

# BORN IN THE FATHER'S HEART

THE CHURCH (Nos. 748–810)



## SESSION OBJECTIVES

After this session, you should understand ...

- Where the Church fits into God's plan of salvation.
- Why it is important to have faith in the Church and how faith in the Church is lived out.
- That the Church has a Trinitarian stamp: the Father is her source, the Son is her founder, and the Holy Spirit is her soul.

## PART 1: GETTING YOUR BEARINGS

Following its discussion of the three Persons of the Trinity, the *Catechism* turns to its treatment of the Church. In the traditional understanding of the Creed, the Church comes under the heading of our belief in the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit sanctifies our souls through the Church.

Although the Church traditionally speaks of the Spirit as the "soul" of the Church and associates her own work with that of the Spirit, the Church is a Trinitarian mystery, as the *Catechism* makes clear in the two major sections (called "Paragraphs") assigned in this session.

In the first paragraph (see Nos. 751-776), entitled "The Church in God's Plan;" we learn that the Church was "born in the Father's heart;" "instituted by Christ Jesus;" and "revealed by the Holy Spirit;" The characteristics of the Church as "the People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit" are found in Paragraph 2 (see Nos. 781-801). This section also has a Trinitarian focus.

### ***The Church in God's Plan***

Twentieth-century theologian Henri de Lubac, in *The Splendor of the Church*, identifies the Church as "the meeting place of all mysteries:' If the central mystery of our Faith is the Blessed Trinity- defined as "an eternal exchange of love" (No. 221)-then the Church is the meeting place of this encounter; the divine love of the Trinity is caught up in the Church. God's plan of sheer goodness uses the Church to help us enter into that holy exchange of love.

Everything Jesus did while on earth prepared and built the Church. Jesus endowed it with the Holy Spirit and supplied it with leadership and a mission.

Jesus intended the Church to endure until he comes again in glory, so that we may enter that glory. When that day comes, the Church will reach its ultimate end: perfect communion with the Blessed Trinity. The Second Vatican Council document *Lumen gentium* described the Church as "the seed and the beginning of the kingdom" (LG, 5).

While some believers today think that it doesn't really matter which "church" you belong to, or might say that they are "spiritual but not religious;" this section of the *Catechism* makes it clear that the Catholic Church is not an optional part of God's plan for us. In fact, it calls the Church "the visible plan of God's love for humanity"<sup>1</sup> (No. 776).

As we discovered in the very first paragraph of the *Catechism*, God's plan is to share his life with us, and so unite us with himself (see No. 1). It is through the Church that God makes that possible.

Quoting *The Shepherd of Hermas*, a Christian document from the second century, the *Catechism* declares, "The world was created for the sake of the Church"<sup>2</sup> (No. 760). Since God willed to draw us to himself from the first moment of Creation, and since the Church is the means by which he does so, the Church was part of his plan from the very beginning of the world.

The Church is not just a denominational preference but our "Mother:' It is from the waters of her baptismal womb that we are born. From her altars she feeds us with the Bread of Life. It is through her sacraments that we receive God's healing touch and loving mercy. She is not so much an organization to which we belong because we are Catholic, but rather the Mystical Body that makes us Catholic. We are called not just to enter her and adhere to her teaching (although these are essential), but to love her as the very embodiment of God's love for us.

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### **BEGIN WITH PRAYER**

*In your prayer time, consider the events of Exodus 19 and 20, which comprise your Scripture reading*

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***Myth: When Catholics can't explain something they believe, they just call it a mystery.***

Can't explain the Trinity? Or the Incarnation of Jesus? His virgin birth? Mary's Immaculate Conception? How the Church can be the Body of Christ? No problem. Just call it a "mystery." That way you can dispense with the need to explain it, right? Not really.

A *mystery*, in the theological sense, is not a belief we can have no understanding of. We cannot understand it fully.

A mystery is one of the truths of our Faith that we did not arrive at on our own; in other words, God had to *reveal* it to us, the Church. We call something a mystery because it took God's intervening to bring it to light or God's action to bring it about. This is why we often use the word *revelation*: God *reveals* his mysteries to our human minds, unlocking a truth that we might not otherwise find on our own.

**READING THE CATECHISM**

The presentation for Session Ten will cover *Catechism*, Nos. 748-810. If your time is limited, you might want to begin with the essential paragraphs for this session: 748-753, 758-760, 762-764, 766, 768, 770-773, 775, 776, 778, 781, 783, 787, 791, 792, 795-798, and 801.

## **GLOSSARY TERMS**

### **Covenant**

A bond formed between persons that makes them like members of a family. In the ancient biblical world, these bonds regulated the relationships between equals, between kings and their subjects, and even between God and his people Israel. Christians are those who have entered into the "new covenant" with God, prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31.

### ***Kyriake***

From the Greek *Kyrios*, or "Lord;" this term cited in the *Catechism* is the root of our word *church* and means "belonging to the Lord." This reminds us that the Church is both from and for the Lord Jesus.

### **Mystical Body**

This term is used to refer to the Church and is based upon St. Paul's long commentary on the unity of the Church in 1 Corinthians 12, where he says to the Church, "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). He tells the Corinthians that we are as intimately united with Christ, and so also each other, as the parts of a human body are joined under the head, which is Christ. These bonds, though invisible, are quite real and so "mysterious." The invisible and mysterious union we enjoy in the Church of Christ takes on a visible quality when we love each other in him (see 1 Corinthians 13).

### **New Covenant**

The theme of covenant, which in the Old Testament was so central to God's plan to join his people Israel to himself, comes to fullest and final expression in the New Testament, when Jesus says over a cup of wine at the Last Supper, "This is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). In this way, he indicates that new covenant membership in the new "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16) will be gained by the sacraments of the "new law;" such as baptism (see John 3:5) and Holy Eucharist (see John 6:53), making possible our "adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:5).

### **Trinitarian Economy**

As No. 234 notes, this term reminds us that God uses the history or economy of salvation to reveal who he is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Creed, which is a mini-history, follows this form as well (see No. 190). Although the divine Persons always act together as one God, we speak of the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier, and these three works of God embrace the whole of the economy from beginning to end.

## **SESSION TEN: BORN IN THE FATHER'S HEART THE CHURCH (NOS. 748-810)**

### **I. The Church We Believe**

#### A. The Holy Spirit in the Age of the Church

1. The Church is a work of the Holy Spirit, speaking through signs = sacraments of the Church (see No. 739)
2. "Christ is the light of humanity ..." (see No. 748, quoting *Lumen gentium*)
3. The Church is a reflection of Christ's light
4. Not entirely proper to say "I believe *in* the Church"; we believe in God (see No. 750)
5. We believe *within* the Church (Henri Cardinal de Lubac)

#### B. The Church in God's plan

1. *Ecclesia* (Latin)-from *ek-kalein* (Greek)= "to call out of" (No. 751)
2. *Ekklesia* (Greek Old Testament) translates Hebrew *qahal* = "assembly"
3. Jesus uses the same term (for the assembly of Israel) to speak of the Church
4. Church must be seen as the fulfillment, in Christ, of God's promises to Israel

#### C. Symbols of the Church (see Nos. 753-757)

### **II. The Church in the Trinitarian Economy**

#### A. "The Church's Origin, Foundation, and Mission" (No. 758)

1. The plan of salvation is Trinitarian
2. Age of the Father: creation and covenant promise

- a. A plan born in the Father's heart (see No. 759)
    - i. *Theologia* = Theology (see Nos. 234-236)
    - ii. *Oikonomia* = Economy of Salvation (see Nos. 234 - 236)
  - b. "The world was created for the sake of Church"<sup>1</sup> (No. 760)
  - c. Israel is a "*preparation*" for the Church (see No. 762)
3. Age of the Son: kingdom of heaven
- a. The Church-instituted by Christ (see No. 763)
  - b. Jesus came "to accomplish the Father's plan" (No. 763)
  - c. The Church "is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery" (No. 763)
  - d. The twelve apostles as representing the twelve tribes of Israel (see No. 765)
  - e. "[T]he Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ ..." (No. 766)
4. Age of the Spirit: the Church revealed
- a. The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church (see Nos. 767-768)
  - b. "The Church ... will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven ..."  
(No. 769)
  - c. The Church of history will become the Church of glory (see No. 769-771)
  - d. Church is both visible and invisible (see No. 771)
  - e. The "visible plan of God's love for humanity"<sup>5</sup> (No. 776)
  - f. "The Church is both the means and the goal of God's plan ..." (No. 778)

### **III. The Church in the Plan of Salvation**

A. People of God (Age of the Father) (Nos. 781-786)

1. One enters the People of God, the Church, through baptism (see No. 782)
2. The Church participates in the three offices of Christ:
  - a. Priestly-makes spiritual life possible (see No. 784)
  - b. Prophetic-gives us truth, teaching (see No. 785)
  - c. Royal-governance in the walk of faith (see No. 786)

B. Body of Christ (*Age of the Son*) (see Nos. 787-796)

1. The Church, disclosed as Body of Christ, with reference to:
  - a. Body - "Believers ... become members of Christ's Body ..." (No. 790)
  - b. Head - "Christ 'is the head of the body, the Church'"<sup>6</sup> (No. 792)
  - c. "The Church is the Bride of Christ" (see No. 796)
2. Christ + the Church = *Christus totus*, the "whole Christ" (No. 795)
3. Christ as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end

C. Temple of the Holy Spirit (*Age of the Spirit*) (see Nos. 797-801)

1. The Holy Spirit as the soul of the Body of Christ (The Church) (see No. 797)
2. "The Holy Spirit is 'the principle of every vital and truly saving action in each part of the Body'" (No. 798)
3. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7; also see Acts 2)
4. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, counsel, understanding, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord
5. The Church is "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"<sup>8</sup> (No. 810)

## GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Based on No. 750, which is more correct to say: "I believe *in* the Church" or "I believe the Church"? Why?
2. *Catechism* Nos. 751-752 discusses the sources of the word *church*. What does this "word study" contribute to your understanding of the Church?
3. Which of the symbols of the Church (see Nos. 753-759) has particular importance for you, and why?
4. *Catechism* No. 766 compares Eve's formation from the side of Adam to the Church's birth from the pierced heart of Christ. What does this "typological" comparison say about the Church?
5. In many important ways, our relationship with God is cultivated individually, especially through personal prayer; and yet we also experience God's love and care within community (see No. 781). Describe some important ways in which your salvation has been initiated and nourished through others, with others, and specifically "in the Church."
6. *Catechism* No. 773 affirms, "[The Church's] structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members."<sup>1</sup> In your own parish experience (or elsewhere), how has the Church contributed to the holiness of its members? In what ways have you seen it fall short? In what ways do (or could) you contribute to the holiness of the members of your parish, family, or community?

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### CLOSING PRAYER

*Eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we adore you, one in three, and we thank you for the gift you have given us of the Church, born in the Father's heart, won for you on the cross of Christ and infused with your very glory on Pentecost. Help us to see your Church as you see her, as the spotless virgin Bride, which you have formed from the very beginning of time and which you intend to take to yourself in an indissoluble embrace for all eternity. Teach us to love her as you do. In Jesus' name, we pray. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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**HOWEWORK QUESTIONS**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

From the *Catechism* Nos. 748-780

1. What image of the Church fathers does the *Catechism* reference to reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church?

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2. What is the literal translation of the Latin word for "Church:" *ecclesia*? You may recognize this Latin word in our English words *ecclesial* ("having to do with the Church") and *ecclesiology* ("the study of the Church").

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3. According to the Christians of the first centuries, for whose sake was the world created?

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4. Who inaugurated the Church?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. The Church will not be perfected in glory without what?

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6. The Church is the visible plan of what?

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From the *Catechism* Nos. 781-810

7. How does one become a *member* of the People of God?

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8. What three offices do members of the People of God share with Christ?

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9. What three aspects of the Church as the Body of Christ does the *Catechism* describe?

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10. What does *Christus totus* mean, and what is included?

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11. What are charisms?

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12. What is the function of the office of the Church's shepherds (her bishops)?

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