

AGGIE CATHOLIC APOLOGETICS TEAM

*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence...
- 1 Peter 3:15*

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The Church is One

September 29, 2014

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“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” John 17:20-21

The Sacred Mystery of the Church’s Unity

The Church is one because her source is one. “It is a mystery that finds its highest exemplar and source in the unity of the Persons of the Trinity: the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, one God.” (UR 2)

The Church is one because her soul is one. This soul is the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the hearts of all who believe and rules over the entire Church, and who also brings all believers into communion in Christ. (cf UR 2)

The Mystical Body of Christ – Christ is the head and we are members of the one body (1 Cor 12)

The gifts of the Spirit are a key in this unity – above all is charity. “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.” (Col 3:12-14)

The bonds of unity are demonstrated through the profession of one faith, celebration of the Eucharist and sacraments, and apostolic succession (CCC 815)

Sin and its consequences always threaten this unity, so we are exhorted by St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)

The Church subsists in the Catholic Church (LG 8) and is the fullness of the means of salvation (UR 3).

This does not mean the Catholic Church is the only means of salvation and others will not be saved! Christians who are not Catholic do believe in Sacred

Scripture and are followers of Jesus. Also there are people who have not heard the message of Christianity through no fault of their own, yet strive to live good lives according to their consciences (LG 15-16)

Wounds to Unity

“Where there are sins, there are also divisions, schisms, heresies, and disputes. Where there is virtue, however, there also are harmony and unity, from which arise the one heart and one soul of all believers.” (Origen)

Heresy: the obstinate denial ... after the reception of baptism of some truth which is to be believed by divine and Catholic faith

Apostasy: the total repudiation of the Church

Schism: the refusal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him (cf. Can 751)

We cannot accuse of sin those who were born into denominations outside of the Church and raised in the faith of Christ. Through their baptism in Christ, we accept them as our brothers and sisters.

Working towards unity

Christ desired the Church to be one from the very beginning.

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The entire Church – laity and clergy – is responsible for working toward unity of all Christians. However, the overall goal for unity of all Christians into the Church transcends human powers and gifts. Thus, we must place our hope in Christ’s prayer for the unity of the Church in John 17, the Father’s love and compassion for all, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

References/Further Reading

New American Bible

Catechism of the Catholic Church – Paragraphs 813-822

Code of Canon Law – Canon 751

Lumen Gentium (Vatican II - Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)

Unitatis Redintegratio (Vatican II - Decree on Ecumenism)

Dominus Iesus (CDF Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church)

Ut Unum Sint (Encyclical by St. John Paul II – On Commitment to Ecumenism)