospital can tell you of numerous restorations to health which can be attributed to this final anointing.

When the sacrament was instituted by our Lord, or on what occasion, we do not know. We do know that He sent His disciples about making use of anointing for symbolic purposes (see Mark 6:12 f.). This practice was certainly continued in the apostolic Church. For

this, we have the testimony of St. James:

"Is anyone of you sick? He should call in the presbyters of the Church, and have them pray over him, while they anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. That prayer, said with faith, will save the sick person, and the Lord will restore him to health. If he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him" (James 5:14 f.).

The universal tradition of the Catholic Church always has maintained the divine institution of this sacrament of the last anointing. Its matter and form are the consecrated oil and the prayers of the adminis-

tering priest. Its purpose is to increase the Christian's union with God, to comfort and strengthen him against temptation, and to prepare him for heaven by removing the results of sin from his soul.

Such is the function of the Church that Christ established, the sanctifying Church which is to continue His redemptive work through all time, to be with the members of His Body from their first waking moments, in the sacrament of baptism, through their lifetime down to the last anointing which prepares them for the true home of Christians for all eternity.

Christ continues His work through grace working in the sacraments whereby the believer is in the Church, united to Christ, and remains so. It is not the faithful who determine the nature and essence of the Church, but rather it is the Church which determines the faith and the supernatural life of grace of the believer, in so far as he places no obstacle to the working of grace, but receives it and co-operates with it. Such co-operation does not signify that man wishes to have something of which he may himself boast, for the believer owes everything absolutely to God and to God's work of salvation in him. God does not force man; He places a choice before him, and any human being admitted into the Church by Baptism and living in a union of grace with Christ through the Holy Ghost is still capable of neglecting the unmerited grace he has received and of losing it through his own fault. It is precisely because of human weakness that the genuine Catholic believer lays such a strong emphasis on life in, and with, the Church, and on the frequent and worthy reception of the means of grace, for Christ has laid down that it is thus that we, in and through the Church, should find union with Him and continue in that union.

"THE CHRISTIAN DILEMMA"—Van De Pol



# MASS... The Eternal Sacrifice



In the fifth century before Christ, the prophet Malachy was condemning the unworthy sacrifices that were being offered to God by the Jerusalem priesthood. Speaking in the name of God, he said:

"I have no pleasure in you," says the Lord of hosts, "and I will not receive a gift from your hand. For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, my name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is a sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean oblation: for my name is great among the Gentiles," says the Lord of hosts (1:10-11).

Christian tradition has seen in Malachy's words a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the New Law, which we call in English, the Mass. And in truth the Mass is a sacrifice offered "in every place," from the West to the East. It is the sacrifice of Christ Himself, continued down through the ages in His Church.

Sacrifice is of the very essence of religion. "Religion" is derived from a Latin word meaning "to bind back," that is, to bind the creature back, to unite him with the Creator. And it is only through

sacrifice that this union with the Creator can be perfectly acquired. It was through sacrifice that Christ Himself was able to achieve this for man. It is only through the perpetuation of that sacrifice that this union may be maintained.

Sacrifice is an offering to God to acknowledge His supreme power to put the worshiper in union with Him. In its simplest form, a sacrifice might be considered a "gift" to God, although man cannot really give anything to the Giver of all. It is better described, perhaps, as a gesture indicating the spirit of goodwill and self-denial on the part of the one who makes the sacrifice. Even the most primitive peoples, whose religion may be very crude and overlaid with superstition generally are actuated by a spirit of sacrifice and the intention of pleasing God.

The Jews had many such sacrifices. In some respects, the Jewish sacrifices were materially the same kind as those of the Gentiles. But the Jews, because of their understanding of God through God's own revelation, could offer sacrifices with assurance that they were pleas-

ing to God, and they knew from their Law how these sacrifices were to be offered.

The Jews had various kinds of sacrifices, each offered for specific purposes. One was called the "holocaust," or "whole burnt-offering." In this sacrifice, an animal victim was entirely destroyed, or, in the case of the poor who could not offer such costly sacrifices, cakes or incense were burnt as a sign of the wish of the sacrificer to honor God's majesty.

### Peace Offerings

Other sacrifices were called "sin-offerings" or "guilt-offerings," and were especially intended to remove sin. A final type of sacrifice was called by the Jews the "peace-offering." In Hebrew the word "peace" means much more than it ordinarily does in our languages. It signifies "completeness," "harmony." Peace with God meant union with God, and that is especially what this sacrifice was intended to symbolize. Therefore an important part of this rite lay in the sacrificial meal which followed the sacrifice.

The choice parts of the victim having been burnt in God's honor, the remainder of the sacrifice, now considered sacred because it had been dedicated to God, was eaten by the one who made the sacrifice and his friends. This type of sacrifice was an occasion in which a wealthy person would have opportunity to share his possessions with the poor by inviting them to partake of the sacrifice with him. The eating of the sacrificial victim was

a dim foreshadowing of the Holy Eucharist of the Mass.

In the peace-offering there was communion — communion of God with man, communion among men under God. In the Mass there is this same Communion, in a far more exalted way. What makes the Mass the most exalted of all sacrifices is the nature of the Victim, Christ Himself. For the Mass is the continuation of Christ's sacrifice which He offered through His life and death.

Christ's work upon earth, and especially His suffering and death, were a sacrifice by which we have been united with God through Christ our Mediator. The Epistle to the Hebrews says of Christ:

"Since then we have a great high priest, who has penetrated the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to the faith we profess ... Let us, therefore, confidently draw near to God's throne, the source of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to aid us when we need it" (5:14,16).

### Christ The Priest

Jesus, then, is the priest, the offerer of the sacrifice. This was by divine appointment, the epistle goes on to say:

"Christ did not seek for himself the glory of becoming the High Priest, but God said to Him: 'You are my Son; today have I become your Father.' So too he says in another place, 'You are a priest forever after the manner of Melchisedech'" (5:5 f.).

But Christ was not only the priest of this sacrifice, He was also

the Victim, the very object itself of the sacrifice:

"Jesus, when he had a mortal body, offered prayers and supplications with piercing cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent piety. Son though he was, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and after he had been raised to the heights of perfection, he became to all who obey him the cause of eternal salvation, since God had proclaimed him a high priest after the manner of Melchisedech" (5: 7-10).

The epistle goes on to say that this sacrifice of Christ's is everlasting:

"In the case of Jesus there intervened the oath of him who said to him, 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever."'. . . He, because he continues forever, has an imperishable priesthood. Consequently he is able at all times to save those that come to God through him, living always, as he does, to make intercession on their behalf" (7:21 f., 24 f.).

### Same Sacrifice

It is not that Christ offers any *more* sacrifices, but that He *continues* the *same* sacrifice. "He has no need of offering sacrifice day by day, as do the other high priests, first for their own and then for the people's sins. He did this once for all, when he offered himself" (7: 26 f.).

This sacrifice Christ continues to offer in heaven. "He has taken his

seat at the right hand of the divine Majesty's throne in heaven. There in the sanctuary and the true tabernacle, which the Lord, and not man, has erected, he carries on priestly functions. To this every high priest is appointed—to offer gift and sacrifices" (8:1 ff.).

### The Mediator

This eternal sacrifice which Christ continually offers in heaven to the Father, is our salvation. "It was not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood that was the means of his entering the Holy Place and securing eternal redemption" (9:12). "This is why he is the mediator of a new covenant and died for redemption from the transgressions committed under the former covenant, in order that those who have been called may receive the eternal inheritance which had been promised" (9:15).

You may agree with the New Testament testimony concerning Christ's sacrifice for our salvation, but still want to ask—"But where does the Mass fit into the picture?"

The gospels provide a clear answer. We read there that on the night in which He was betrayed, in which His suffering was to begin, "Before supper was over, Jesus took bread into his hands and, after saying grace, broke it into portions, which he gave to the disciples with the words: 'Take! Eat! This is my body.' He also took a cup and, after saying grace, passed it on to them with the words: 'Drink of it, every one of you, for this is my covenant-blood, which is about to be shed for the sake of many, with a view to

forgiveness of sins'” (Matthew 26: 26 ff.). The other two gospels which record this great event do not differ greatly; see Mark 14:22 ff., Luke 22:19 f.

An independent account which Paul had from tradition is found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26:

### The New Covenant

“The fact is that I have received as coming from the Lord, and have passed on to you, how the Lord Jesus on the night of his betrayal took bread in his hands and after he had given thanks broke it and said, ‘This is my body which is given up for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after he had finished supper, he took the chalice in his hands and said, ‘This chalice is the new covenant sealed with my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ In reality, every time you eat this bread and drink the chalice of the Lord, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

From these texts we learn, first of all, that Christ has identified the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist or Holy Communion, His body and blood, with the fact of His sacrifice—“This is my covenant-blood, which is about to be shed for the sake of many, with a view to forgiveness of sins”...“This is my body which is given up for you.” Further, Christ commanded that this act should continue, the same act which He performed at the last supper: “Do this as my memorial” (Luke 22:19). “Do this...in remembrance of me...Every time

you eat this bread and drink the chalice of the Lord, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:25 f.).

The rite whereby the body and blood of Christ are made available to men, therefore, is a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ. Those who offer this memorial rite are the priests of the Church, the successors of the Apostles to whom Christ gave the command “Do this.” Because of the union of this rite with Christ’s sacrifice, the rite itself is a sacrifice—not through the efficacy of human offering, but in virtue of the sacrifice which it memorializes. Christ is the principal priest who offers this sacrifice, the human priest is His minister.

The Mass is thus the same as the sacrifice of the cross. No matter how many times it is offered, nor in how many places at one time, it is the same sacrifice of Christ. Christ is forever offering Himself in the Mass.

### Salvation For All

What Christ effected through His sacrifice on the cross, He effected for all time. He suffers no more. The sacrifice continues, of course, only in its effects. That is what the Epistle of the Hebrews means in speaking of Christ’s eternal sacrifice in heaven. And this is precisely what the Mass is for—to continue the effects of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. The souls of men yet unborn, together with those now living and those who have come into existence since Christ’s sacrifice, all have need of the salvation which Christ has won for us. It is through

the Mass as well as through the sacraments that the effects of Christ's salvation are applied to the souls of such men. In this sense, the redemption is still going on, and will go on as long as a single soul remains to be saved. In this sense the sacrifice of Christ is still being enacted and will continue to be enacted.

### "breaking of bread"

"We have an altar," says the Epistle to the Hebrews, "from which those in the service of the tabernacle (the unconverted Jews) have no right to eat" (13:10). The sacrificial character of the Mass was recognized from the very beginning of the infant Church.

The Mass is referred to continuously in the Acts of the Apostles as "the breaking of bread" (2:42, etc.). Paul calls it "the Lord's supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20). In the early Church it received the name "Eucharist," which means "thanksgiving," perhaps as a result of Paul's referring to it as "the chalice of blessings which we bless" (1 Corinthians 10:16). St. Justin Martyr (who died between 163 and 167 A.D.) is one of the first we know to have called it the Eucharist (Dialogue with Trypho, 41). But even before Justin, St. Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred in 107, used this term (in his Epistle to the *Smyrnans*, 7). And one of the most ancient of all Christian documents, older even than part of the New Testament, thus describes the Mass:

"On the Lord's day gather together, break bread and give thanks (the word used in Greek is the

same as Eucharist), having confessed your sins in order that your sacrifice may be pure. Everyone who has an enmity with his neighbor should not meet with you, until they are reconciled, lest your sacrifice should be profaned. For this is the saying from the Lord: 'In every place' and time 'let them offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King,' says the Lord, 'and my name is glorified among the nations!'"

This quotation, which identifies the Mass with sacrifice and which even associates it with the prophecy of Malachy with which we began this article, is from the work called in Greek the *Didache*, that is, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (chapter 14), which dates from around the year 90 or so after Christ. It is quite probable that the name Eucharist for the memorial Sacrifice comes from the Apostles themselves.

### Called "Mass" Later

The Eucharistic sacrifice came to be known later as the Mass, as a result of the rite itself. The concluding words, still used in the Mass, are *Ite, missa est*, meaning, "Go (the Eucharist) is dismissed." The single word *missa* came to be applied to the whole ceremony, and eventually became Mass in English.

From what has been said, it should be easy to see why the Mass holds such an important place in the Church's life, why we build churches and why, when we have no church building, we are anxious to get some place available for the celebration of Mass. It explains the

importance we attach to the priesthood, the extraordinary emphasis which we place on Mass as a Sunday observance, why Catholics are obliged to assist at the sacrifice of the Mass each Lord's day.

The Mass is something more to us than a Sunday service. It is not something that we can take or leave alone, something that could be removed from our lives and still leave us the same. The Mass is the very essence of the Church. Within it the Church's life, and the Church's very existence, is centered. If there were no Mass, there could be no Catholic Church.

### Worthy Worship

The Mass is our act of worship, an act which we know to be worthy really worthy of God, because it is the sacrifice of God's own Son. It is not just the feeble offering of our hands, but an act which we know does God supreme honor.

What the sacrifices of the Old Law were unable to accomplish—what no other form of human worship can accomplish—the Mass performs. God is adored adequately, God is thanked adequately. God is petitioned irresistibly for those things which His children need. Perfect atonement is made for sin. All these effects follow from the fact that Christ's sacrifice was perfect.

Non-Catholics are often confused when we speak of "low" Masses and "high" Masses, "solemn" Masses and "requiem" Masses. What do we mean by these terms?

A low Mass is the ordinary Mass celebrated daily in which the priest

himself prays all the parts of the Mass, and there is no choir or additional ministers. When the priest is assisted by a choir and sings certain parts of the Mass, we have what is officially called a sung Mass, but popularly a high Mass. When there are additional ministers to sing certain of the parts of the Mass and to perform certain functions, the Mass is called solemn. This Mass includes some additional ceremonies that are not in the low or sung Mass. The Mass that is celebrated by a bishop, with the assistance of other ministers and with the addition of various other ceremonies, is called a pontifical Mass.

Any of these Masses can be a requiem Mass. "Requiem" is taken from the first word uttered in the Mass, meaning "rest"—the prayer in full is "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord." The requiem Mass is the Mass offered for the dead, in which the priest and officiating ministers wear black vestments.

### One Sacrifice

There is no essential difference between any of these Masses—they are all the continuation of the one sacrifice of Christ. The essence of the Mass remains what it has always been: the consecration of the body and blood of Christ as a memorial of His sacrifice in obedience to His command "Do this in remembrance of me." The ceremony, the vestments, the song, all these things are simply reflections of the loving care with which the Church has surrounded the great sacrifice with solemnity through the ages.

# The LAW of CHRIST As Expressed In The Ten Commandments



Every institution composed of men, must be governed by law. It is law that establishes the standards which men must obey if they would respect their obligations and not transgress their privileges. Man is obliged to other men and he is obliged to God. Law determines the extent and limits of his obligation and tells him what he must do.

Law is simply the determination of individual obligation as laid down by a legitimate authority. Most people are humble enough to recognize that the good of society at large must be preferred to the individual good. If this were not recognized, we should have anarchy, in which individual rights would be destroyed. Similarly, most people recognize that God has claims upon man. The recognition of those claims we call God's laws.

Even St. Paul, who was insistent that Christians were not obliged by the old law of Moses does not hesitate to use the word "law" in referring to the Christian's obligation: "Bear one another's burdens," he says, "and so you will fulfill *the law of Christ*" (Galatians 6:2),

which is a law of love.

Law, which reason tells us is necessary in the affairs of men, thus has a solid New Testament foundation as well in signifying man's duties towards God.

The simplest summary of man's duties toward God is in the decalogue, the "ten commandments" of the Old Testament (Exodus 20:2-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-21). It is consequently under the form of the ten commandments that Catholics customarily group the obligations which they recognize as the law of their faith.

The question may be asked: How is it that Catholics recognize the ten commandments as God's divine law if Christians are not obliged by the Old Testament Law of Moses? Does not Paul say "You are not under the Law" (Galatians 5:18), and is not this doctrine common in the New Testament?

We are not under the Law of Moses, that is true. Neither do we observe the ten commandments as part of that Law. But the ten commandments as outlined in the Old Testament provide a summary which we can most conveniently

use for the various Christian laws that we do observe.

The ten commandments are precepts which are of obligation on the part of all men, because they are laws dictated by man's very reason. Paul has told us this: "The Gentiles who have no law follow the dictates of reason and do what the Law prescribes." And by so doing, "these, though they have no law, are a law to themselves" (Romans 2:14).

With the coming of Christ's new law, all obligation to the old law ceased with the Mosaic Law itself. We observe now, besides the prescriptions of the law of nature, those regulations which Christ, directly or indirectly, has seen fit to impose upon us.

### Duties To God

First of all, the law of reason. Most of the ten commandments fall under this heading in addition to having been revealed by God. Nobody will argue against the proposition that wilful murder is wrong, that it is evil to bear false witness against the neighbors, that adultery is a crime of injustice. The law of nature alone will not take us too far, but it does cover the basic essentials of what is called morality.

Secondly, we recognize the laws of Christ which we find in the New Testament or in sacred tradition. In many cases, these laws repeat the natural law or reconfirm moral precepts of the Mosaic Law. In many cases they go beyond these laws. Only under Christ do we have the universal law of love, for ex-

ample, an obligation which extends to enemies as well as to friends, and to every single person in the world. From Christ we have the obligation of belonging to His Church, of receiving His sacraments.

### Civil Duty

Thirdly, we recognize the laws that are made by legitimate authority, whether ecclesiastical or civil. Both the Church and the State are perfect societies of men, each in its own field with a particular function to serve for mankind. Such societies must make laws for the correct governing of their subjects that all may obtain the purpose for which they exist. We recognize that such laws are binding in our conscience as the will of God, exercised through God's representatives.

"Be submissive to every human authority for the Lord's sake," wrote St. Peter. "Whether to the king since he is supreme, or to governors since they are delegated by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. The will of God is precisely that your virtuous lives should silence foolish men who do not know true worth. Live as free men, yet not as those who make freedom a cloak for malice. No! Live as servants of God. Honor all men; love all the brothers; reverence God; honor the king" (1 Peter 2:13-17).

The New Testament clearly considers the Church to be a governing organization with the power to make laws. We have already noted, for example, in considering the



sacrament of penance or confession, the power which Christ gave the leaders of the Church to judge in the matter of remitting or retaining sin. Our Lord's commission to Peter is well known, expressed in the words of promise when He resolved to appoint him the first head of His Church: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18 f.). This confers supreme authority.

The Apostle Paul, on the occasion of his last return to Jerusalem, called together at Miletus the presbyters of the Church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17), and admonished them, "Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as bishops to rule the Church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood" (20:28). And Christ Himself said to His Apostles:

### The Proper Way

"When your brother does you wrong, go and, between you and him alone, convict him of his fault. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over; but should he not listen to you, then take one or two along with you, so that 'every case may be decided on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he pays no attention to them, then notify the Church; and if he pays no attention to the Church, then treat him as a heathen and a publican" (Matthew 18:15 ff.).

And immediately after this qualification of the Church's authority, He repeats the divine commission to the Church's leaders:

"I tell you with assurance: whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (18:18).

### The Commandments

Our laws, then, which come from our reason, our moral conscience, from the revealed will of God, and from the lawful authority of the Church and the State, we find it convenient to sum up under one or another of the ten commandments of the Old Testament.

This brings up a point which often confuses non-Catholics. The enumeration of the ten commandments as found in the Catholic catechism is different from that used by most Protestants. "Who has changed the order of the commandments?" they ask. "Is it the Catholic Church, or have we?"

The answer is that nobody has changed the order or the numbering. There are simply different ways of numbering the commandments. Actually, there are three traditional enumerations followed by various religious groups, not merely two. There is something to be said for each of the enumerations, and none of them can be simply called wrong.

If you look at the text of Exodus 20:2-17 or Deuteronomy 5:6-21, where the ten commandments are found in the Bible, you will discover that in neither place is there any enumeration. Nowhere is it even stated that there are ten com-

mandments or that they should be numbered as ten. The numbering has been the work of men of a later time. The three traditional enumerations all add up to ten, but reach ten by a different route.

Obviously, the enumeration is of far less importance than an understanding of God's law and the resolve to keep it. Because this matter frequently causes puzzlement, however, it is well to understand how the differences in numbering the commandments came about.

Under the first commandment, Catholics recognize their obligations regarding the worship of God and the exclusion of the worship of anyone or anything else. This commandment forbids any kind of superstition or idolatry, the substitution of anything in God's place. God's servants, the Saints and His Blessed Mother, may be accorded honor and veneration, but never the worship that belongs to God only. Images of the divine Son of God and the Saints are not forbidden, anymore than images of the cherubim were forbidden to the Jews, but the images are simply to represent to us those whom we would honor.

### Sacred Obligations

Despair or presumption against the providence of God are sins against this first commandment, which sums up for us all our obligations of faith, hope and charity toward God. Sacrilege, the profanation of a sacred person or thing, as for example a church dedicated to God, would be a sin against

this commandment.

The second commandment forbids the misuse and abuse of the name of God. Positively, we recognize under this heading our obligation to revere God's name. Here too, we include the obligation to respect an oath imposed by legitimate civil authority. In an oath we call upon God to witness to the truth of what we say. Perjury, therefore, in addition to its character as a civil crime, is a sin against the second commandment.

### Blasphemy

Cursing and blasphemy are sins against this commandment. These, of course, must be distinguished from ordinary profanity, which may show a person to be vulgar but not necessarily a sinner. Cursing is wishing harm to someone in God's name, obviously an irreverence to God, and blasphemy is actual abuse of God Himself.

The third commandment in Exodus is "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day." This was not part of the natural law, but a directly revealed command of God whereby the Jews set apart the seventh day of the week, Saturday, to be consecrated to God. This consecration consisted simply in no work of any kind being done. It was not a special day of worship. The worship of God in the temple was the same every day, for the sacrifices were daily. The essence of the Sabbath law was no work, thus even the irrational animals were obliged to "keep" this law (Ex. 20:10).

This Sabbath law passed away with the liberation of Christians

from the Mosaic Law. The Acts of the Apostles (15:1-2, 5-29) and Paul's epistles show clearly that the Mosaic dispensation was entirely removed from the shoulders of Christians. Those who tried to suggest that Christians should be obliged by any aspect of the Law were branded by Paul as heretics, and he admonished his disciples to "let no one, then, call you to account for what you eat or drink or for the observance of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath" (Colossians 2:16), that is, the Jewish dietary laws or their feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths found in the Law of Moses.

But we have similar regulations as Christians, and it is these that we group under this commandment. Thus the first day of the week, Sunday, is for us a special day of worship of God, in honor of the day on which our Lord rose from the dead. The Church has instituted this law and has forbidden unnecessary work, in imitation of the old Law of Moses. It is, however, an entirely different commandment. The emphasis is on worship of God, and therefore, Catholics are obliged to assist at Mass on this day.

### Various Meanings

The fourth commandment for the Jews obliged children to honor their parents. We recognize such an obligation, of course, from the very law of nature. But we also list under this commandment other obligations of like kind. The fourth commandment obliges us, for example, to respect lawful superiors, both ecclesiastical and civil, and it

imposes duties of responsibility on superiors and parents toward those under their charge. Here too we place the obligations of citizenship and patriotism.

Besides wilful murder, the fifth commandment forbids the taking of one's own life. Likewise all those things intimately connected with the taking of life are prohibited, that is, all those acts and desires which could lead to murder. Among these are fighting, anger, hatred, revenge. Against our own person we can sin by drunkenness, gluttony, the abuse of drugs—unlawful practices that needlessly shorten our lives.

### Kills The Soul

Worse than physical murder is the murder of the soul. Bad example, scandal, inducements to sin, fall within this category and are consequently forbidden by the fifth commandment.

The fifth commandment requires us to take prudent care of the spiritual and bodily well being of our own person and those of our neighbors. We can as easily offend the law by the neglect of what we should do as by the commission of what we should not do.

The sixth commandment originally obliged the Jews to refrain from adultery. The emphasis of the Law was on this one sin because of the importance attached by the Old Testament to the purity of family descent. We know, however, that there are additional ways of offending against the virtue of chastity, and all of these we know to be excluded by the sixth com-

mandment.

Adultery, fornication, sins natural and unnatural which abuse the sexual faculties, artificial birth prevention, all fall under the ban of the sixth commandment. The virtue of chastity must be preserved through modesty and decorum. There are standards to which the married as well as the unmarried must conform.

Theft and robbery are forbidden by the seventh commandment, but so are cheating, defrauding a laborer of his just wages, taking undue advantage of another's need to exploit him, accepting bribes and "graft" in public office—in short, everything that is a violation of justice. This includes depriving another of his reputation through calumny and slander. No one can call himself a just person simply because he has never held a gun at another's back and relieved him of his wallet. Some of the most pernicious violations of the seventh commandment may have been done over the back fence, at the bridge table, or in the offices of seemingly respectable businessmen or public officials.

### False Witness

The eighth commandment is concerned with the virtue of truth. In primitive times the Jews considered only that kind of lying to be bad which harmed another. That is the way the law read: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Some people still see little if anything wrong in what they call "white lies." Yet a lie of any kind is an unworthy act of man.

It is not true to say that there are lies that harm no one. They harm the one guilty of them, and they harm society by destroying the basis of trust and mutual confidence on which society must rest if it is to survive.

Therefore, lies, the rash and unfounded condemnation of others, detraction from a neighbor's reputation and good name—even if what we say is true—and revealing his secrets, are all forbidden by this commandment.

### Sinful Thoughts

The ninth and tenth commandments forbid in thought, desire or intention the same things that are forbidden in act by the sixth and seventh commandments. Some people think that sin and crime are the same thing—that there is no sin unless there is an open act that can be verified and punished. Those who recognize the law of God will not fall into such an error. Sin consists essentially in the will to sin, not in the act. A man who commits murder in his heart is guilty of murder. A man who commits adultery in his heart is guilty of adultery. If there is anything sure from the law of Christ, it is this fact, and it is precisely these sins that our Lord has singled out in detailing the true nature of sin as against the easy-going morality of those who are content simply to be "respectable":

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old: 'Do not murder' and 'He who commits murder is answerable to the court.' I, on the contrary, declare to you:

anyone who is angry with his brother is answerable to the court ... You have heard it said: 'Do not commit adultery.' I, on the contrary, declare to you: anyone who glances at a woman with a lustful intention has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:21 f., 27 f.).

It is in these commandments above all that we arise to a recognition of the full enormity of sin, and what it is that God expects of us. Sin is our turning away from God's law, our violation of a sacred virtue, our failure against what is right and decent.

God deals with us as free men, but we must accept the responsibility of our freedom. Just as He will not blame us for what we unknowingly do wrong, neither will He excuse us if we will what is wrong, yet through cowardice or some practical deterrent do not actually carry out our evil will. He does not stand over us to exact ex-

terior obedience. He is not like men, who can only judge from external actions and cannot read the secrets of our hearts. Only by a recognition of one's obligations under the ninth and tenth commandments can there be a worthy understanding of what human freedom is and the holiness of God whose law we follow.

"Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind," said our Lord, "This is the great and first commandment. But a second commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37 f.). These commandments He took from the Old Testament. The way they are to be observed He has shown us in His life and teachings. If we truly love God and our neighbor because of God, then the many specific and individual obligations that we acknowledge will be actually observed by us.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the sacrifice of the New Covenant. The central fact in the work of salvation is the Sacrifice of the Cross, and the central act of the Church's liturgy bears, for this reason, a sacrificial character. The Sacrifice of the Mass is "a true and proper sacrifice," but not a new and independent sacrifice detracting from the historical sacrifice offered once for all on Calvary. Because the central act of the Holy Eucharist has this sacrificial character, the Lord's Table is the Altar of the New Covenant, and Christ's ministers are not only ministers of the word in the sense of being preachers, but ministers of the Incarnate Word who sacrificed Himself, and therefore priests in the real sense of the word, since Christ is the eternal High Priest.

"THE CHRISTIAN DILEMMA"—Van De Pol

# The Structure of The Church

Because it is, an organization of men, the Church must have laws and a government.

The government of the Church is, of course, inherent in its very foundation. In its practical application it has been shaped by the experiences of nearly two thousand years. In this time the Church has learned by trial and error some of the best ways of exercising the authority of government divinely given it by its Founder. Still, to all practical purposes, it has not changed in its major divisions since apostolic times; the changes have been mostly of a minute nature.

The lowest level of the government of the Church is the parish. The parish usually contains the parish church, a school, and perhaps a cemetery, a parish co-operative or a library. In charge of the parish is a priest who is called the pastor, the "shepherd." Depending on the size of the parish, he may have one or more assistant priests. But the pastor has the ultimate responsibility. He is responsible not only for all the Catholics in his parish, but for all



the non-Catholics as well. It is true, his first care is for his own people. Nevertheless, non-Catholics can rightly feel that they, too, have a certain claim on the Catholic pastor.

The pastor has jurisdiction over the members of his parish as their religious superior, just as there are civil rulers in the town or borough. It is his obligation to enforce the laws of the Church, administer the sacraments, preach the word of God, and, in short, carry out the Church's work within his parish.

The faithful of the Church, as distinguished from the clergy, are called the laity. The pastor of the parish is in charge not only of the laity but also of his assistant priests, if he has any. The parish may also include a convent of sisters to care for the church or the school, but the sisters do not participate in the government of the Church.

The next division of the Church's government is the diocese, consisting of a number of parishes under the jurisdiction of a bishop. Dioceses are also territorial, and the size of the territory will depend on the density of the Catholic

population. In the United States, for example, it may embrace an entire state, or a single city such as New York, may make up a complete diocese. The bishop stands in relation to the diocese much as the pastor to the parish, although his jurisdiction is more important, his powers broader, and his responsibility far greater.

## Church Organization

The capital city of the diocese—the word “diocese” originally meant “the managing of a house”—is called the see-city, where the see or throne of the bishop is located. Here is the head church of the diocese, called the cathedral. Here, too, the bishop maintains the various offices and departments of this large ecclesiastical unit. He has what is called the chancery office with various assistants to maintain the acts of administration necessary in the diocese. There is a court to try cases of ecclesiastical law, a school board, and bureaus for various other purposes.

There are also some priests who are not subject immediately to the bishop of the diocese in which they live. These are the priests of the religious orders. The orders exist chiefly for some special function, such as education, or foreign missions. These orders have, instead of bishops, provincial superiors who are in charge of a certain territory called the province. The religious orders are independent of diocesan government so they may be moved from house to house and from diocese to diocese, wherever they are needed.

Certain of the more important dioceses are called archdioceses. Ordinarily there is no difference, practically speaking, between an archdiocese and a diocese, but the bishop of an archdiocese is also known as an archbishop. To each archdiocese some of the surrounding dioceses are attached. The dioceses are then called suffragan sees, “subsidiary sees,” while the archdiocese is the metropolitan see, the “capital see.” In practice, this does not affect the government of each individual bishop, who is wholly in charge of his own diocese. It means simply that certain administrative details are carried out between the metropolitan and the suffragan sees.

Above the diocese and the bishop is simply the pope. However, it is obvious that the pope cannot be expected to govern the entire Church single-handed, and consequently he carries out the supreme government of the Church through many delegates.

## Pope's Deputy

Generally in each country there is what is called an apostolic delegate, who is the pope's official representative. The apostolic delegate for the United States lives in Washington, D. C. In most countries which maintain diplomatic representation with the Vatican, the apostolic delegate is also the pope's representative with the civil power, in which case he is called a nuncio, “ambassador.”

The apostolic delegate, however, does not have charge of the bishops of the country. They are independ-

ent in their own dioceses. He simply serves as the intermediary between them and the pope in matters of administration.

The pope himself is the chief bishop of the Church. As is well known, the central headquarters of the Church are in the ancient city of Rome, in a section now known as Vatican City, which is independent of the Italian government and of every other government in the world. Within this city are the administrative offices of the universal Church.

This administration is carried out through various offices which are known as congregations. There is a congregation for seminaries and universities, another for religious orders, another for the sacraments, and so on. These congregations are made up of priests and other officials who serve as the actual central government of the Church as delegates of the pope. Matters referring to their various departments are forwarded to them from the bishops of the world, usually through the apostolic delegates, and the heads of the different congregations have periodic conferences with the pope.

### They Go To Rome

That the pope may have a more particular knowledge of the state of the Church throughout the world, every five years the bishop of each diocese must make a report to him in Rome.

Thus the government of the Church is simultaneously both simple and complex. The relation of people to pastor to bishop to pope

is simple enough, but in an organization of 400 million souls and well over a thousand dioceses throughout the world, the details of administration are bound to be quite complicated.

### Titles of Clergy

Non-Catholics are often puzzled by certain titles and offices in the Church, such as the Monsignori. The title Monsignor, which means "my lord," is simply an honor bestowed upon a diocesan priest (members of religious orders do not become Monsignori) because of some outstanding service, or a number of years of devoted labor. The title does not give him any special jurisdiction or power, and therefore does not affect the government of the Church.

Then there are the Cardinals, another position of honor. It is usually given to the bishops of the chief dioceses in the world, though there are some cardinals who are not bishops of any diocese. In ancient times the cardinals were the chief clergy of Rome—the word is derived from the Latin word *cardo*, "hinge," and thus referred to those who were the pivotal members of the clergy. Even today every cardinal has one of the ancient churches of Rome as his special church. The cardinals are the heads of the different congregations which govern the Church in the name of the pope. Most cardinals now, however, live outside the city of Rome itself, as heads of dioceses.

For several centuries the cardinals have had the privilege of electing the pope. Theoretically any



Catholic man could be made pope, though if he were a layman he would have to be consecrated bishop immediately. Usually, however, the pope is chosen from among the cardinals.

Originally, in the first days of the Church, the pope was elected by the people of Rome, and he still officially is the Bishop of Rome. Later, elections of bishops were confined to the clergy, and the pope was elected by the Roman clergy. The present legislation is, in a sense, more democratic, though democracy is not a consideration. The cardinals come from all parts of the world and thus represent the Church more universally. Since the days of the Renaissance the pope has been an Italian, but it is not necessary that he should be. Almost every nation at one time or another has been represented in the papacy.

## The Congregations

The cardinals in turn, are created by the pope personally. Just as each bishop of an individual diocese has a council of experienced priests to assist him, the cardinals serve the pope. About half the cardinals do this actually, residing in Rome and heading the various congregations. The others reside in the dioceses of which they are bishops, though they may be called to Rome for some extraordinary purpose.

The congregations headed by cardinals, and numbering eleven, are in charge of the Holy Office, the Consistory, the Sacraments, the Council, Religious Orders, Propaganda, Rites, Ceremonies, Extra-

ordinary Affairs, Seminaries and Universities, and the Oriental Church.

The congregation of the Holy Office handles affairs pertaining to faith and morals and that concern the universal Church. The congregation of the Consistory determines the limits of dioceses, erecting new ones, and electing bishops. The congregation of Sacraments handles all legislation pertaining to the dispensing of the sacraments—but not doctrinal matters of the sacraments, which pertain to the Holy Office, nor the ritual, which pertains to the congregation of Rites. The congregation of the Council has been likened to a secretariat of the Interior. It is a kind of clearing house to which are submitted problems and disputes concerning the proper running of the Church. The congregation of Religious Orders is the agency through which the pope regulates the affairs of priests and others who belong to the various orders, who are not directly subject to the local bishops. The full name of the congregation of Propaganda is *De Propaganda Fide*, "the propagation of the Faith." This congregation is in direct charge of missionary countries, which have not yet a Catholic population large enough to justify the regular diocesan arrangement. Propaganda usually takes the place of all the other congregations in regulating Church affairs in these countries. Thus, the Congregation of Propaganda has nothing to do with public relations, which its title suggests. The congregation of Rites governs the ritual of the

Church as distinct from the congregation of Ceremonies, which is in charge of the functions observed in the papal household. The congregation of Extraordinary Affairs is an extension of the papal secretariat of State: it is concerned mostly with the relation of the Church to the government of any country where there are special problems. The congregation of Seminaries and Universities handles the matters pertaining to education. The congregation of the Oriental Church takes over all the functions of the other congregations (except the Holy Office) in any matter pertaining to the Oriental parts of the Church, that is, the ancient parts of the Church which use other languages than Latin in their liturgy, and which are governed by different laws and customs than are common in the Western Church.

There are also courts, offices of various kinds, and permanent commissions for specified duties. They seem to make up a quite complicated system, yet actually they are simple in structure for the administration of a society vaster in numbers than any civil government in the world.

Also acclaimed as a model of simplicity is the lawcode of the Church. Within the pages of a single book, expressed in 2414 distinct laws, called "canons," is the Catholic Code of Canon Law. Here we have a synthesis of the law of nearly two thousand years, organized into a single unit. The laws of even the tiniest country are, in

comparison, extremely complex and complicated.

The congregations are the means through which the pope usually deals with the bishops of the world, and they in turn regulate their normal affairs according to the provisions of the Church's canon law. The bishops, as has been mentioned, have their own councils to assist them in governing their dioceses.

The Church has undergone much development in these externals of its government since the days in Galilee when Christ led about a little group of followers, or since the time in Jerusalem when "Peter stood up and addressed the meeting" (Acts 15:7) which was the parent of all subsequent church councils. But essentially, and in principle, the government and the law of Christ's Church are the same today as they were in the beginning.

"I beseech that in harmony with God you strive to do all things under the jurisdiction of the bishop, who holds the place of God, and the priests, who are like the council of the apostles," wrote Ignatius of Antioch to the Magnesians sometime around the year 107 A.D. In compliance with this principle, the Church has consistently gone about its work of governing, accommodating itself to the changing world and living up to the greatness it has achieved. The Church is, as St. Augustine called it, the City of God. What we have briefly considered is the government of this great City.

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