Where is the church of Christ?

The developing teaching of Vatican II

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Where is the church of Christ?

In the 1950s it would have been as difficult for Catholics to imagine the pope launching a broad reform movement within the church as it would be for Americans today to conceive of the Kremlin initiating a far-reaching democratization of the Eastern bloc countries. Yet that is what occurred with the Second Vatican Council.[1]

The Second Vatican Council was held from 1962 to 1965, and resulted in the reforms that Phillip Berryman alludes to in the above quote. During the course of the council, the church addressed questions that had been addressed at earlier times in the course of church history, but they did so in a new way. Perhaps the most startling aspect of the reforms has been the awakening of the Roman Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement. Some have likened it to the awakening of a sleeping giant, with all the accompanying risks. Central to this awakening is the willingness to recognise ecclesial reality beyond the bounds of the visible Roman Catholic community. It is this conciliar development that I wish to trace in this paper.

I. The Roman Catholic Awakening

Through two thousand years of church history, there have been numerous instances of division that have split the church apart. Beginning with the early heresies, and the divisions associated with the early councils, the church has usually managed to bring the dissenting parties back to the fold, or to limit the damage where that was not possible. Even the schisms with the Oriental Orthodox following the Council of Chalcedon and with the Eastern Orthodox in 1054 had very little practical impact on the local churches in the West. However, since the Reformation, the unity of the Western church has been rent asunder. In response, at the Council of Trent and by means of the ascendancy of the papacy and religious orders, the Roman Catholic Church consolidated itself and built a uniformity of liturgy, doctrine, and church structure. This has artificially maintained unity within the Roman Catholic Church but has prevented any significant achievement of reunion between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation. It is only in the last thirty-five years that the

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[1] Phillip Berryman, *Liberation theology: The essential facts about the revolutionary movement in Latin America and beyond* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p.15. It is somewhat ironic that only two years after Berryman published these comments, Mikhail Gorbachev did precisely this.

official Roman Catholic Church has taken a firm and active role in the modern ecumenical movement, and has engaged in dialogue with other churches as partners, rather than as adversaries.

Prior to the modern era, the Roman Catholic Church explored reunion with other Christian churches on a number of occasions. The councils at Lyons in 1274 and at Ferrara and Florence in 1438-1439 were attempts to resolve the Eastern Schism. Later, with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1595, a majority of the Byzantine hierarchy in the Ukraine resumed relations with Rome, and formed the Ukrainian Catholic Church. Twenty-two similar Eastern Catholic churches were formed at later dates on the same model. This remains a source of harsh feelings in the present day. In June 1993, the Roman Catholic – Orthodox dialogue stated that this means of unity, known as uniatism, is a form of proselytism which "can no longer be accepted either as a method to be followed or as a model of the unity our churches are seeking."[2]

A further occasion for an attempted reunion occurred in the 1890's on the eve of the modern ecumenical movement. Viscount Halifax, a highly respected lay member of the Church of England, and the Abbé Portal, a Roman Catholic priest, met at Malines in Belgium to identify areas of agreement and opportunities for dialogue between the Church of England and Roman Catholics. They decided to seek a formal assessment by the Vatican of the status of Anglican orders. Unfortunately, the judgement, expressed in the papal bull, *Apostolicae Curae*, was that Anglican orders are "absolutely null and utterly void."[3] As a direct result of this judgement, any potential theological discussions were doomed. For a considerable time, the slogan "No more Malines!" was heard in the Church of England as a caution against further attempts at dialogue with Rome. *Apostolicae Curae* remains an obstacle in the contemporary dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

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[2] Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (Balamand, Lebanon, 1993), *Origins* 23 (1993), p. 167.

[3] Pope Leo XIII, *Apostolicae Curae*, bull on the validity of Anglican orders, 1896. Published in Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 30th ed., Karl Rahner, ed., § 1963-1966. English translation in *Sources of Catholic dogma*, Roy J. Defarrari, trans., (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1957), pp. 496-97.

1. The First Vatican Council

The awakening of ecumenical concern and involvement that occurred in the Roman Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council has its roots in the earlier attempts described above, as well as in various pre-conciliar movements of the twentieth century. The context for these attempts was the Counter-Reformation that began at the Council of Trent and continued, in full swing, until the eve of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. The Council of Trent was held from 1545 to 1552 and continued from 1562 to 1563. In a series of twenty-five sessions, it initiated far-reaching reforms related to ecclesiastical offices and benefices, and issued significant decrees on the sacraments, justification, original sin, and purgatory. The conciliar reforms respond to legitimate objections raised by reformers of all persuasions. Nevertheless, Trent did not consider the question of the status of the communities gathered around the various reformers.

For the First Vatican Council, the issue of papal primacy and infallibility was of central importance. The council was held in four sessions in 1869 and 1870. The council issued two dogmatic constitutions, one on the church and one on the "Catholic faith." These two documents are strongly related to each other, and depend upon a theory of apostolic authority that derives from the commission of Peter: "you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." (Mt. 16:18)

> And it was to Peter alone that Jesus, after his resurrection, confided the jurisdiction of supreme pastor and ruler of his whole fold ... To this absolutely manifest teaching of the sacred scriptures, as it has always been understood by the catholic church, are clearly opposed the distorted opinions of those who misrepresent the form of government which Christ the lord established in his church, and deny that Peter, in preference to the rest of the apostles ... was endowed by Christ with a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction.[4]

Peter, as the apostle to Rome, is understood to be the first bishop of Rome. Thus, the primacy of Peter among the apostles is conferred upon the bishops of Rome who succeed Peter in that post. The council is adamant that the authority that was granted to Peter is a personal apostolic charism, rather than an apostolic charism of the whole community or of the episcopacy. Thus, it is conferred directly upon the petrine office, the See of Rome.

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[4] First Vatican Council, *De ecclesia*, dogmatic constitution on the church of Christ, ch. 1, in Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the ecumenical councils* (*Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*), (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

> The same may be said of those who assert that this primacy was not conferred immediately and directly on blessed Peter himself, but rather on the church, and that it was through the church that it was transmitted to him in his capacity as her minister.[5]

The First Vatican Council draws certain conclusions from this petrine charism, not the least of which is, that the infallibility of the church, as described in the "Constitution on the Catholic faith," is exercised through the person and ministry of the bishop of Rome. In addition, the petrine ministry contains within it the principle of Christian unity. Thus:

> it has always been necessary for every church – that is to say the faithful throughout the world – to be in agreement with the Roman church because of its more effective leadership. In consequence of being joined, as members to head, with that see, from which the rights of sacred communion flow to all, they will grow together into the structure of a single body.[6]

This institutional model of church defines unity in terms of the relation and subjugation of local churches to the church of Rome, regardless of their own apostolic institution and traditions. It leads to a canonical understanding in which the bishop of Rome exercises "universal, ordinary and immediate"[7] authority in local churches. Moreover, it leads to an understanding of episcopal ministry in which the episcopal charism is dependent upon the consent and supervision of the Roman pontiff.

> In this way, by unity with the Roman pontiff in communion and in profession of the same faith, the church of Christ becomes one flock under one supreme shepherd.[8]

With these words, the strict identity between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Christ is proclaimed. This model of authority constitutes one of the major obstacles to contemporary ecumenical rapprochement between the Roman Catholic Church and every other church with which it enters dialogue. How Roman Catholics restate this in contemporary circumstances will hold the key to any future ecumenical achievements. As we shall see when we examine the Second Vatican Council below, the identity between the church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church is affirmed in a new way which may provide an opportunity for ecumenical rapprochement.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., ch. 2

[7] Ibid., ch. 3. The canonical term "ordinary" refers to the authority of a bishop, or another charged with similar authority over a local church, such as certain abbots. The term "immediate" means that the authority is direct and not subject to another's authority.

[8] Ibid.

2. *Mortalium Animos*

In January 1928, Pope Pius XI responded to the previous year's Faith and Order conference in Lausanne by issuing an encyclical on religious unity, *Mortalium Animos*. While the encyclical dealt with the ecumenical movement, it did so with a tangential approach. Pius XI's main concern seemed to be with "that false opinion which considers all religions to be more or less good and praiseworthy."[9] A further concern seems to be that:

> A good number of them ... deny that the Church of Christ must be visible and apparent, at least to such a degree that it appears as one body of faithful, agreeing in one and the same doctrine under one teaching authority and government; but on the contrary, they understand a visible Church as nothing else than a Federation, composed of various communities of Christians, even though they adhere to different doctrines, which may even be incompatible one with another.[10]

His concern with the visible church is a continuing theme in Catholic theology. It is found in Irenaeus, Augustine, Trent and Vatican I. As we will see, this concern will continue to arise.

Pius XI further condemns those that might suggest that the "longstanding differences of opinion which keep asunder ... the Christian family, must be entirely put aside, and from the remaining doctrines a common form of faith drawn up and proposed for belief."[11] Instead he proposes an alternative, that which Rome had always proposed, that all those who call themselves Christian submit to a visible unity with Christ's Vicar, the Bishop of Rome.[12] The so-called "Return to Rome" proposal had always been in the background of Rome's relations with other Christians, this was another opportunity to express it.

In order to ensure that the perceived errors did not spread within the Roman Catholic Church itself the Pope repeated the existing restriction regarding participation in non-Catholic assemblies. This restriction was re-affirmed again before the 1937 Oxford conference of Faith and Order and the general assembly of the WCC at Amsterdam in 1948.

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[9] Pope Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos* (encyclical on religious unity, January 6, 1928), § 2, in Claudia Carlen, ed. *The papal encyclicals*, Raleigh: McGrath Publishing Co., 1981. All papal encyclicals will be cited from this source unless otherwise noted.

[10] Ibid., § 6

[11] Ibid., § 7

[12] Ibid., § 10

3. *Mystici Corporis Christi*

In 1943, amid the bombs and carnage of the Second World War, Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical on the mystical body of Christ. His assertion was that in the context of violent oppression and warfare, Christians are called ever more clearly to a reflection on the mystery of the person of Christ. Certainly, in the midst of violence and bloodshed, it is not unreasonable to reflect on the carnal nature of humanity. Therefore, he offers a dogmatic treatise on the mystical body of Christ, which according to St. Paul is the church. (Col. 1: 24) Pius XII repeats the strict identity between the church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church that was found in Vatican I:

> If we would define and describe this true Church of Jesus Christ – which is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Roman Church – we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression "the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ".[13]

Pius XII, following the lead of others before him, finds in the pauline language of "body of Christ" an incarnational ecclesiology. The body of Christ, which is both human and divine, is identified with the church. Thus the church, while its members are human and subject to sin, is holy and without blemish.

The incarnational ecclesiology of *Mystici Corporis Christi* is also a eucharistic theology. To describe the church as the physical presence of Christ draws a close analogy to the sacramental theology of the Eucharist that Catholics consider central to their faith life and practice. It opens itself to a sacramental ecclesiology such as that expressed by Vatican II and which is explored in greater depths by theologians such as Edward Schillebeeckx.[14]

However, sacramental ecclesiology is not the only implication of Pius XII's incarnational theology. Another important feature of this theology directly concerns Pius XII. This is that the church, which is the mystical body, is also the visible body. He rejects the understanding of the church as being somehow found in pure form, here and there. The church is not merely a fellowship

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[13] Pope Pius XII, *Mystici corporis Christi* (encyclical on the mystical body of Christ, June 29, 1943), § 13

[14] cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the sacrament of the encounter with God*, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963) & *Church: The human story of God*, John Bowden, trans. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990).

of committed believers, however worthy such a fellowship may be. Instead, the church is the treasure

house of grace, won for us through Jesus' death upon the Cross.

> It was possible for Him of Himself to impart these graces to mankind directly; but he willed to do so only through a visible Church made up of men, so that through her all might cooperate with Him in dispensing the graces of Redemption.[15]

In addition, the church cannot be understood as only the true believers found one by one amidst a

world of unbelievers. It is found whole and intact, as Christ's body in its resurrected wholeness.

> Hence they err in a matter of divine truth, who imagine the Church to be invisible, intangible, a something merely "pneumatological" as they say, by which many Christian communities, though they differ from each other in their profession of faith, are united by an invisible bond.[16]

The emphasis of this ecclesiology is on the visible institution whose marks are the sacraments, the

three orders of ministry, and the magisterium. It bears the marks of the true church confessed in the

creeds: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The guarantee of each of these marks is the historic

episcopate, whose divine commission is to teach, govern and sanctify. The head of the body is Christ,

whose vicar on earth is the bishop of Rome. To the vicar of Christ alone is granted the primacy of

jurisdiction. Therefore, those who deny the authority of the pope:

> have taken away the visible head, broken the visible bonds of unity and left the Mystical Body of the Redeemer so obscured and so maimed, that those who are seeking the haven of eternal salvation can neither see it nor find it.[17]

The case of Lawrence Feeney, in 1949, illustrated a special corrective to this highly

institutionalised view of the church. The Holy Office,[18] in response to his teaching that outside of the

visible church there is no salvation, excommunicated Feeney. According to the classic axiom: "*extra

ecclesiam nulla salus.*" However, according to the Holy Office, Feeney erred when he took this

formula, and presumably the papal encyclical, to mean that one cannot belong to the church by desire

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[15] *Mystici corporis Christi*, § 12

[16] Ibid., § 14

[17] Ibid., § 41

[18] The Holy Office was the successor to the Office of the Roman Inquisition, and has subsequently been renamed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is charged with the preservation of theological orthodoxy.

and longing. This desire need not always be explicit, but may be implicit as in the medieval notion of "invincible ignorance," or *votum*.[19]

4. The Ice Begins to Melt

In anticipation of the WCC's inaugural assembly at Amsterdam in 1948, the local Roman Catholic archbishop had agreed to allow limited participation by authorised Roman Catholic theologians, until Rome intervened and refused to allow any Roman Catholic observers. Rome's action here was consistent with the prevailing canon law found in *Mortalium Animos*. Nonetheless, a statement from the archbishop was read to the assembly, explaining the reasons why Roman Catholics could not participate and wishing the WCC well in its endeavours.

Slightly more than a year later, in December of 1949, the Holy Office issued an instruction known as *Ecclesia Catholica*, which was addressed to local bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. The instruction was concerned with the ecumenical movement. Despite coming from the Vatican office responsible for preserving the doctrine of the faith, the instruction is surprisingly open to the ecumenical movement in its many facets. The instruction places the responsibility in the bishops' hands for ensuring that the movement be kept "under effective supervision," but also that it be given "prudent encouragement and direction."[20]

Notwithstanding the openness of the instruction to the ecumenical movement, the restrictions on Roman Catholic participation in ecumenical conferences were only slightly loosened. However, the restriction on *communicatio in sacris*[21] was relaxed to allow the common recitation of the Lord's Prayer or other approved prayers at ecumenical gatherings. The local bishop was to approve before

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[19] Holy Office, *Suprema haec sacra*, (letter to Archbishop Cushing, August 8, 1949), *American Ecclesiastical Review*, 127 (1952), pp. 307-15. Also see Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, § 3866-3873. The Holy Office cites *Mystici Corporis Christi* § 103 in support of this view: "For even though by an unconscious desire they have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church." Feeney and his followers at the St. Benedict Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts were placed an interdict that was only lifted a few years before his death in 1978. This intriguing story is told in George B. Pepper, *The Boston heresy case in view of the secularization of religion: A case study in the sociology of religion*, (Lewiston / Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1988).

[20] Holy Office, *Ecclesia Catholica* (*Instructio ad locorum ordinarios de motione œcumenica*, December 20, 1949), § I, in *The jurist*, 10 (1950), p. 208.

[21] cf. footnote 70 below

hand every ecumenical encounter and ensure that it conformed to the guidelines set down in the instruction.

At the Evanston Assembly in 1954, the Archbishop of Chicago, exercising his authority as outlined in the instruction, refused to allow Roman Catholics to travel to Evanston for the purposes of participating in the assembly. According to ecumenical folklore, a number of influential Roman Catholic theologians housed themselves in a motel just outside the archbishop's jurisdiction, and were available to the assembly delegates for consultation.

Gregory Baum published his doctoral dissertation in 1958 entitled "That they may be one," taking up the cautious invitation expressed in *Ecclesia Catholica* to begin to study the ecumenical movement. Baum identifies a number of points in papal doctrine from Leo XIII to Pius XII that begin to recognise an ecclesial reality in "dissident Christianity." Particularly, he points to the acknowledgement by Pius XI of a common patrimony with the Orthodox churches. This common patrimony requires that the Catholic community responds with respect to the churches of the East, and learns from their perspectives and experience.[22]

In addition, Baum suggests that the predominant model of "Catholic ecumenism" concerning the Protestant churches is one of healing the imperfections. He suggests that the Roman Catholic Church recognises a conflict at the heart of these churches between "the divine patrimony of grace" and "the principles of error." Thus, the church:

> must offer her assistance in the effort to bring to perfection the divine heritage and to dispel the aberrations... If the wounded heritage of grace surviving among dissident Christians can be brought to its authentic perfection, it will impel them towards the Catholic Church.[23]

While this does not appear to be a very positive assessment of the Protestant churches, Baum points out that it precludes any possibility of proselytism. He suggests that when ecumenical work deteriorates into proselytism, it neglects the divine patrimony, rather than perfecting it.[24] Anyone

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[22] Gregory Baum, *That they may be one: A study of papal doctrine (Leo XIII to Pius XII)*, (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1958), pp. 109-10.
[23] Ibid., p. 97
[24] Ibid., p. 111

who has read anything that Baum has written since the Second Vatican Council will immediately

recognise that this short book is considerably different from anything he has written since. This is

most likely due to the enormous changes that occurred at the council. Baum himself discusses this in a

recent article in his journal *The Ecumenist*:

> When I wrote my dissertation in the fifties, I thought of myself as sympathetic to ecumenism within
> the Catholic framework; yet reading the book today, I recognize that I still had the Catholic mind-set
> of the pre-conciliar period. I still concluded that "the last end of ecumenism is the return of the
> separated Christians to the Church of Christ, that is, to the Roman Catholic Church." And I added,
> "About this there can be neither doubt nor difficulty in the mind of a Catholic."[25]

II. The Second Vatican Council

Although *Ecclesia Catholica* represented a small movement by the Vatican with respect to the

ecumenical movement, the big breakthrough came with the election of Pope John XXIII in 1958. The

new pope stunned the world early in the following year by calling an "œcumenical council," and by

establishing in 1960 the permanent Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. There was some

misunderstanding both amongst the Roman Catholic laity, and among some of the other churches, as

to the intent of the council. It was apparently thought in some quarters that the council would bring

together delegates of all the Christian churches in a truly "ecumenical" council. Although there was

some sense of disappointment when it was discovered that the council would only be Roman

Catholic, there was still a sense of excitement as invitations were sent to other Christian churches to

send official observers.

Günther Gassmann has expressed an interesting reflection upon the significance of the Second

Vatican Council for the churches of the Reformation. He relates his experience as an assistant to

Edmund Schlink, an official Lutheran observer at the council, and the manner in which Schlink who

had previously been extremely cautious with respect to Roman Catholic ecumenism became more

optimistic. Thus Gassmann states, Schlink was for him:

> an impressive symbol of the recognition that the Council, and especially [*Unitatis Redintegratio*],
> addressed and challenged us Lutherans and Reformed in a way that required a response in the form

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[25] Gregory Baum, "Vatican II: The church and 'the others': Turning point of Catholic teaching," *The ecumenist* 36 (August-
September, 1999), p. 13.

both of a reconsideration of our own judgements and attitudes and of a renewal of our own theological thinking and ecclesiastical life.[26]

Unitatis Redintegratio, the Decree on Ecumenism,[27] was presented to the council by the newly formed Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU). It consisted of five chapters; the first three chapters became the final decree.

A. Christian Faith and Witness

Unitatis Redintegratio is not a conciliar constitution in the sense that *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* are, and thus does not express the same level of authority. Nonetheless, the decree constitutes a significant change in the Roman Catholic response to relations with groups outside of the church. When *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Lumen Gentium* were promulgated on November 21, 1964, Pope Paul VI "made the explicit point that the doctrine on the Church in *Lumen Gentium* was to be interpreted in the light of the further explanation given in the Decree on Ecumenism."[28] The most significant new insights are with respect to the validity of the Christian witness of those in other churches, the recognition of the Eastern Orthodox churches as "sister churches," the recognition of a "hierarchy of truths," and the decision to describe the church of Christ in *Lumen Gentium* as "subsisting in" the Roman Catholic Church.

Probably the most radical change that arose with respect to the ecclesial self-understanding of the Roman Catholic Church at the council was the recognition that:

> in some real way [non-Roman Catholic Christians] are joined to us in the Holy Spirit for, his sanctifying power is also active in them and he has strengthened some of them even to the shedding of their blood.[29]

The manner in which the council envisions being "joined in the Holy Spirit" is through baptism and profession of a common faith. Baptism is understood as the primary sacrament of initiation, through

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[26] Günther Gassmann, "The decree on ecumenism: The churches of the reformation," *One in Christ*, 26 (1990), p. 32.

[27] Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (decree on ecumenism, November 21, 1964) in *Vatican Council II: The conciliar and post-conciliar documents*, new rev. ed., Austin Flannery, ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992). All English language Vatican II documents will be cited from this source unless otherwise indicated. Latin texts are available in Tanner, *Decrees of the ecumenical councils*.

[28] Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., "*Subsistit In*: The significance of Vatican II's decision to say of the church of Christ not that it "is" but that it "subsists in" the Roman Catholic Church," *One in Christ*, 22 (1986), p. 117. The citation given is *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 56 (1964), pp. 1012-3.

[29] Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (dogmatic constitution on the Church, November 21, 1964), § 15.

which all are "born again in Christ." All other sacraments flow from baptism and strengthen our

relationship with Christ and the church. Since baptism is a sacrament celebrated in most Christian

churches,[30] the council is prepared to recognise that members of these churches belong to Christ's

mystical body through baptism, and are thus related to the Roman Catholic Church "in the Holy

Spirit."

> But baptism, of itself, is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed toward the
> acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. Baptism is thus ordained toward a complete profession of faith, a
> complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ himself willed it to be, and finally,
> toward a complete integration into eucharistic communion.[31]

The council is primarily interested in those Christians "who openly confess Jesus Christ as God

and Lord and as the only Mediator between God and man for the glory of the one God, the Father,

the Son and the Holy Spirit."[32] The council here identifies a bond of unity in the profession of a

Triune God and Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The bond of unity is found primarily with those

Christians who share this profession, and thus in a lesser degree with those who do not.

While this is a positive evaluation of the faith and witness of Christians outside of the juridical

boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church, it does not actually say anything about the churches, or

ecclesial communities, to which they belong. In this regard, *Lumen Gentium* suggests that:

> many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside [the Roman Catholic Church's] visible
> confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards
> Catholic unity.[33]

Thus, *Unitatis Redintegratio* teaches:

> In ways that vary according to the condition of each Church or Community, these liturgical actions
> most certainly can truly engender a life of grace, and, one must say, can aptly give access to the
> communion of salvation.[34]

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[30] It should be remembered that there are a few Christian communities, such as the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Salvation Army who celebrate no sacramental rites. As well, some churches that celebrate the rite do not consider it a sacrament, and sometimes use the term "ordinance" to describe the practice.

[31] *Unitatis Redintegratio*, § 22

[32] Ibid., § 20. This formula bears a close resemblance to the formulation of the basis of the World Council of Churches as it was revised at New Delhi in 1961.

[33] *Lumen Gentium*, § 8

[34] *Unitatis Redintegratio*, § 3

1.   The Church of Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church

There are a number of terms used by the council that indicate the perspective of the bishops with respect to the non-Roman Catholic churches. The term "separated brethren" is frequently used in the council documents to refer to those that are "properly baptised" but are not part of the visible communion of the Roman Catholic Church. While the term "separated brethren" is used to refer to individuals, the term "ecclesial communities" is used to refer to certain bodies that are not properly called "churches" from the Roman Catholic perspective.

> Implicit in the use of [the term "ecclesial communities"], and in the Decree, is the idea that the more a Church has of the essential structures of the Catholic Church, the more it approaches the ideal of the Church. On this institutional scale of measurement, some are more properly called Churches than others, and the Decree regards Eastern Churches as practically sister Churches of the Roman Catholic Church ... Another reason, of course, for the expression "ecclesial Communities" and the word "Communities" throughout the Decree is that some Christian bodies do not wish to be called "Church."[35]

Underlying the ecclesial recognition of non-Catholic churches is an understanding of the relation of the church of Christ to the Roman Catholic community. While the council was prepared to use the "institutional scale of measurement" described above, it serves to illustrate the more objectively oriented understanding that is found in the conciliar documents. The "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium*, expresses the understanding that:

> This Church [the true Church of Christ], constituted and organized as a society in the present world, *subsists in* the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards Catholic unity.[36]

Similarly, the "Declaration on Religious Freedom" uses the term "subsists" in an obvious re-phrasing of the Nicene Creed: "We believe that this one and only true religion subsists in the catholic and

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[35] Walter M. Abbott, S.J., footnote 45, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, in *The documents of Vatican II*, (Piscataway, NJ: America Press, 1962), p. 355.

[36] *Lumen Gentium*, § 8. Emphasis added. Latin text: "*Haec Ecclesia, in hoc mundo ut societas constituta et ordinata, subsistit in Ecclesia catholica, a successore Petri et Episcopis in eius communione gubernata, licet extra eius compaginem elementa plura sanctificationis et veritatis inveniantur, quae ut dona Ecclesiae Christi propria, ad unitatem catholicam impellunt.*" Some English translations have "catholic" in lowercase.

apostolic church."[37] Illustrative of the gulf yet to be bridged between the Roman Catholic Church and the "separated brethren" is a corresponding comment by an Anglican group of the "Catholic" school of thought:

> In our divided Christendom we do not believe that any existing institution or group of institutions gives a full and balanced representation of the true and primitive Catholicity. It is the recovery of that Catholicity that is our quest.[38]

It has been argued that the term "subsists in" leaves open the question of whether the Roman Catholic Church is exclusively the true Church of Christ. This is a very significant point, especially considering the fact that the original text prepared by the Commission used the Latin word "*est*" rather than "*subsistit in*," which in English would translate as "This Church ... is the Catholic Church..."[39]

The change in wording is extremely significant, not only for ecumenical dialogue, although here especially. The implication of the term "subsists" is that there are other churches which bear elements of the true Church of Christ, and while possessing an inner dynamism towards a universal unity, are nonetheless in their own right properly called "church." Thus, in *Unitatis Redintegratio* and elsewhere, the Orthodox churches are referred to as sister churches, and there has been a movement to extend this designation to the Anglican Communion as well.[40]

There has been some significant level of argument over this interpretation of the change from "*est*" to "*subsistit in*," particularly from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). Since the CDF is charged with safeguarding the doctrines of faith, it would not be overstating the case to say that the CDF is known for being conservative.

In *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, the CDF's 1973 declaration in defence of the Roman Catholic doctrines on the church, *Lumen Gentium* is translated as such:

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[37] Vatican II, *Dignitatis Humanae* (declaration on religious freedom, December 7, 1965), § 1, as found in Tanner, *Decrees of the ecumenical councils*.

[38] *Catholicity: A study in the conflict of Christian traditions in the West*, A report presented to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1947), pp. 9-10.

[39] "*Haec igitur Ecclesia, vera omnium Mater et Magistra, in hoc mundo ut societas constituta et ordinata, est Ecclesia catholica ...*" *Schema Constitutionis Dogmaticae de Ecclesia*, Pars I (Vatican: Polyglot Press, 1963), § 7, p. 11, lines 19-21.

[40] cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, § 14

> [This Church of Christ] set up and structured as a society in this world, *perdures* in the Catholic Church ...[41]

The term "perdures" has the sense of permanency and durability.[42] The Latin verb *subsisto* and its infinitive *subsistere* have a variety of meanings. The meaning that concerns us here is "to stand, withstand, sustain, support, or abide."[43] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "subsist" as "exist, continue to exist, remain in being, keep oneself alive, support life, be kept in life, find sustenance, or provide sustenance for."[44] In no way, does this term imply exclusivity. Nevertheless, only eleven years after the release of *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, the new Prefect of the CDF, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger could insist that the term:

> "*subsistit*" has the sense of substance, and ... as substance can be only one, the Church of Christ must therefore subsist in the Catholic Church alone.[45]

One should not have the impression that the Vatican curia is of one mind on this issue. On May 5, 1987, Cardinal Willebrands, then Prefect of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, presented a far different view in a speech to the National Workshop on Christian Unity in Atlanta, Georgia. In his speech, Willebrands recounts the council deliberations on the subject of the "*subsistit in*" in detail. According to Willebrands, the doctrinal commission expressed the following reasoning:

> Nineteen fathers propose that we should write "*subsistit* integrally" in the Catholic Church. Another 25 want to add "subsists by divine right." Again 13 others want *est* instead of *subsistit in*. One, however, proposes *consistit* instead of *subsistit*. Obviously there are two tendencies, one which would somewhat broaden the proposition, the other which would like to restrict it. For this reason the commission, after long discussion, chose *subsistit in*, a solution agreed upon by all present.[46]

Willebrands, while expressing a support for the broader interpretation of the *subsistit*, cautions that the council's whole ecclesiological understanding must be considered in the examination of this controversial phrase. The council's ecclesiological understanding, according to Willebrands, is based upon the special insight of *Mystici Corporis Christi*, that the church is the body of Christ. And thus:

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[41] CDF, *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, (instruction "in defense of the Catholic doctrine on the church," June 24, 1973), *The pope speaks*, 18 (1973), p. 146. Emphasis is added.

[42] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "perdures" as "to continue, to endure, to last on."

[43] *A Latin Dictionary*, Charlton T. Lewis & Charles Shortt, eds., (London: Oxford, 1890).

[44] *The concise Oxford dictionary of current English*, fourth edition, H.W. Fowler & F. G. Fowler, (London: Oxford, 1951).

[45] cf. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Liberation theology: From dialogue to confrontation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 85.

[46] Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, "Vatican II's ecclesiology of communion," *Origins* 17 (1987), p. 28.

We cannot fail to note that all this belongs in a "broadening" of Pope Pius XII's doctrine – which nevertheless is not rejected as a whole – thanks to a deeper grasp of the Pauline vision. A short phrase proposed by the German bishops and the Scandinavian episcopal conference gives the crux of the whole argument: "No one can be Christ's without belonging to the church." But the body of Christ is the church. The conclusion is that whoever belongs to Christ belongs to the church, and hence that the limits of the church are coextensive with those of belonging to Christ. This seems to me the dogmatic reflection behind the transition from *est* to *subsistit in* as it emerges from the council itself.[47]

An interesting support for the wider interpretation of the term "subsists in" is found in an examination of the use of the term "*subsistit in*" by St. Thomas Aquinas. A perusal of the *Index Thomisticus*[48] garners one thousand six hundred and fifty-five references to the root word "*subsisto*," with fifty-three of those references to the term "*subsistit in*." Of these, fifteen references are to Aquinas' main writings: *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In each of these fifteen cases the term "*subsistit in*" is used in the context of the Doctrine of the Incarnation, although sometimes in order to explain a related concept by analogy to the Incarnation.[49] Yet, in none of these fifteen references is the implication given that the term implies exclusivity. While, obviously, the Incarnation is a singular event in the history of salvation, that exclusivity is not a result of the subsistence of the human and the divine natures in Christ.

The interpretation of Vatican II's "*subsistit in*" solely by thomistic usage would involve applying an ahistorical approach to theology. One must be wary of such a pit-fall. However, while such a use of the term by Aquinas does not indicate that the council fathers necessarily understood the term in that specific sense, it is instructive to note that the expression "This Church ... subsists in the catholic Church [*sic*]" is found in the same paragraph which discusses the church as "the Body of Christ which comes together from a human and a divine element."[50] It is no mistake that incarnational terminology is used with reference to the church in the papal encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, and in other ecclesiological documents. We must presume that when a term such as "*subsistit*" is used in an

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[47] Ibid., p. 29

[48] *Index Thomisticus*, Roberto Busa, ed. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974-1980).

[49] *Summa Theologiae* I q.3 a.4; q.29 a.2; q.45 a.7; I-II q.4 a.5; III q.2 a.1; q.2 a.4 & a.5; q.3 a.6; q.16 a.6 & a.12; q.24 a.1; q.50 a.5. *Summa Contra Gentiles* Bk.4, Ch.11, n.12; Ch.35, n.1; Ch.37, n.10.

[50] *Lumen Gentium*, § 8.

ecclesiological context that it is to be interpreted in the context of the incarnational theology of *Mystici Corporis Christi.*

It could possibly be argued that an "incarnational" interpretation necessarily implies exclusivity, however such a judgement would be stretching the case. While there is a necessary "exclusivity" implied in the doctrine of the Incarnation, this exclusivity is only due to the singular occasion of the Incarnation. Thus, while Christians understand that there is only one Jesus of Nazareth, in whom is incarnated the divine and the human persons of the Christ, nonetheless, this exclusivity does not extend to the terminology that has been chosen to explain this mystery.

Edward Schillebeeckx, in his book *Church: the Human Story of God*, agrees in a minor way with Ratzinger, that the term "*subsistit in*" has the sense of substance, but nonetheless Schillebeeckx contends that it does not imply exclusivity.

> At all events ... it becomes clear that (in contrast to [Vatican] attempts subsequently to give the word "*substistere*" a heavily ontological significance) this word is used because of its suggestive power, in which the *sub* is not without its explosive significance: "*sistit sub....*" In other words, what the New Testament envisages with its biblical mystery of the church is present in the *Ecclesia Catholica* under all kinds of historical veils and distortions: the mystery is present, but...! It is also present elsewhere, in other churches, but...! In this formula the uncritical, almost exclusive, identification of the mystery of the church with the Catholic Church is put aside.[51]

The exclusivist interpretation that is given by Cardinal Ratzinger to the "subsists" in *Lumen Gentium* is inconsistent with the use of the term in *Unitatis Redintegratio* where the term is used with particular reference to the Anglican communion: "Among those in which catholic traditions and institutions continue to subsist, the Anglican communion occupies a special place."[52] It should be recalled that the council understands that churches contain elements of the true church of Christ insofar as they bear some resemblance to the Roman Catholic Church in liturgy and structure.

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[51] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The human story of God*, p. 193.

[52] *Unitatis Redintegratio*, § 13, as found in Tanner, *Decrees of the ecumenical councils.* This positive affirmation is frequently cited by those who wish to extend the designation "sister church" to Anglican churches. It does however seem to conflict with the judgement expressed in *Apostolicae Curae*.

2. Nostra Aetate and Dignitatis Humanae

Originally, the two declarations *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitatis Humanae* were chapters four and five of the conciliar draft document, *De Oecumenismo*, which became *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Both declarations are extremely significant in their own spheres, as each signalled a sharp change in the Roman Catholic Church's attitude towards their respective issues. *Nostra Aetate* is the "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," and *Dignitatis Humanae* is the "Declaration on Religious Freedom." The latter is probably more significant to inter-denominational Christian relations, however even *Nostra Aetate* has some level of influence on the ecumenical movement.

In *Nostra Aetate* is found the Roman Catholic Church's charter document on the relations of the church with non-Christians. With this document, the council fathers made clear that the Roman Catholic Church's teachings concerning other religions had changed. They taught that God's will extends to all people.

> All [people] form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26), and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all [people] (cf. Wis. 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:6-7; 1 Tim. 2:4) against the day when the elect are gathered together in the Holy City which is illumined by the glory of God, and in whose splendour all peoples will walk. (cf. Apoc. 21:23 ff.).[53]

The impact of *Nostra Aetate* on Roman Catholic relations with other Christian churches has been somewhat limited. Although the document focuses on relations with non-Christians, its relevance to inter-Christian dialogue is significant, however minimal. As the council extended positive remarks towards non-Christian groups, it encouraged local and international dialogue with these groups. However, this dialogue is to occur in co-operation with other Christian groups, so as not to give a divided witness of the Gospel. Over the thirty-five years since the council, it has been found that, in many inter-religious forums, Christian groups work together in a manner that supports and

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[53] Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the relationship of the church to non-Christian religions, October 28, 1965), § 1.

strengthens their existing partnership in faith. In addition to the positive effect that this has for inter-religious relations, it has an additional bounty for the inter-Christian ecumenical task.

Dignitatis Humanae expressed the Roman Catholic Church's commitment to the religious freedom of all, Christian and non-Christian.

> Freedom of this kind means that all [people] should be immune from coercion ... so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his own convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in associations with others.[54]

In the anthropology of Vatican II, the freedom of religious practice and expression is seen as rooted in the dignity of the human person. Human dignity is of primary importance because the person is created in the image and likeness of God. The person is called by God to a life of holiness, and is impelled by God's grace to respond to this call. Thus:

> the practice of religion of its very nature consists primarily of those voluntary and free internal acts by which a [person] directs himself [or herself] to God. Acts of this kind cannot be commanded or forbidden by any merely human authority.[55]

For the council, religious freedom exists not only in countries in which the Roman Catholic community is a minority, but also in those places where it is the established church. It was on the latter point in particular where the declaration made its mark. Prior to Vatican II, in countries where the Roman Catholic Church was the established or majority church – such as in Spain – other religious groups found themselves persecuted by both the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities, even in the twentieth century. Such persecution was found as well, although perhaps less extensively, in countries where another Christian church was the majority. For obvious reasons, then, the advent of religious freedom in Roman Catholic teaching encourages ecumenical relations.

3. "Hierarchy of Truths"

Unitatis Redintegratio also proposes another new concept that had not been expressed before. This is the concept, or notion, that there is a "hierarchy of truths." The church teaches many things, but these things are not all equally as significant in the history of salvation.

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[54] *Dignitatis Humanae*, § 2
[55] Ibid., § 3

> When comparing doctrines with one another, they [Catholic theologians] should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or "hierarchy" of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith.[56]

This term "hierarchy of truths" expresses a very new idea in Catholic theological teaching. Previously, in Roman Catholic theology there was no qualitative distinction between different doctrines. Any matter that was considered as dogmatic truth was given similar weighting in terms of the assent required from the faithful. However, at Vatican II, Archbishop Andrea Pangrazio introduced the concept of a hierarchy into the discussion. As the Joint Working Group reports, Pangrazio noted that:

> to arrive at a fair estimate of both the unity which now exists among Christians and the divergences which still remain, it seems very important to pay close attention to the hierarchical order of revealed truths which express the mystery of Christ and those elements which make up the church.[57]

Cardinal Franz König of Vienna proposed an amendment to the draft decree "*De Oecumenismo.*" In his written *modus*, König:

> emphasized that the truths of faith do not add up in a quantitative way, but that there is a qualitative order among them according to their respective relation to the centre or foundation of the Christian faith.[58]

Rather, it is clear that certain matters are dependent upon others for their truth. The *Sixth Report* of the Joint Working Group (JWG), in its study of the notion of a "hierarchy of truths" explains that:

> The notion of "hierarchy of truths" acknowledges that all revealed truths are related to, and can be articulated around the "foundation" – the "mystery of Christ" through which the love of God is manifested in the Holy Spirit.[59]

What is the foundation of Christian faith to which the council refers? According to the JWG, the council's deliberations point towards the foundation in the:

> person and mystery of Jesus Christ, true God and true human being... This foundation is normatively witnessed to by the prophets, apostles and the apostolic communities in the Old and New Testaments. In faithfulness to the original apostolic witness, it is confessed in the ecumenical creeds and handed on by the church through the ages.[60]

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[56] *Unitatis Redintegratio*, § 11
[57] Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (JWG), "The notion of 'hierarchy of truths': An ecumenical interpretation," appendix B of the *Sixth report* (Geneva-Rome: WCC Publications, 1990), § 7, p. 39.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., § 29, p. 43
[60] Ibid., § 22-23, p. 42

Thus, to elaborate on an example proposed by the JWG, the church teaches that Mary was conceived without original sin. This dogma is called the Immaculate Conception. It is quite evident that, whether or not this particular dogma is scripturally sound, it is far removed from the essentials of Christian faith. However, in the view of the Roman Catholic Church, this dogma does lend itself to a pious and reverent faith in the Incarnation of the Lord. It is in this way that this dogma can be understood in ecumenical dialogue, if we apply the concept of a hierarchy of truths. What does this say about the possibility of unity with those who do not explicitly profess this particular dogma?

The answer to the question is: there is no reason that the Roman Catholic Church cannot find some level of unity with churches and individuals who do not explicitly profess a faith in the Immaculate Conception. This is possible because the Immaculate Conception is not directly at the foundation of the Christian faith, but is only related to it in a hierarchical manner. However, greater difficulty would be found in reunion with those who implicitly reject such a dogma. Such dogmas, because of their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith, imply a certain attitude and perspective towards that faith. By implicitly, or explicitly, rejecting such a dogma, one implicitly rejects the associated perspective towards the foundations of the Christian faith.

A complementary manner of explaining the concept of a "hierarchy of truths" is by reference to the categories of *a priori* and *a posteriori* revealed truth. In Roman Catholic theology, it has long been recognised that the doctrine of infallibility rests upon the commissioning of the apostles, especially Peter, and the power of the keys given to them. Thus, apostolicity is an *a priori* element of Catholic faith, while infallibility is *a posteriori*. "For Protestants, the gospel has a more immediate link with the foundation than does the ministry which serves the gospel."[61] Thus, the gospel is – for many Protestants – the subject of a faith that is revealed *a priori*, while the ministry, which is to serve the gospel, is *a posteriori*.

It is clear that this concept of a "hierarchy of truths" can be extremely helpful to an ecumenical consideration of doctrinal controversies. The window is opened considerably wider than it was with

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[61] Ibid., § 35, p. 44. By "gospel" is meant the content of the Christian message, rather than the texts of the four Gospels.

the encyclical *Mortalium Animos* or the instruction *Ecclesia Catholica*. Its usefulness in ecumenical

dialogues will depend, of course, on the extent to which it becomes a meaningful part of the theology

of both Roman Catholics and of their dialogue partners.

4. Assessing the Reform

Various commentators have remarked that the Second Vatican Council was the end of the

counter-Reformation, the adoption of the Reformation by the Catholic world, or the surrender of the

Catholic world to the forces of history. Whether one's assessment is positive or negative, the question

still arises regarding the stark contrast between the positions of the two Vatican councils. How is it

possible that in a little less than ninety-five years, the Catholic Church could take such an abrupt

change of direction? Are the documents of Vatican II consistent with the tradition which they claim

to represent?

In his recent article, to which we have already referred, Gregory Baum discusses this apparent

contradiction, and tries to give it a sociological and theological explanation. He asserts that "Apart

from a few prophets, Christians – including ourselves – are caught in their age."[62] In the last years of

the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, the world changed considerably

> when society became marked by religious pluralism, and when liberal ideas critical of imperialism,
> domination and social inequality acquired cultural power... What, in the Spirit, should be their
> relation to 'the others' and the 'outsiders'? This was a topic on which Christians living in earlier
> periods had not reflected. Now the answer to this question became the testing stone of the Gospel.[63]

III. Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Ecumenism

The vision of the ecumenical movement is found in Jesus' high priestly prayer "that they all may

be one." However, in recent years, reflection by ecumenists upon this prayer has led to a greater

appreciation for its context:

> that they all may be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, that the
> world may believe that you have sent me. (Jn 17:21)

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[62] Baum, "Vatican II," p. 16
[63] Ibid.

The understanding of Christian unity expressed in this text is essentially trinitarian and evangelical. Firstly, it expresses a trinitarian understanding of Christian unity in the connection it makes with the "unicity" of the three persons of the Trinity. Christians are called to a unity that reflects that of the Trinity, insofar as this is possible for humanity. Secondly, it is evangelical in the sense that it is ultimately so that the world might believe and know Jesus that all Christians must be able to live in unity. This realisation is not wholly new, it has long been understood that Christian unity serves the evangelical mandate of Christians expressed in the final verses of Matthew's gospel.

The term *koinonia* is used in the New Testament to refer to the community of the people of God. Although found in the New Testament, and recognisable in Vatican II texts and other theological works, it is only in the last ten years that the ecumenical emphasis on *koinonia* has become conspicuous. In the ecclesiology of communion, the accent is upon the communion or *koinonia* of the Christian community rather than the hierarchical and juridical accents of other ecclesiologies.

The English terms "communion" and "community" come from the Latin: "*communio,*" which in turn comes from the Greek: "*koinonia."* Used in the New Testament in reference to the early Christian community,[64] the term has since become identified with the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. Though the term is not found explicitly in the four Gospels, the concept is found implicitly throughout the Gospels and the epistles. In the first letter of John, the term is used "to signify in one word the simultaneous union of Christians with the Father and the Son and among themselves."[65] Thus, the ecclesiology of communion or "*koinonia* ecclesiology" in its simplest form describes the nature of the Christian community as it is, and as it is becoming, in terms of the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The early Christian community is described in Acts 2:42-47 as a community that devoted itself to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship (*koinonia*). It expresses this fellowship in its service to the poor, and by distributing their possessions throughout the community.

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[64] cf. Acts 2:42; I Cor. 1:9, 10:16; II Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1; I Jn 1:3, 1:6-7.
[65] J.-M.R. Tillard, "*Koinonia,*" in *Dictionary of the ecumenical movement,* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), p. 570, also cf. 1 Jn. 1:3, 6-7.

The bond of unity is the common sharing of the sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist. The communities that share the Eucharist together signify by this fact, that they are truly one. As Christ willed that we may all be one,[66] so too, did He desire that we share in His body.[67]

As we have seen, for Catholics, ecclesiology is heavily influenced by eucharistic theology. There is but one Body of Christ, one Eucharist, and thus there is one church. This church is truly the Body of Christ, and all that are part of the Body of Christ are part of the church. By the common bond of baptism, the baptised are all made one in the Body of Christ, and by sharing the Eucharist, the bond of unity is strengthened.

Pope John Paul II, in an address to a Coptic Orthodox delegation, raises an important concern in our examination of this vision of unity:

> It is fundamental for this dialogue to recognise that the richness of this unity in faith and spiritual life must be expressed in the diversity of forms. Unity – whether on the universal level or at the local level – does not signify uniformity or the absorption of one group by the other. It is rather at the service of all groups, to help each one to give better expression to the gifts which it has received from the Spirit of God.[68]

A. Sacramental Sharing

In accordance with a request of the bishops at Second Vatican Council, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) issued a two-part "Ecumenical Directory" in 1967 and 1970.[69] The first part of the directory gives guidelines for Roman Catholic participation in the ecumenical movement and the second part for Roman Catholic ecumenism in higher education.

The directory moved further than the instruction *Ecclesia Catholica* in allowing for wider "*communicatio in spiritualibus*," and for limited "*communicatio in sacris*."[70] While *Ecclesia Catholica* had

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[66] cf. Jn. 17:21; Eph. 4:1-6

[67] cf. Mt. 26:20-30; Mk. 14:17-26; Lk. 22:14-23; Jn. 13:21-30

[68] Pope John Paul II to the Coptic delegation (June 22, 1979), *Irénikon* 52 (1979), p. 377, as cited in Yves Congar, O.P., *Diversity and communion* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985), p. 33.

[69] Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, "Ecumenical Directory, Part I" (*Ad totam Ecclesiam*, May 14, 1967) and "Ecumenical Directory, Part II" (*Spiritus Domini*, April 16, 1970) in Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The conciliar and post-conciliar documents*. Also in *Documents on the liturgy: 1963-1979: conciliar, papal, and curial texts*, International Commission on English in the Liturgy, ed., (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982), § 38, p. 325.

[70] "The term, sharing of spiritual activity and resources (*communicatio in spiritualibus*) is used to cover all prayer offered in common, common use of sacred places and objects, as well as all sharing in liturgical worship (*communicatio in sacris*) in the strict sense ... There is *communicatio in sacris* when anyone takes part in the liturgical worship or in the sacraments of another church or ecclesial community," in "Ecumenical Directory, Part I," § 29-30.

allowed only for the common recitation of the Lord's Prayer, or another prayer that is common to the traditions of the participants, the directory allows for limited liturgical worship in common with non-Roman Catholics; for extraordinary cases of eucharistic hospitality in Roman Catholic parishes and chaplaincies; and in extremely rare cases, for Catholic participation in the sacraments of another church or ecclesial community.

While the directory did not envision regular sacramental sharing, it is aware of the pastoral necessity of receiving the sacraments in cases in which there is a "physical and moral impossibility of receiving the sacraments in a person's own Church for an extended period."[71] Thus, the directory authorises limited sacramental sharing between Roman Catholics and Orthodox, on the condition that the celebrant of the liturgy is consulted prior to the liturgy. In many cases, this will involve requesting authorisation from the local bishop of the respective church as well.

With respect to individuals belonging to the non-Roman Catholic churches of the West, the directory allows the reception of the sacraments of the Eucharist, reconciliation (penance), and anointing of the sick in those cases where there is:

> danger of death or in a case of pressing need (in persecution, in prisons), if such persons do not have access to a minister of their own Communion and if they voluntarily ask for the sacraments from a Catholic priest. The only conditions are some sign of a belief in these sacraments *consonant with the faith of the Church* and the individual's own right dispositions.[72]

The directory does not make allowances for the reception of the sacraments by Catholics when visiting churches other than the Orthodox or those churches with valid episcopal orders.

The Vatican has the perception that non-Roman Catholic churches of the West have accomplished ecumenical rapprochement on thin, or non-existent, theological grounds. Roman Catholic hierarchy display this discomfort in their concern regarding the "full communion"[73] agreements between various Anglican provinces and the respective Lutheran churches in Scandinavia,

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[71] Ibid., § 44

[72] Ibid., § 55. Emphasis added.

[73] The term *full communion* is used here in the sense used by the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission at Lund in 1952: "Full communion ... [is] when Churches in doctrinal agreement, or of the same confessional family, allow communicant members freely to communicate at the altars of each, and where there is freedom of ministers to officiate sacramentally in either Church (i.e. Intercelebration)." Quoted from G. K. A. Bell, ed., *Documents on Christian Unity*, fourth Series, 1948–57, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 230.

the Baltic states, Germany, Britain, Canada and the U.S.[74] The concern of the Vatican with respect to "eucharistic sharing" is found expressed in *Unitatis Redintegratio*:

> Yet worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*) is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of unity among Christians. There are two principles upon which the practice of such common worship depends: first, that of the unity of the Church which ought to be expressed; and second, that of the sharing in the means of grace. The expression of unity very generally forbids common worship. Grace to be obtained sometimes commends it.[75]

As a result of the Second Vatican Council's opening of the doors to ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the various other churches and ecclesial communities, a noticeable sense of ecumenical optimism swept the churches. This sense of optimism led to a certain relaxation, in some quarters, of what had previously been considered immovable barriers. From the perspective of the Vatican, widespread excesses in eucharistic sharing resulted from this ecumenical optimism. Some of the "ecumenical excesses" that concern the Vatican include eucharistic sharing and the unflattering comparison of Roman Catholic structures and practices to their Protestant equivalents. It should be noted, however, that there is little indication that eucharistic sharing was ever as widespread as the Vatican thought it was.

The application of the 1967 directory mitigated, to some extent, the "excesses" that had concerned the Vatican. In 1993, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity issued a revised directory entitled "Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism." The 1993 directory was issued in order to incorporate the minor changes that are found in the 1983 "Code of Canon Law" and the 1990 "Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches." These two codes and the 1993 directory provide a more developed treatment of many of the issues within their scope. However, their perspective on the status of other Christian churches does not reach beyond that of the Second Vatican Council and the 1967 directory. The new directory clarifies the distinction between

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[74] These agreements generally follow the Porvoo model. The Roman Catholic hierarchy is quietly critical of the Anglican willingness to license clergy from Lutheran churches which have not maintained the historic episcopate.

[75] *Unitatis Redintegratio*, § 8. Also "Ecumenical Directory, Part I," § 38. The ICEL translation of the directory is somewhat helpful: "*Communicatio in sacris* may not be regarded as a means to be used indiscriminately toward restoring Christian unity. Such sharing is dependent mainly on two principles: the unity of the Church, of which it is a sign, and the sharing in the means of grace. Its function as sign often rules out *communicatio in sacris*; its being a source of grace sometimes favours it." *Documents on the liturgy*, § 38, p. 325.

eucharistic sharing and admission to eucharistic communion within a Catholic church. Within the context of the directory, eucharistic sharing is the broader term that encompasses both "admission to eucharistic communion within a Catholic church" and the reception of the sacrament in another Christian church. The term "eucharistic hospitality" is not found in the directory, but has come to be used in recent literature to refer to welcoming visitors to eucharistic communion.

The 1993 directory does include one significant development over the 1967 edition. The inclusion of a section on mixed marriages offers encouragement for a more pastoral response to mixed marriages. The directory does not seem to extend the provisions on eucharistic sharing or hospitality. However, it presumes that these will occur and requests that the bishops establish diocesan norms for eucharistic sharing in consultation with mixed marriage couples and their respective churches.

There has been extensive discussion in recent years regarding the pastoral application of the ecumenical directory to mixed marriages. The development of associations of "inter-church families" in Europe over thirty years ago, and the extension of these associations world-wide more recently, has provided a constructive contribution to the church's consideration of these matters. Roman Catholics come to mixed marriage with the presumption that families will worship together.[76] This places strain on mixed marriage couples. Inter-church families are couples that worship together in both of the churches involved. By refusing to choose a single church for their family worship, these couples provide a witness to Christian unity within their own homes.

These inter-church families ask the churches to support their efforts to live their ecumenical vocation. This normally involves providing opportunities for cross-registration of baptisms, active participation by spouses within each other's churches, and sharing of the Eucharist. As a basic necessity, it involves the co-operation of the clergy from either church in the pastoral care of the family. In many cases these opportunities are not available. Nevertheless, where they are available, the families become a bridge between the churches that contributes to the growth in dialogue and leads to further ecumenical riches.

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[76] Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the application of principles and norms on ecumenism*, (Vatican: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1993), § 144.

A particular contribution of these families has been a reflection on the meaning of the "domestic church." The domestic church is the family, the most localised expression of Christian community. Families are formed in marriage, which in catholic theology is understood to be sacramental. The sacrament effects a unity of the two individual persons who share the vows. Many of these couples ask quite insightfully how it is conceivable that denominational division can divide what God has joined in marriage.[77]

1. Orientale Lumen & Ut Unum Sint

In the years following *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union, tensions between the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Eastern Catholic churches has increased. The religious freedoms that were restored in these years allowed the Eastern Catholic churches to come out from the underground. Church buildings confiscated by the state were restored to their original owners, even though this has resulted in the eviction of Orthodox parishes. The arrival of numerous western churches, particularly those of Evangelical and Pentecostal origin, has increased these tensions. The evangelisation efforts of the Eastern Catholic and Polish Catholic communities in Russia, the Ukraine, and Byelorussia have led to charges of proselytism. As a result the Orthodox – Catholic dialogue has been forced to change its agenda and deal with issues of ecclesiastical diplomacy and territorial defensiveness.

In 1993 the Orthodox – Catholic dialogue discussed the subject of the Eastern Catholic churches for the first time. This in itself was a departure from the agenda followed since the dialogue began in the 1960's. The subject of uniatism had earlier been deliberately avoided, now it became a priority. The Balamand statement – referred to earlier – was an attempt to establish a minimal consensus on the status of these churches. The agreement affirms the right of the Eastern Catholic churches to exist and govern themselves, while at the same time condemning uniatism as a form of proselytism. The Roman Catholic Church committed itself to refrain from developing similar churches in the future. The

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[77] The Association of Inter-Church Families maintains a journal in which papers, presentations and documents relevant to inter-church families are published. In addition, an extremely active internet discussion list called AIFW carries on a daily reflection on these issues and others of ecumenical significance. Much of this reflection is private and un-published.

agreement further affirms that the natural home for these churches is within the Orthodox community, and that the process of uniatism is a sin against the unity of the church.[78]

In the spirit of the Balamand statement, Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic letter in May 1995 that affirms the apostolic tradition of the eastern churches. "Indeed, in comparison to any other culture, the Christian East has a unique and privileged role as the original setting where the church was born."[79] He calls the western churches to a greater appreciation of the spiritual and theological patrimony of the East. This letter, entitled *Orientale Lumen*, was issued on the centenary of Leo XIII's similar letter *Orientale Dignitas* that called the church to a greater appreciation of the eastern patristic tradition. However, John Paul II's letter is far more appreciative of the eastern churches, following the example of Vatican II by using the term "sister" to describe the eastern churches.

> Conversion is ... required of the Latin church, that she may respect and fully appreciate the dignity of Eastern Christians and accept gratefully the spiritual treasures ... that she may show concretely ... how essential she considers its contribution to the full realization of the church's universality.[80]

John Paul II appears to relativise the claims of the Roman Catholic Church in *Orientale Lumen*. He states that "it appears that true union is possible only in total respect for the other's dignity, without claiming that the whole array of uses and customs in the Latin church is more complete or better suited to showing the fullness of correct doctrine."[81] The context for these comments however, suggest that he only intended these sentiments with respect to the eastern churches. In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* issued later in the same month, John Paul II states as clearly as can be found his interpretation of the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the eastern churches. He understands the council to have stressed "their ecclesial nature and the real bonds of communion linking them with the Catholic Church."[82]

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[78] Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (Balamand, Lebanon, 1993), *Origins* 23 (1993), pp. 166-69.

[79] John Paul II, *Orientale Lumen* (apostolic letter on the churches of the East, May 2, 1995), *Origins* 25 (1995), § 5.

[80] Ibid., § 21

[81] Ibid., § 20

[82] John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (encyclical on commitment to ecumenism, May 25, 1995), *Origins* 25 (1995), § 50.

In *Orientale Lumen* he identifies monasticism as the heart of the eastern spiritual patrimony. In the contributions of the monastics to the church, and in the common experience of martyrdom throughout history, the churches of east and west are united in a real though imperfect communion.

> This is articulated in the historical and cultural patrimony of each church, shaped by the witness of the martyrs, fathers and saints, as well as by the living faith of all Christians down the centuries to our own day. It is ... a heritage which preserves its original, living kerygmatic core.[83]

John Paul II offers an important insight regarding the experience of dialogue and the search for true unity. He insists that any potential union "must be preceded by an awareness of communion that permeates the whole church and is not limited to an agreement among leaders."[84] This is a point that he will return to in *Ut Unum Sint*. In his encyclical, he affirms the commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement, wherever that may lead us. Ecumenism is not an appendix added to traditional church activity, but rather is "an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does."[85]

In the spirit of examining all that the church is and does in the light of its commitment to ecumenism, the pope invites other churches to explore with him the ways in which the petrine ministry has been exercised, and ways in which it might be exercised to more effectively serve as an instrument of unity.

> Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us persuade church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which ... we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ for his church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea "that they may be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:21)?[86]

If we recall the assertions of Trent and Vatican I regarding the importance of union with the Roman see, this invitation will seem somewhat startling. However, in the context of the movements initiated by Vatican II, and the dialogue results of recent years, this invitation was most timely. Nevertheless, John Paul II is not backing off from the priority of the Roman see. In a long discourse that precedes

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[83] *Orientale Lumen.*, § 8
[84] Ibid., § 20
[85] *Ut Unum Sint*, § 20.
[86] Ibid., § 96

the invitation to other church leaders he asserts what he understands to be the essential character of the petrine ministry, namely to be a minister of unity. Immediately following the invitation, the following assertion is made:

> The Catholic Church, both in her praxis and in her solemn documents, holds that the communion of the particular churches with the church of Rome, and of their bishops with the bishop of Rome, is – in God's plan – an essential requisite of full and visible communion.[87]

If this seems disappointing, it should be noted that he does not insist on "submission" to the bishop of Rome as at Vatican I. In fact, he makes the intriguing reference to the role of Peter at the council in Jerusalem as described in the Acts of the Apostles. He describes Peter as the spokesperson for the apostolic group, and the one who serves the unity of the community, all while respecting the authority of James, "the head of the church in Jerusalem."[88] Is this a hint of the role he foresees for future Popes?

IV. Conclusion

In some quarters, where there had been a strong ecumenical enthusiasm in the years following the council, in the early 1980's there developed a partial backlash, as the enthusiasm did not result in tangible results. On the part of Roman Catholics, there has been a partial return to traditional attitudes regarding non-Catholics, and on the part of non-Roman Catholics, there has been a sense of disappointment, and rejection. Ecumenists from churches that were involved in the ecumenical movement prior to Vatican II allowed their hopes for ecumenical rapprochement with Roman Catholics to be awakened, only to have their hopes left unfulfilled, or in some cases actually rejected. While the situation today is a far sight better than it was before the Second Vatican Council, the pace of dialogue is seen as disappointing by many who have a passion for Christian unity.

Someone coined the term "ecumenical winter" to describe the ecumenical forecast in the early 1980's. It is certainly clear that there has been a noticeable cooling of ecumenical enthusiasm, and not only on the Vatican's part. The Anglican Primate of Canada, Archbishop Michael Peers, has pointed

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[87] Ibid., § 97
[88] Ibid.

out however that every winter ends eventually, and that when the spring comes there is new growth that would not have been possible without the winter. Christians must look to the future with hope, and look to the present with a commitment to work to bring about an "ecumenical springtime."[89] The "ecumenical springtime" is to be found – I would suggest – in the emerging ecclesiology of communion, or *koinonia* ecclesiology.

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[89] Comments made at an open forum entitled "Episcopal reflections on Christian unity" with Archbishop Michael Peers (primate of the Anglican Church of Canada), Archbishop Antoine Hacault (Roman Catholic archbishop of St. Boniface), and Bishop Donald Sjoberg (presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada), January 22, 1992 at St. John's College, The University of Manitoba.

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