

*Mission
in the
Catechism
of the
Catholic Church*

By

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The Society for

THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH

...all of us committed to the worldwide mission of Jesus

FOREWORD



In presenting the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in November 1992, Pope John Paul II captured the dynamic of the Christian life in these words: "I am certain that the publication of the new *Catechism* will be a valuable opportunity for all the faithful to strengthen their faith and increase their missionary spirit, thus fostering an authentic renewal of the Church."

The Pope makes it clear that authentic renewal in the Church depends on an interior deepening of faith, as well as an increase in the missionary spirit of all the faithful. These two dimensions of Christian life, like inhaling and exhaling in breathing, cannot be separated.

In this new presentation for the Propagation of the Faith, Father Eugene LaVerdiere, S.S.S. provides clear insights into the essential relationship between faith and missionary zeal. He points out how, as a necessary consequence, missionary responsibility is a major and integrating theme that permeates the entire *Catechism*.

In our day, the universal availability of salvation in Christ to all persons, including those to whom the Gospel and the Church are virtually unknown, has quite rightfully been stressed. Also, we are more sensitive today to the teaching that faith in Christ and in his Church is a gift, a grace, and those who sincerely hold to other religious convictions are entitled to our respect and our love.

Erroneous interpretations of these teachings of the Second Vatican Council, however, have led some to question the urgency, even the validity, of the Church's

universal mission to call all to faith in Christ. Father LaVerdiere shows us that even a cursory reading of the new *Catechism* should dispel those serious threats to that "authentic renewal of the Church," to which Pope John Paul II calls us.

If, in the past, missionary zeal, at home and to the nations, was, at least in part, motivated by a fear for the eternal salvation of those who for whatever reason did not receive Baptism, the new *Catechism* makes it clear that: "It is from God's love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigor of her missionary dynamism, 'for the love of Christ urges us on' (2 Corinthians 5:14)" (# 851).

If our missionary responsibility, flowing from Baptism, is both serious and formidable, the *Catechism* assures us: "The Holy Spirit is the protagonist, 'the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission' (*Redemptoris Missio* 21). It is he who leads the Church on her missionary paths" (# 852) and instills "into the hearts of the faithful the same missionary spirit that was the driving force in the life of Christ himself" (*Ad Gentes* 4).

It is the Propagation of the Faith's primary task to promote the universal missionary spirit of the Church. Toward that end, we present this latest and valuable contribution by Father LaVerdiere, confident that it will be helpful as we strive for that renewal of the Church, called for by the Holy Father, in preparation for the Third Millennium.

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National Director

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Introduction



A missionary Pope! From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II has been a missionary Pope. And that is how he will be remembered, as the Pope who personally preached the Gospel of Christ the Redeemer on every continent, in cities large and small, wherever there were people to hear.

Long after the memory of his presence fades, however, and the sound of his voice grows faint, Pope John Paul II will continue his mission through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

In his Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum*, "On the Publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Prepared Following the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council," Pope John Paul II himself associated the *Catechism* with "the renewal of the Liturgy and the new codification of the canon law of the Latin Church and that of the Oriental Catholic Churches." Along with these, the *Catechism* "will make a very important contribution to that work of renewing the whole life of the Church, as desired and begun by the Second Vatican Council."

On Sunday, November 15, 1992, announcing the publication of the *Catechism* to the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square for the *Angelus*, the Pope spoke of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as "an event of historic importance because the new *Catechism* is not just another book of theology

or catechesis, but rather a general reference text for the catechetical activity of the whole People of God."

Faith and Missionary Spirit

Expressing his personal hopes for the *Catechism*, Pope John Paul II spoke of its great value for the Church's mission. "I am certain," he said, "that the publication of the new *Catechism* will be a valuable opportunity

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The Pope's hopes for the *Catechism* echo his goal in

Pope John Paul II

writing the Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, "On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate": "The present document has as its goal an interior renewal of faith and Christian life. For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!*" (*Redemptoris Missio* 2).

In the same Sunday noon talk to the faithful, the Pope said, "When faith is accepted and lived it impels believers to *proclaim and witness the 'good news' of the Gospel* to all people."

There is no separating the renewal of faith from the missionary spirit. In the *Catechism*, the two are inseparable: "The '*Catechism* of the Universal Church' is meant to be at the service of that renewal of faith and missionary spirit in believers who are committed to living out their Baptism in the contemporary world."

Inviting the faithful to pray the *Angelus*, the Pope expressed his hope that the *Catechism*, "this new tool of faith...will bear abundant fruit in the maturation of the People of God and the evangelization of the world."

In the same Sunday address, Pope John Paul II indicated that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has a dual purpose: the renewal, strengthening and maturing of the faith among the faithful and the missionary spread of that faith to all peoples throughout the world.

We are not surprised, therefore, that the Church's universal mission is a major theme in the *Catechism*, one that permeates the entire *Catechism*.

One section of the *Catechism*, however, is devoted expressly to the mission of the Church. It is found in Part One of the *Catechism*, devoted to "The Profession of Faith," in Chapter Three, "I Believe in the Holy Spirit," which includes Article 9: "I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church." The

mission of the Church is treated in Paragraph 3, "The Church Is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic," part III: "The Church Is Catholic." The section on mission is entitled, "**Mission — a requirement of the Church's catholicity**" (#s 849-856).

I shall begin by situating mission in the *Catechism* as a whole. The *Catechism* is a highly integrated piece of work. It is like an organism or a great building, in which every part is related to every other.

Not that the theme of mission is explicitly mentioned at every point. In the *Catechism*, every part presupposes every other, and mission is part of an organic whole.

Every part of the *Catechism* is important, as in a complex organism like the human body. Some parts of the body, however, such as the heart, the lungs, and the brain, are absolutely vital. That is how it is with the theme of mission.

Mission is absolutely vital to the *Catechism*. Without the theme of mission, the whole organism would suffer a mortal blow. Without the rest of the *Catechism*, mission would no longer make sense.

After situating mission in the *Catechism* as a whole, I shall explore the *Catechism's* special treatment of catholicity and its teaching on the mission of the Church as a demand of the Church's catholicity. ✧

Mission

An Integral and Organic Theme



The scriptural heading and the opening numbers of the Prologue alert us to the vital place of mission in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

A New Testament Synthesis

The scriptural heading is like a frontispiece, a New Testament synthesis, announcing the *Catechism's* most basic themes. It begins with a verse from Jesus' prayer at the end of his last discourse in John's Gospel: "Father, . . . this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). The purpose of the *Catechism* is that people will have eternal life in knowing the only true God, the Father to whom Jesus prays, and Jesus Christ, whom the Father has sent.

This prayer is often referred to as Jesus' "high priestly prayer." And so it is, from the point of view of Jesus, the high priest, who speaks the prayer. Jesus' hour has come. His mission is fulfilled.

As high priest, however, Jesus prays for his disciples, for the Church, and for its mission. From the point of view of Jesus' intentions in the prayer, his "high priestly prayer" is a missionary prayer.

In *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II quoted the same verse to show that "the

entire missionary sense of John's Gospel is expressed in the 'priestly prayer'" (23).

The scriptural heading continues with verses from Paul's First Letter to Timothy: "God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). As part of the scriptural heading, the verses from 1 Timothy connect God's universal salvific will with Jesus' missionary prayer (John 17:3).

God, Jesus' Father and the only true God, wants everyone to be saved by coming to the knowledge of the truth. Such is the purpose of the *Catechism*. It is also the purpose of the mission of the Church. The *Catechism* is to be a primary tool in the fulfillment of that mission.

The scriptural heading concludes with a verse from Acts, the conclusion of Peter's discourse before the Sanhedrin: "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" than the name of JESUS (Acts 4:12).

Jesus' name reveals his very person. It is also where we meet Jesus in faith and are saved. As part of the scriptural heading, Acts 4:12 shows how God wills all men to be saved through the name of Jesus (1 Timothy 2:3-4). In Jesus' name, they will know the Father, the only true God, and enjoy eternal life (John 17:3).

To Know and Love God

Most of the Prologue deals with the nature of catechesis (#s 4-10), the aim and

intended readership of the *Catechism* (#s 11-12), its structure (#s 13-17), some practical directions for using the *Catechism* (#s 18-22), and the various kinds of adaptations it requires (#s 23-25).

Before dealing with all these practical matters, however, the Prologue gives a brief resume of the contents of the *Catechism*:

“The Life of Man — To Know and Love God” (#s 1-3). Like the little scriptural frontispiece that precedes these numbers, the first part of the Prologue highlights the centrality of the theme of mission and shows its relation-

ship to other basic themes in the *Catechism*.

The Prologue begins by setting out God’s purpose in creating man: “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life.”

Like the story of creation in Genesis, the

Catechism emphasizes the unity of the human race, a unity that transcends every distinction among human beings, including that of sex. Hence the *Catechism*’s use of the word, “man,” corresponding to the Hebrew term, *Adam*, an inclusive term showing the unity and equal dignity of man and woman (Genesis 1:26-27). In English, the same term “man” also corresponds to the Hebrew term, *ish*, a term showing the complementarity and the relationship between the woman, *ishah*, and the man, *ish* (Genesis 2:23).

The purpose of human existence is to share in God’s own blessed life.

It is for this reason that, “at every time and in every place, God draws close to man.” This is also the reason why God “calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength,” and why God “calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church.”

The purpose of creation, calling man to share God’s blessed life, and the unity of the human race, demand the unity of God’s family in the Church.

Such is God’s purpose, but how will it be accomplished?

This is where mission comes in: the mission of Christ (# 1), of the apostles (# 2), and of their successors, indeed of all Christ’s faithful (# 3).

Christ is a historical figure, sent “when the fullness of time had come” to accomplish God’s purpose in creating man. “God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become,

God, Jesus’ Father and the only true God, wants everyone to be saved by coming to the knowledge of the truth. Such is the purpose of the *Catechism*. It is also the purpose of the mission of the Church. The *Catechism* is to be a primary tool in the fulfillment of that mission.

in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life" (# 1).

Christ's apostles, also historical figures, were commissioned to proclaim the gospel throughout the world. "So that this call," that is, God's invitation given in and through his Son, "should resound throughout the world, Christ sent forth the apostles he had chosen, commissioning them to proclaim the gospel" (# 2).

The *Catechism* then quotes the great commission from Matthew 28:18-20, and a description of how the apostles fulfilled their commission from Mark 16:20. Their mission was to proclaim the invitation God issued in and through his Son. For this, Jesus, the risen Lord, assured the apostles in Matthew 28:20: "I am with you always to the close of the age" (# 2).

The mission of Christ and the apostles would be fulfilled in the course of history by the apostles' successors, indeed by all Christ's faithful. The distinction is significant.

Bishops and priests, ordained for the universal Church, have a special responsibility as shepherds of the Church for Christ's mission. "Those who with God's help have welcomed Christ's call and freely responded to it are urged on by love of Christ to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world." Such also was Pope John Paul II's message in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Chapter II). The love of Christ, urging those who respond to Christ's call to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth, is a "treasure, received from the apostles" and "faithfully

guarded by their successors" (# 3).

The mission, however, is not only for those who succeed the apostles, or all those who have a special call. "All Christ's faithful are called to hand it on," that is, hand the Gospel on, "from generation to generation, by professing the faith, by living it in fraternal sharing, and by celebrating it in liturgy and prayer" (# 3).

The faithful fulfill the mission of the Church in four ways, each of which corresponds to one of the four major parts of the *Catechism*. The first means, "professing the faith," is developed in **Part I: The Profession of Faith**. The second, "living it in fraternal sharing," is developed in **Part III: Life in Christ**. The third, "celebrating it in liturgy," is developed in **Part II: The Celebration of the Christian Mystery**. The fourth, "celebrating it in...prayer," is developed in **Part IV: Christian Prayer**.

The entire *Catechism*, through each of its four parts, spells out how "all Christ's faithful" fulfill their mission to hand the Gospel on from generation to generation.

Sensitive to the tradition of the Church, the *Catechism* also relates the four ways of handing on the Gospel to the four characteristics of the primitive community in Jerusalem as spelled out by Luke in one of Acts' famous summaries: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

The scriptural heading and the first part of the Prologue both show how the mission

of the Church is related to the most basic aspects of Church teaching as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. They also show how mission is a vital and organic aspect of the Church and of its *Catechism*.

The mission of the Church is related to God's purpose in creating men and women and sending his Son Jesus Christ that all might be saved. That mission is now the responsibility of every member of the Church, of "all Christ's faithful," who hand on the Gospel by every aspect of their lives, including the celebration of the Eucharist and prayer. ✧

Mission
in a
Church that Is Catholic
✧

In various ways, the entire *Catechism* shows how the Church and "all Christ's faithful" fulfill their missionary vocation. We learn that not only from the Prologue, but from the *Catechism's* many references to mission, many of which are cross-referenced in the margin of the section on "Mission — a requirement of the Church's catholicity."

In developing how mission is a requirement of the Church's catholicity, the *Catechism* draws on Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, Vatican II and Pope John Paul II's

Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, whose teaching is situated with regard to the whole body of Catholic teaching. The result is a wonderful synthesis of tradition and living faith on the mission of the Catholic Church.

To appreciate the relationship between mission and the Church's catholicity, we first need to reflect on the meaning of the term "catholic."

The Church Is Catholic

For many people in the Western world today, the word "Catholic" is used to distinguish someone who is united with the Pope from someone who is either Protestant or Orthodox. Some even feel the need to specify that they are "Roman Catholic," as opposed, for example, to "Anglo-Catholic" or "Old Catholic."

Such usages presume either the division between East and West or the Protestant Reformation, both of which presuppose a long stretch of Church history.

In the *Catechism*, the use of the term, "catholic," stays close to the original meaning of the Greek word, *katholikos*, which means "universal," with the sense of "according to the totality" or "in keeping with the whole."

As such, the Church is catholic in two senses, first, because Christ is present in her (# 830), and second, because she has a mission to the whole human race (# 831).

The first sense is the most basic. For that sense, the *Catechism* quotes St. Ignatius of Antioch, writing, around A.D. 110, to the

Church at Smyrna on his way to martyrdom at Rome: "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church" (*Ad Smyrn.* 8,2; *Apostolic Fathers*, II/2, 311). This is the oldest reference we have to the expression, "the Catholic Church."

St. Ignatius defined the catholicity of the Church by the presence of Christ Jesus. Writing to the Smyrnians, Ignatius responded to those who denied Christ's humanity or tried to divide the Church. The *Catechism* situates Ignatius' statement in the broader context of the universality of the Church: "In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head." As the fullness of Christ's body, united with Christ, the Church is truly "catholic."

The second sense of "catholic" flows from the first: "the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race." The Church is Catholic in her relationship to Christ. She must also be Catholic in her relationship to all humanity. In this respect, the *Catechism* quotes *Lumen Gentium*: "All men are called to belong to the new People of God" (*Lumen Gentium* 13, 1-2). Catholic in Christ, the Catholic Church must be Catholic in her mission.

Each Particular Church Is Catholic

The term, "catholic," applies not only to the universal Church, that is, to the faithful everywhere, but to each particular Church (#s 832-835). What Ignatius of Antioch said, "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church," applies to the particular

Church as well as to the universal Church.

This has important implications for the unity and universality of the Church. As Paul VI indicated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, when the Church "puts down her roots in a variety of cultural, social, and human terrains, she takes on different external expressions and appearances in each part of the world" (# 835; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 62).

While reflecting on "the rich variety of ecclesiastical disciplines, liturgical rites, and theological and spiritual heritages proper to the local churches" (# 835), the *Catechism* quotes *Lumen Gentium*: "Unified in a common effort," this rich variety "shows all the more resplendently the catholicity of the undivided Church" (*Lumen Gentium* 23).

The catholicity of the particular Churches also has great implications for the mission of the Church. Each particular Church, like the Church as a whole, "is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race" (# 831).

Mission and Catholicity

The *Catechism's* special section on mission is under the heading of the Church's catholicity. Its specific title is **Mission — a requirement of the Church's catholicity**. The presentation includes four major numbers (#s 849-852) with the following titles:

- The missionary mandate** (# 849);
- The origin and purpose of mission** (# 850);
- Missionary motivation** (# 851);
- Missionary paths** (# 852).

These four major numbers are followed by four numbers in small print (# 853-856) with “observations of an historical or apologetic nature, or supplementary doctrinal explanations” (# 20).

The Missionary Mandate (# 849)

The Prologue began with the Trinitarian and Christological foundation of mission: “God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life” (# 1).

The *Catechism’s* special treatment of mission begins with a more proximate and concrete point of departure for mission, namely, the mystery of the Church and its missionary mandate.

The opening statement is taken from the introductory paragraph of the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*: “Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be ‘the universal sacrament of salvation,’ the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men” (*Ad Gentes* 1).

The Church has been sent “to the nations,” *ad gentes*, to be “the universal sacrament of salvation.” The description of the Church as “the universal sacrament of salvation” is taken from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* 48. The full statement is as follows:

Christ lifted up from the earth, has drawn all men to himself (see John 12:32). Rising from the dead (see Romans 6:9), he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples and through him (this Spirit) set up his body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, he is continually active in the world in order to lead men to the Church and, through it, join them more closely to himself; and by nourishing them with his own Body and Blood, make them partakers of his glorious life.

While presenting the Church’s teaching on the Holy Spirit and the Church, the *Catechism* explains that “the Church’s mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament: in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity” (# 738).

In *Ad Gentes*, the “command of her founder” refers to Mark 16:15: “He said to them, ‘Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.’” Fulfilling that command, the Church “strives to preach the Gospel to all men” for two reasons, to fulfill the command of Jesus her founder, and because it is “demanded by her own essential universality.”

The *Catechism* then quotes Christ’s missionary mandate from Matthew: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and Lo, I am with you always, until the close of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

In the *Catechism*, it is Jesus as the founder of the Church who issues the mandate and the mandate is given to the Church itself (# 738). In Matthew 28, Jesus addressed the mandate to the eleven disciples. The *Catechism* rightly interprets Matthew's statement as addressed to the Church in every age. It thus emphasizes the mandate's permanent validity, as Pope John Paul II did in the Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate.

The Church's mandate is threefold:

- ◆ she is to make disciples of all nations;
- ◆ she is to baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit;
- ◆ she is to teach them all that Jesus had commanded her.

In fulfilling the mandate, the Church is assured of her founder's presence throughout her history, even to the close of the age.

The Origin and Purpose of Mission (# 850)

After giving the point of departure for mission in the nature of the Church as "the universal sacrament of salvation" and in her founder's mandate (Mark 16:15; Matthew

28:19-20), the *Catechism* sets out the ultimate origin and purpose of that mandate.

First, it gives the ultimate origin: "The Lord's missionary mandate is ultimately grounded in the eternal love of the Most Holy Trinity." For this it quotes *Ad Gentes*: "The Church on earth is by her nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, she has as her origin the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Ad Gentes* 2).

The ultimate origin of the Church's missionary mandate and of her very nature as missionary is in the Trinity. The statement in # 850 is very concise. For its elaboration, we must refer to the *Catechism's* teaching on the Trinity and on the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity. The *Catechism* relates the mission of the Church to the mystery of the Trinity in the section on "The Divine Works and the Trinitarian Missions" (# 257).

The Love of God. The number begins by giving God's plan: "God is love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God freely wills to communicate the glory of his blessed life. Such is the 'plan of his loving kindness,' conceived by the Father before the foundation of the world, in his beloved Son: 'He destined us in love to be his sons' and 'to be conformed to the image of his Son,' through 'the spirit of sonship' (see Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 8:15, 29)."

A Grace in Christ. The number continues by showing how God's plan is a grace given in Christ: "This plan is a 'grace [which] was

given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,' stemming immediately from Trinitarian love (see 2 Timothy 1:9-10)."

God's Plan Unfolds. The number concludes with how God's plan unfolds: "It unfolds in the work of creation, the whole history of salvation after the fall, and the missions of the Son and the Spirit, which are continued in the mission of the Church" (see *Ad Gentes* 2-9).

A Divine Initiative. The mission of the Church continues that of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God's plan "for us is one of benevolent love," revealed "by giving up his own Son for our sins,...prior to any merit on our part" (# 604). In fulfilling that plan, God took the initiative. That is why it is a grace.

Universal Redeeming Love. God's loving initiative or plan of grace is meant for all human beings. "The Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all men without exception: 'There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer'" (# 605). The quotation is from the Council of Quiercy (853): DS 624 (see 2 Corinthians 5:15; 1 John 2:2).

Beginning with the Incarnation. Viewing God's plan from the point of view of Christ, the *Catechism* teaches, "From the first moment of his Incarnation the Son embraces the Father's plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission: 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work' (John 4:34)" (# 606).

The Work of the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Church also flows from that of the Holy Spirit, revealed in various ways (# 688), beginning with Pentecost (# 767):

"When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church" (*Lumen Gentium* 4; see John 17:4).

Then "the Church was openly displayed to the crowds and the spread of the Gospel among the nations, through preaching, was begun" (Ad Gentes 4).

As the "convocation" of all men for salvation, the Church in her very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to all the nations to make disciples of them (see Matthew 28:19-20; Ad Gentes 2; 5-6).

After giving the ultimate, Trinitarian, origin of the Church's missionary mandate, # 850 continues with the ultimate purpose or goal, which is equally Trinitarian: "The ultimate purpose of mission is none other than to make men share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of love" (see *Redemptoris Missio* 23).

Missionary Motivation (# 851)

The love of God, which provided the ultimate origin of mission (# 850), also provides its motivation.

The teaching on missionary motivation begins with a basic principle: "It is from God's love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the obligation and the vigor of her missionary dynamism, 'for the love of Christ urges us on'" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Missionary motivation is then related to God's plan of universal salvation. The presentation opens with 1 Timothy 2:4: "Indeed, God 'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.'" We recall the verse from the *Catechism's* scriptural heading or frontispiece at the beginning of the Prologue.

After quoting 1 Timothy 2:4, the number focuses on the relationship between the truth and salvation: "God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth."

The number then situates those to whom the Church is sent and the Church itself in relation to both truth and salvation.

Prior to the coming of the Church, "Those who obey the prompting of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation." But that does not mean the mission of the Church and the Church itself are not needed.

As the *Catechism* adds, "But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth." Those to whom the Church brings the truth of Christ have been prepared by the Spirit of truth, but they have not yet received the truth. They are

"on the way of salvation," but still need the truth through which they will be saved.

The teaching on missionary motivation concludes as it began, with a basic principle: "Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary."

Missionary Paths (# 852)

In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II associated the various paths of mission (Chapter IV) with the Holy Spirit: The Principal Agent of Mission (Chapter III). Quoting from *Redemptoris Missio* 21, the *Catechism* does the same: "The Holy Spirit is the protagonist, 'the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission.' It is he who leads the Church on her missionary paths."

Fittingly, the same number of the *Catechism* may be considered a brief synthesis of the

missionary spirituality elaborated in Chapter VIII of *Redemptoris Missio* and already included in Vatican II's Decree on Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes* 5.

Most of the *Catechism's* teaching on missionary paths is taken from *Ad Gentes* 5.

The following of Christ is a missionary journey. The Catechism invites Catholics to read the Gospels and view the following of Christ as the following of Christ the missionary.

In her mission, the Church follows the same basic paths Jesus followed in fulfilling his mission on earth. Indeed, the Church's "mission continues and, in the course of history, unfolds the mission of Christ, who was sent to evangelize the poor." The passage brings to mind Jesus' reading from Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring
glad tidings [the gospel] to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to
captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free, and to
proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."*

(Luke 4:18-19)

Like Christ, the Church, "urged on by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ himself walked, a way of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice even to death, a death from which he emerged victorious by his resurrection" (*Ad Gentes* 5).

The passage brings to mind a hymn Paul adapted in his letter to the Philippians:

*Have among yourselves the same attitude
that is also yours in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,*

*coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.*

(Philippians 2:5-8)

The following of Christ is a missionary journey. The *Catechism* invites Catholics to read the Gospels and view the following of Christ as the following of Christ the missionary.

Sent to evangelize the poor, Christ walked a way of poverty. Moved by the same Spirit which moved him, the Church must do the same.

The number on missionary paths, and the four major numbers which show how mission is a requirement of the Church's catholicity, end with a quotation from Tertullian: So it is that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians" (Tertullian, *Apol.* 50, 13: PL 1, 603).

Fulfilling her universal mission of salvation, the Church must contemplate martyrdom, even as Christ contemplated his passion. As the risen Lord asked the disciples on the way to Emmaus: "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). ✧

Conclusion



The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a great missionary document. As an official “compendium of all catholic doctrine” (Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*), the *Catechism* presents the mission of the Church as central and integral to the profession of faith, the celebration of the Christian mystery, life in Christ, and Christian prayer, indeed, as central and integral to every aspect of Christian living.

The *Catechism* relates the mission of the Church to the Trinity, God’s creative and redeeming love, grace, the Incarnation, Christ’s redemptive sacrifice, the theology of salvation, the work of the Holy Spirit, the whole teaching of the Church, including its sacramental life, Christian morality and the Lord’s prayer. The achievement is awesome.

The Second Vatican Council laid the foundations for such a synthesis. So did the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*. The synthesis itself, however, was finally realized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

From 1566 to 1992

We can appreciate the scope of the new *Catechism*’s achievement by comparing it with its predecessor, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, also called the *Roman Catechism*, published by Pope St. Pius V in 1566, a year after the close of the Council of Trent.

Unlike the new *Catechism*, that of the

Council of Trent began during the Council itself. First suggested in 1546, work on the *Catechism* began in earnest in 1562. When the Council closed in 1565, the continuation of the work, much of which had to do with precision of language, was left to the Holy Father.

The world was extremely different in 1566. True, Christopher Columbus had discovered a new world in 1492, and Magellan’s expedition had completed the circumnavigation of the globe in 1522.

It took time, however, for these discoveries and achievements, and all that would follow them, to be integrated in the consciousness of the Church. Two years after the publication of the *Roman Catechism* (1568), Pope St. Pius V would set up two temporary commissions to deal with the Church’s mission. But it would take another 54 years for Pope Gregory XV to set up the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith — *Propaganda Fide* (1622).

When the *Roman Catechism* was published in 1566, the Church was aware it had a new missionary responsibility, but that awareness had not yet permeated its self-understanding. Knowing that the Church has a mission is not the same as seeing herself as missionary by her very nature.

Go Therefore

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was officially made public in a special ceremony on December 7, 1992. The wheels had been set in motion for the *Catechism* only a little

bit more than six years earlier (1985) in a recommendation of the Synod of Bishops, convoked on the 20th anniversary of Vatican II.

In presenting the *Catechism* to the public, Pope John Paul II referred to the Synod's recommendation:

Indeed, in that request, I recognized the desire to fulfill once again in a renewed manner, Christ's perennial command: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, ...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Catechism... (would be) a valuable help in fulfilling the mission they have received from Christ to proclaim and witness the Good News to all people.

"Go, therefore."

"Be not afraid!" ✧

