

# Relationship Between the Catholic Church and Non-Christian Religions

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*My Father's House*

God has chosen to save the world by forming mankind into one covenanted family for the simple reason that our God IS a family covenanted to delight and love each other person in the Trinity. And because God is one, this covenanted people would be one. Because God is holy, this covenanted people could have all the means of holiness. Because God's love extends to all men, this covenanted family is universal or Catholic. Because God is love diffusive of itself, this covenanted people is zealous and apostolic. This is the plan of God based upon His nature as family. That is what God is essentially doing upon earth -- creating family upon earth His way.

## Preparation in the Old Testament

The gathering together of the People of God, began the moment when sin destroyed the communion of men with God and of men and women with themselves. The gathering together of the Church is God's reaction to the chaos provoked by sin and disunity. This reunification is achieved most essentially and secretly in the hearts of all people. "In every nation, anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to God" (Acts 10:35 cf LG 9:13:16). The remote preparation for this gathering together of the People of God began when God called Abraham and promised Him that He would become the father of a Great Nation (cf Gen 12:2; 15:5-6).

Its immediate preparation begins with Israel's election as the People of God. By this election, Israel is to be the sign of the future gathering of all nations. But the prophets accuse Israel of breaking the covenant and behaving like a prostitute. They announce a new and eternal covenant. "Christ instituted this New Covenant."

## The Church - Instituted by Christ Jesus

It was the Son's task to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation in the fullness of time. Its accomplishment was the reason for his being sent. "The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures." To fulfill the Father's will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church "is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery."

## Who Belongs To the Catholic Church

Since Christ has come as the savior of all people, all men and women are called to this Catholic unity. Unto the Catholic Church, the Spirit of God is moving all men and women explicitly and unconsciously. You can consider membership in the Church as concentric circles. The inner circle is made up of those who are fully incorporated into the Catholic Church. They have at their disposal all the means of salvation given by Christ including the sacraments, especially those of reconciliation and Eucharist, and the clear

teachings of the Church Magisterium. This is not to say that every Catholic fully avails himself of all the means needed to persevere in holiness. There are some Catholics however, who are living in mortal sin and therefore are not living in the Kingdom of God.

### **Joined to the Church**

The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but do not profess the Catholic faith in entirety or have not preserved unity and communion under the successor of Peter. These have a certain although imperfect communion with the Catholic Church. In this way, they are joined and linked with her to the extent that if and when they were to join the Catholic Church, they would not be rebaptized. In fact, the baptism that they have already received was in fact the sacrament that enabled them to become part of the mystical body of Christ -- which is the Catholic Church. Since, from God's point of view, there is only one Church founded by His Son Jesus, a baptized person would have been incorporated into that one Church by their very baptism.

### **The Church and non-Christians**

"Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways.

*The relationship of the Church with the Jewish People.* When she delves into her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant, discovers her link with the Jewish People, "the first to hear the Word of God." The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ", "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."

And when one considers the future, God's People of the Old Covenant and the new People of God tend towards similar goals: expectation of the coming (or the return) of the Messiah. But one awaits the return of the Messiah who died and rose from the dead and is recognized as Lord and Son of God; the other awaits the coming of a Messiah, whose features remain hidden till the end of time; and the latter waiting is accompanied by the drama of not knowing or of misunderstanding Christ Jesus.

*The church's relationship with the Muslims.* "The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day."

The *Church's bond with non-Christian religions* is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race:

All nations form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny,

namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city ...

The Catholic church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as "a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life."

### **Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions**

In our times, when every day men are being drawn closer together and the ties between various peoples are being multiplied, the Church is giving deeper study to her relationship with non-Christian religions. In her task of fostering unity and love among men, and even among nations, she gives primary consideration in this document to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them.

For all peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole race of men dwell over the entire face of the earth (cf Acts 17:26). One also is their final goal: God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, and His saving designs extend to all men (cf Wis 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rom 2:6-7; 1 Tim 2:4) against the day when the elect will be united in that Holy City ablaze with the splendor of God, where the nations will walk in His light (cf Apoc. 21:23 f.).

Men look to the various religions for answers to those profound mysteries of the human condition which, today even as in olden times, deeply stir the human heart: What is a man? What is the meaning and the purpose of our life? What is goodness and what is sin? What gives rise to our sorrows and to what intent? Where lies the path to true happiness? What is the truth about death, judgment, and retribution beyond the grave? What, finally, is that ultimate and unutterable mystery which engulfs our being, and whence we take our rise, and whither our journey leads us?

As we search into the mystery of the Church, we recall the spiritual bond linking the people of the New Covenant with Abraham's stock. For the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to the mystery of God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are already found among the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ, Abraham's sons according to faith (cf Ga. 3:7), are included in the same patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church was mystically foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage.

The church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy deigned to establish the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles (cf Rom 11:17-24). Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, our Peace, reconciled Jew and Gentile, making them both one in Himself (cf Eph. 2:14-16).

Also, the Church ever keeps in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen, "who have the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenant and the legislation and the worship and the promises; who have the fathers, and from whom is Christ according to the flesh" (Rom 9:4-5), the son of the Virgin Mary. The Church recalls too that from the Jewish people sprang the apostles, her foundation stones and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ to the world.

As holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation (cf Lk 19:44), nor did the Jews in large number accept the gospel; indeed, not a few opposed the spreading of it (cf Rom 11:28). Nevertheless, according to the Apostle, the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues (cf Rom 11:28-29). In company with the prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him with one accord: (Soph. 3:9; cf Is 66:23; Ps 65:4; Rom 11:11-32).

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred Synod wishes to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues.

True, authorities of the Jews and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf Jn 19:6); still, what happened in His passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the holy Scriptures. All should take pains, then, lest in catechetical instruction and in the preaching of God's Word they teach anything out of harmony with the truth of the gospel and the spirit of Christ.

The Church repudiates all persecutions against any man. Moreover, mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews, and motivated by the gospel's spiritual love and by no political considerations, she deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source.

Besides, as the Church has always held and continues to hold, Christ in His boundless love freely underwent His passion and death because of the sins of all men, so that all might attain salvation. It is, therefore, the duty of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.