Rel. 500A: The Citation of Church Documents: A Supplement to Turabian
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General Guidelines

Unfortunately, neither the Chicago Manual of Style nor Turabian offer guidelines on how to cite a Church document. Fortunately, experience with such documents teaches best practices on how to cite them.

*The rule to follow is to always cite Church documents by paragraph number, never their page number.* The reason for this is that Church documents are published using multiple editions, both in print and online, so citation by paragraph is best.

One should add in the bibliography the usual publishing data (city, publisher, date) for the Church document in question because, unfortunately, the paragraphs may differ sometimes from edition to edition. If your reader finds that he or she cannot find the paragraph you’re referencing, he or she can either hunt for the edition you’re using or the paragraph you’re citing.

*How to footnote a Church document*

With all that in mind, the citation of Church documents in footnotes is actually quite simple. The citation begins with the author of the document, *the title of the document in italics*, and the paragraph number.

The author can be a person or a Church body of some kind, such as an ecumenical council or a Roman dicastery. The following examples should make this all clear.

*Documents authored by an individual*


John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 3.


Omit the title of “pope” or “bishop” when they are the author of a document such as an encyclical, pastoral letter, etc. If the pope or bishop in question belongs to an order, the post-nominal initials (e.g., S.M., O.S.B., S.J.) can be added after the name.

*Documents authored by a Church body*

Here, the author is the corporate author of the document; the council, synod, or curial dicastery responsible for the document’s production.


Notice when one uses a Church document written in a language other than English, one cites it in that language. A Church document in English that uses the original Latin title can be cited using that title.

*Exception to the above*

Very short documents (e.g. papal letters or declarations) without paragraph numbers can be cited as any Church document minus those numbers. Remember to include full bibliographic information in a works cited page.

If no paragraph numbers are given in a Church document, cite the work as one would any other text in a footnote complete with page number with the bibliographic information one can give both in a footnote and a works cited page.