

Christian Unity

Q. 166. Why is the unity of Christians in faith and love God's will?

Christian unity in faith and love is God's will because Jesus prayed that all who believe in Him should be one, in order that the whole world would know that His Father sent Him.

The night before He suffered His Passion and death, Jesus prayed for Christian unity. "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20-21).

Seeing how the early Christians loved and honored one another, the pagans came to believe that the Christian God was the true God.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:14-16).

Jesus founded but one Church, that which is built upon Peter the Rock. Moreover, Jesus brought the same Good News to all men, and called all to the same new life. His Church subsists in the Catholic Church, which is the world-wide community of the followers of Jesus united around the Pope.

Vatican Council II

The condition of the modern world lends greater urgency to this duty of the Church; for, while men of the present day are drawn ever more closely together by social, technical and cultural bonds, it still remains for them to achieve full unity in Christ. *The Church, 1*

Today, in many parts of the world, under the influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires. The sacred Council exhorts, therefore, all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism. *Ecumenism, 4*

Q. 167. How is Christian unity promoted by Catholics?

In order to promote Christian unity, Catholics should take the first steps in seeking to overcome the unfortunate divisions existing between Christians. They should strive to make Christians more faithful to Christ and to be effective witnesses to the truths received from the Apostles.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr: John Vianney and Fr: Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

Sacred Scripture

Q. 167. 1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph 4:1-3.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Q. 166. Paragraphs 1815-1816, 1826-1827.

Q. 167. Paragraphs 815, 821, 855.



The Church is one because there is only one Jesus, Who communicates the same life of God through the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Him. At this level, all Christians are truly united, and the Church is one. If our love for Christ is sincere, we shall do all in our power, by prayer and work, so that Christ's will and prayer for unity may be realized: "That they may all be one" (John 17:21).

At the same time, the Church is not one, because historical differences and bitterness have driven the followers of Jesus apart. Consequently, much of their Christian lives is not shared with one another. Besides, men's understanding of Jesus and the meaning of His life and teaching differ, and sometimes these differences prevent Christians from coming together.

As a result, divisions and separate groups have appeared. These groups are principally the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church, and the various Protestant communities. As Catholics, we should show our deep concern for this sad condition by praying and working for Christian unity.

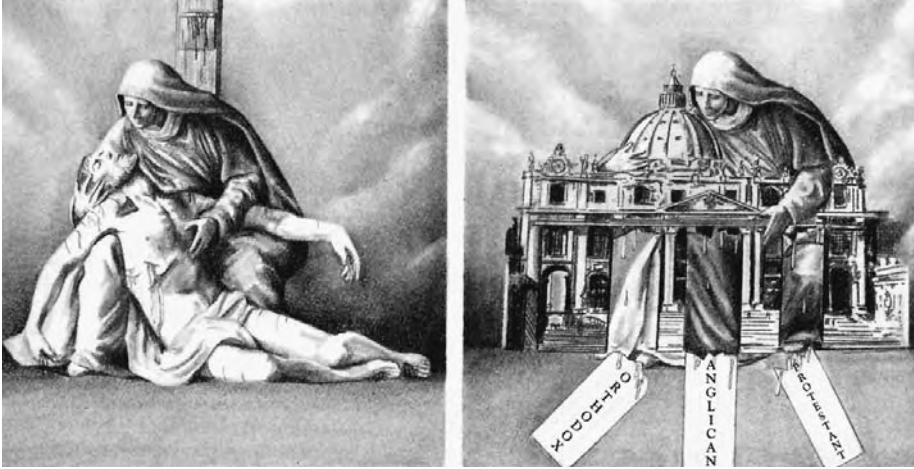
Ecumenism is the acceptance of the basic unity of the Church and the effort to make this unity present and visible in the whole life of the Church. We Catholics partake of Christ's unfathomable riches, and we should lovingly share them with others.

Sacred Scripture

I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." *1 Corinthians 1:10*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

822 Concern for achieving unity "involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike."¹ But we must realize "that this holy objective—the reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ—transcends human powers and gifts." That is why we place all our hope "in the prayer of Christ for the Church, in the love of the Father for us, and in the power of the Holy Spirit."²



Vatican Council II

The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but who do not however profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter. For there are many who hold sacred scripture in honor as a rule of faith and of life, who have a sincere religious zeal, who lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and the Savior, who are sealed by baptism which unites them to Christ, and who indeed recognize and receive other sacraments in their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities. Many of them possess the episcopate, celebrate the holy Eucharist and cultivate devotion of the Virgin Mother of God. There is furthermore a sharing in prayer and spiritual benefits; these Christians are indeed in some real way joined to us in the Holy Spirit for, by his gifts and graces, his sanctifying power is also active in them and he has strengthened some of them even to the shedding of their blood. *The Church, 15*

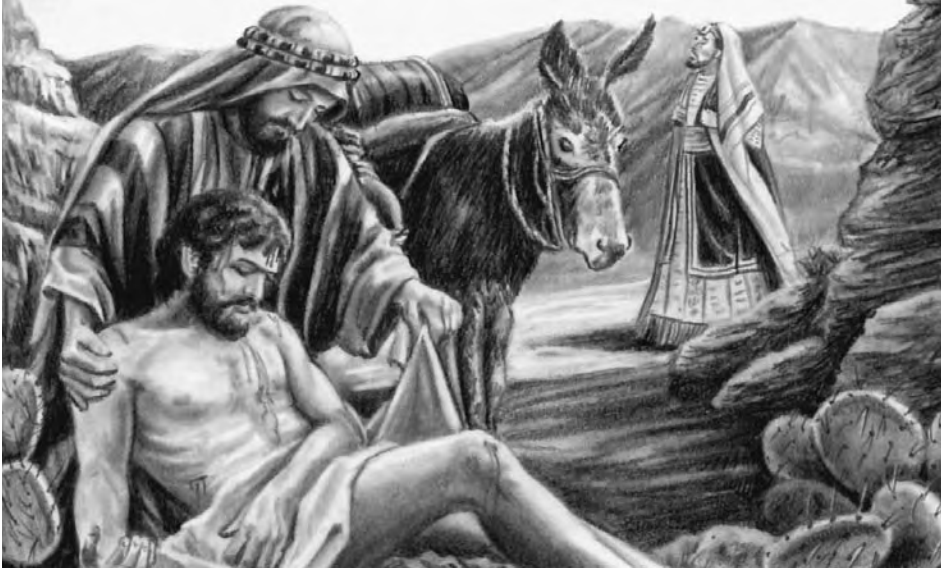
Certainly, such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature. *Ecumenism, 1*

This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name, "spiritual ecumenism." *Ecumenism, 8*

In certain circumstances, such as in prayer services "for unity" and during ecumenical gatherings, it is allowable, indeed desirable that Catholics should join in prayer with their separated brethren. Such prayers in common are certainly a very effective means of petitioning for the grace of unity, and they are a genuine expression of the ties which still bind Catholics to their separated brethren. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20). *Ecumenism, 8*

Summary Prayer

Heavenly Father, gather all our brothers and sisters who share our faith in Jesus Christ. Gather and keep together in one Church all those who seek the truth with sincerity. Look kindly on all those who follow Jesus Your Son. We are all consecrated to You by our common Baptism. Make us one in the fullness of faith, and keep us one in the fellowship of love, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom with You and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory. Amen.



Q. 168. Why should we respect all men of good will?

We should respect all men of good will because man was created for God in His image and likeness; as a human being he possesses a special dignity and value. Man, having a spiritual soul and being a more perfect image of God, has dominion over all other earthly creatures. He has a free will and is immortal. For these reasons alone, all men are deserving of our respect. The Catholic Church rejects as un-Christian any unjust discrimination or injustice because of race, national origin, ethnic origin, color, sex, class, condition in life, or religion.

The story of the Good Samaritan teaches us that our neighbor is every man, not only those who belong to our race, our country, or our religion. We should love even those who hate us and injure us. The Divine Master gave us the example when He said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Sacred Scripture

If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. *1 John 4:20*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1930 Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy.¹ If it does not respect them, authority can rely only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects. It is the Church’s role to remind men of good will of these rights and to distinguish them from unwarranted or false claims.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

Splendor of Truth

Jesus' way of acting and his words, his deeds and his precepts constitute the moral rule of Christian life. Indeed, his actions, and in particular his Passion and Death on the Cross, are the living revelation of his love for the Father and for others. (*section 20*)

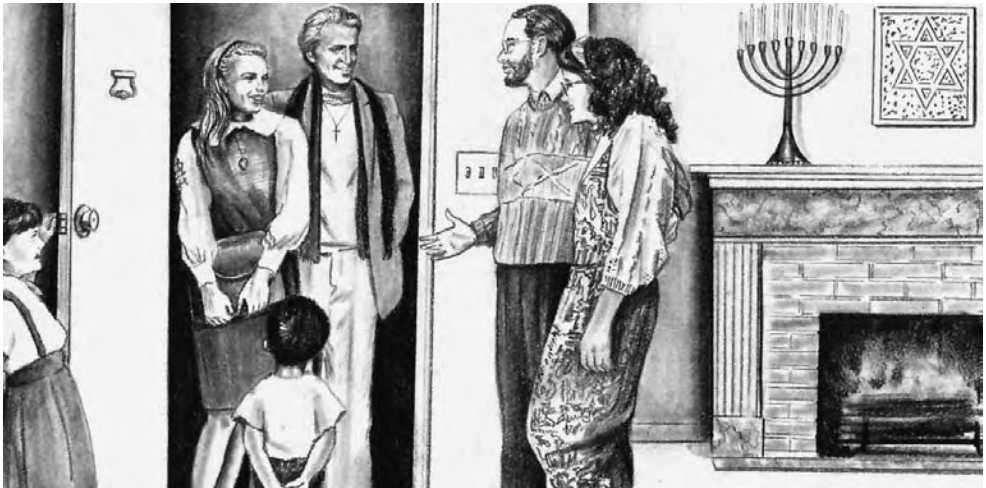
Vatican Council II

And so the Spirit stirs up desires and actions in all of Christ's disciples in order that all may be peaceably united, as Christ ordained, in one flock under one shepherd. Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope and work that this may be achieved. *The Church, 15*

It is through the faithful preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles and their successors—the bishops with Peter's successor at their head—through their administering the sacraments, and through their governing in love, that Jesus Christ wishes his people to increase, under the action of the Holy Spirit; and he perfects its fellowship in unity: in the confession of one faith, in the common celebration of divine worship, and in the fraternal harmony of the family of God. *Ecumenism, 2*

In his fatherly care for all of us, God desired that all men should form one family and deal with each other in a spirit of brotherhood. *Modern World, 24*

Therefore, the Church reproveth, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion. Accordingly, following the footsteps of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, the sacred Council earnestly begs the Christian faithful to “conduct themselves well among Gentiles” (1 Pet. 2:12) and if possible, as far as depends on them, to be at peace with all men (cf. Rom. 12:18) and in that way to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt. 5:45). *Non-Christian Religions, 5*

***Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise*** (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. Cite two passages in Sacred Scripture which show that Jesus wants all people to be united in faith in the one true Catholic Church which He founded? What does ecumenism mean?
2. One way to promote Christian unity is to lead others to the knowledge of the one true faith. What can you and your family do to teach or lead others to the truths of our Catholic Church?
3. Pray for Christian unity and that all may come to the knowledge of the one true Catholic faith.

Chapter Summary Prayer

Father, You gather the nations to praise Your Name. May all who are reborn in Baptism be one in faith and love. Grant Your continuing protection to all those who have received new life in Baptism. The perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ made us Your people. In Your love grant peace and unity to Your Church. You are the strength of the people. Unite us as one in Your holy Church, so that we may attain the peace our hearts desire. Jesus, Divine Shepherd, Your life's last concern was that the Apostles, upon whom You would confer the Holy Spirit, would be able, by God's grace and their own word and example, to lead Your scattered sheep into the one true fold. You prayed to Your Father for this unity the night before You died. Help us to maintain this unity by remaining always faithful to the Holy Father, the Pope, and to all the bishops united to him in faith and charity. We ask this in Your most powerful and holy Name. Amen.

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Family Wisdom Library: Chapter 47

See Appendix A for more references.

Q. 166. Why is the unity of Christians in faith and love God's will?

Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 3, 8, 9, 13, 15;
On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, John Paul II, sect. 25;
On the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church, John Paul II, sect. 22-24;
On Evangelization in the Modern World, Paul VI, sect. 77;
On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, John Paul II, sect. 62-64;
Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 6;
The Relationship Between Faith and Reason, John Paul II, sect. 70.

Q. 167. How is Christian unity promoted by Catholics?

Catechesis in Our Time, John Paul II, sect. 32;
Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 8, 9, 13, 15;
On the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church, John Paul II, sect. 23, 24;
On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, John Paul II, sect. 60;
On Reconciliation and Penance, John Paul II, sect. 2;
Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 6;
The Relationship Between Faith and Reason, John Paul II, sect. 70;
Splendor of Truth, sect. 102, 103.

Q. 168. Why should we respect all men of good will?

Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 8, 9, 13, 16, 30, 31;
The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, John Paul II, sect. 5, 37-39;
On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum, John Paul II, sect. 51;
Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 6, 12.

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**Thought Provokers**

Please see Appendix C for the answers.

- Q. 166: Where should Christian unity in faith and love begin?
- Q. 167: In addition to showing a deep love for our Christian, but non-Catholic, family members, friends, and acquaintances, how else can we Catholics promote Christian unity with them, as well as with other non-Catholic Christians?
- Q. 168: Why should we show respect to those who profess good will but who, nonetheless, hold views which are contrary to Christianity?