



Theology Corner

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“Four Marks of the Church: How is the Church *One*?”

Sometimes, amidst many disagreements between individual Catholics or even with leadership in the Catholic Church, it is difficult to see that how the Church can be “One.” But the reason we say that the Church is one is not to say that people within the Catholic Church are always united, but that the institution itself is “One” inasmuch as its Source, the Trinity of Persons is One (CCC 813). As Christ said in John’s Gospel, “And the glory which you have given me, I have given them; that they may be one as We also are one.” (John 17:22). There is a unity of **faith** in the Church by which we all believe the same doctrine, a unity of **hope** by which we all pursue the same goal in hope for eternal life, and we are all united in **love** which has its source in the One, True God. The Church is one in that it is instituted by Christ, not man. For this reason, the teachings of the Church go back to the very beginning and the doctrines themselves have remained unchanged. The Catholic Church has the fullness of the truth insofar as Christ is the fullness of truth. Because of this unity of faith in the Catholic Church, the members of this Church (the body of Christ) cannot take away this unitive nature of the Church, but rather, they can wound the unity through sin. Remember, the Church is a *divine* institution that is comprised of human beings, not a *human* institution that has God in it.

When I say that the unitive nature of the Church cannot be taken away, this is because “The Church does not possess [it] of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one.” (CCC 811). We are of one faith, hope, and love, and anyone within the Church who seeks to deprive her of these virtues is said to be in schism. That is, they remove themselves from the oneness of the Church. I think that the concept of the unity of the Church, understood practically, is through the teaching *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* – “outside the Church there is no salvation.” A misunderstanding of the unity in the Church would suppose this to mean that anyone who is not Catholic will not be saved, but this is not true at all. The purpose of this statement is to show that “all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body.” (CCC 846). People of other faiths could very well be saved, but since the Church is united to Christ as his Body, and Christ is the source of salvation, then salvation is inseparable from the Church itself. In other words, you cannot separate the Church from Christ any more than you can separate a head from a body. When you remove a head from a body, it loses its principle of unity and will thus die out. But the Church never dies with Christ as its Head and it is for this reason that he says, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matt 16:18). So, any other faith, inasmuch as they preach *some* degree of truth, derive these truths from the teachings of the Church which flow from Christ himself. Therefore, it is commonly said that the Church is not a denomination, but rather, the common denominator.

Threats to this unity are certainly being made at every moment, as they have for almost 2000 years. It is just very important to remember that these threats are not ones that threaten to remove the intrinsic unity of the Church, but instead, to separate its members from its oneness. So, the goal is to do whatever we can to ensure that all members of the Body remain ever faithful to the teachings of the Church which is and always will be One.

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