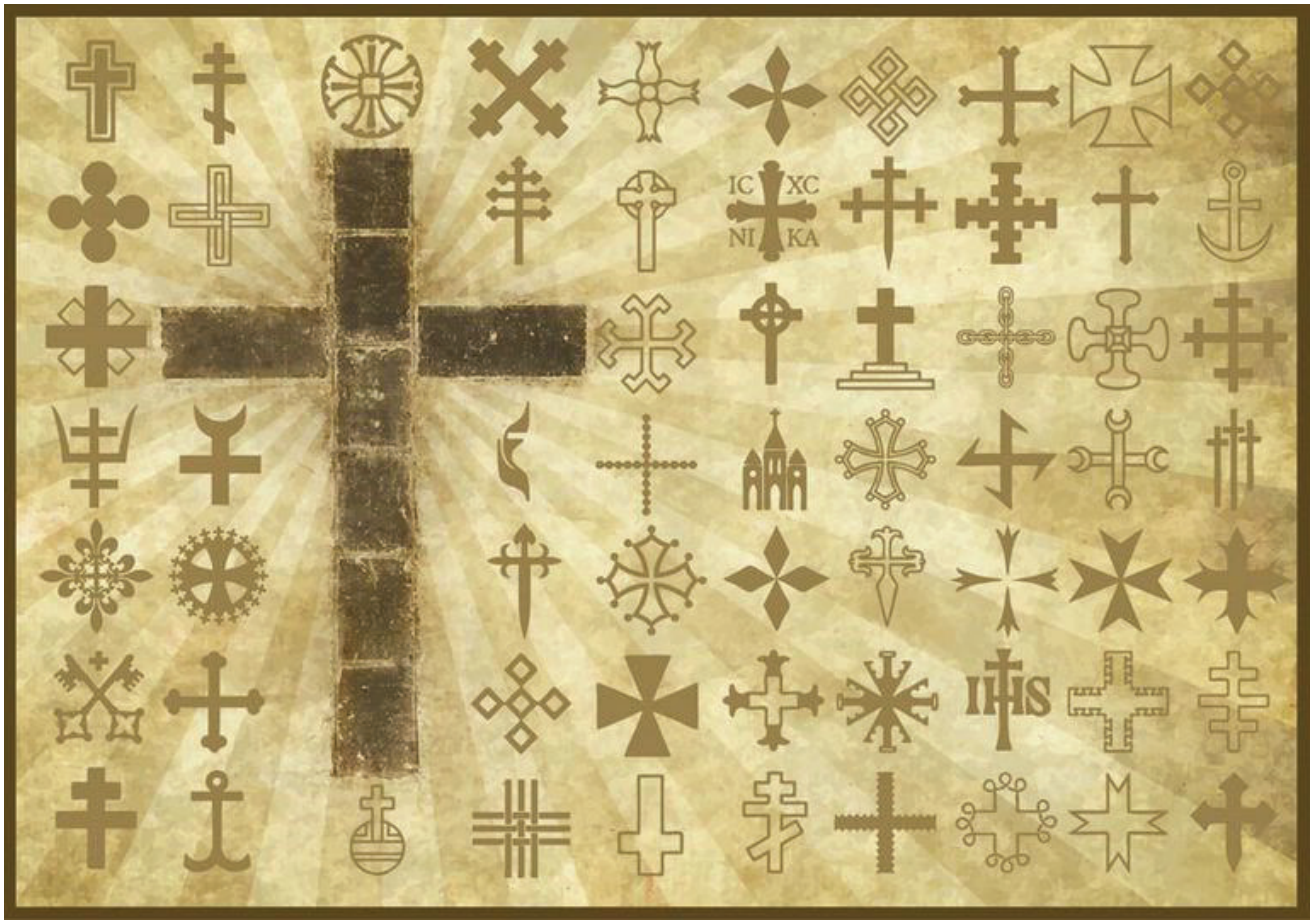
THE RENEWAL OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

by ERIK JOHNSON



Introduction

It is common to hear that we are in a season of ecumenical winter[1]. For those who have not been checking the ecumenical "weather", the last century, particularly in the latter half, saw an unprecedented amount of movement towards Christian unity. However, now we seem to be in a rather stagnant place, with no major theological or structural (ecclesial) breakthroughs around the corner. While referencing briefly a few of the major steps taken thus far, I aim to mainly review the reasons why we as Christians ought to seek unity, the guiding principles of the ecumenical movement, and then consider what further steps, even if seemingly small, we can reasonable take together.

Why the Impetus?

Why should we as Christians spend valuable time and effort thinking or working for Christian unity? There are at least four reasons.

First and foremost, it is God's desire and at the center of the heart of Jesus. In praying to the Father before His betrayal, Jesus distinctly prays that the perfect fellowship of the Trinity, to which he would be redeeming us, would be reflected in our unity and love for each other.

> As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.[2]

Moreover, in teaching his disciples, Jesus said,

> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all

[1] Michael Root, *Ecumenical Winter? The Ecumenical Movement Has Stopped Moving,* First Things 2018,
Adelle M. Banks, *U.S. Christians Hope For An 'Ecumenical Spring'*, The Washington Post, 2012

[2] John 17:20-23

> men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.[3]

Secondly, St. Paul demands it:

> I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought… Is Christ divided?
>
> I… beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.[4]

Third, our desire for the peace and salvation of the world should make us repent of our antagonisms and pride (past and present) and pursue a common witness, visibly as the undivided body of Christ. Arguably, the primary cause of skepticism and contempt towards religion in western civilization is not, nor was it ever, incompatibilities between science and faith, but rather the wars and polemics we waged against each other, and the hate and indifference we refused to let go of.[5] In acknowledgment of how our disunity harms our witness, participants of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together initiative (ECT)[6] repeated the words of the Amsterdam 2000 Evangelical Conference and those of Pope John Paul II.

> One of the great hindrances to evangelism worldwide is the lack of unity among Christ's people, a condition made worse when Christians compete and fight with one another rather than seeking together the mind of Christ … In all ways that do not violate our consciences, we should pursue cooperation and partnerships with other believers in the task of evangelism, practicing the well tested rule of Christian fellowship: "In necessary things unity, in nonessential things liberty, in all things charity." We pledge ourselves to pray and work for unity in truth among all true believers in Jesus and to cooperate as fully as possible in evangelism with other brothers and sisters in Christ so that the whole Church may take the whole gospel to the whole world. (Amsterdam 2000)
>
> The relationship between activity aimed at Christian unity and missionary activity makes it necessary to consider two closely associated factors … We must recognize that the division among Christians damages the holy work of preaching the gospel to every creature and is a barrier for many in their approach to the faith. The fact that the good news of reconciliation is preached by Christians who are divided among themselves weakens their witness. It is thus urgent to work for the unity of Christians, so that missionary activity can be more effective. At the same time, we must not forget that efforts toward unity are themselves a sign of the work of reconciliation which God is bringing about in our midst. (Encyclical Redemptoris Missio: The Mission of the Redeemer)

Similarly, Pope Francis in his opening address to the World Council of Churches during its 70th anniversary meeting, stated that "our lack of unity was openly contrary to the will of Christ, but is also a scandal to the world and harms the most holy of causes: the preaching of the Gospel to every creature."[7]

Finally, it is an inherent part of the Good News of the Kingdom of God that we as a people called by God from the nations are united and "catholic". By showing indifference or encouraging division we are not embracing the totality of the gospel of God. Peter Kreeft, a professor of philosophy at Boston College, states:

> Ecumenical reunion is like the "social gospel", the creeds, baptism, or ministering to the poor: it is an ineradicable part of the whole Gospel. It is not the whole of the Gospel, and it is not the very center of it, but it is not an addition to it either.[8]

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[3] John 13:34-35

[4] 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, Ephesians 4:1-6

[5] See Peter Kreeft, *Catholics and Protestants, What Can We Learn from Each Other,* 74. When I visited Prague recently, I learned that the Czech people have had a general skepticism towards religion ever since the Battle of White Mountain in 1620 at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War.

[6] *The Communion of Saints,* March 2003, FirstThings. Importantly, in their first issue, *The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,* FirstThings, May 1994, they outlined their place in the ecumenical movement: "ECT is an unofficial initiative. We speak from and to the communities of which we are part, but we do not presume to speak for them. We wholeheartedly support the several official theological dialogues between Evangelicals and Catholics. ECT is an ancillary initiative, serving as a kind of advance scouting party to explore possibilities, and, as such, has received much appreciated encouragement from many sources, both Evangelical and Catholic."

[7] Catholic Voices Comment, *Pope proposes a "new ecumenical spring" at the World Council of Churches,* June 2018

[8] Peter Kreeft, *Catholics and Protestants, What Can We Learn from Each*

Further, Pope John Paul II in his encyclical on Ecumenism states:

> This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ's mission. Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community. God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his agape.[9]

In this regard, without considering Christian unity, Protestants are missing part of the Gospel. For Catholics, Vatican II made it clear that "In a state of division she [the Catholic Church] cannot realize fully her own catholicity."[10]

"Unity or reunion cannot be our end; God must be our end."

Guiding Principles

Before considering where the ecumenical movement may produce further fruit and reconciliation, it is important to appreciate and take heed of the main, proven, guiding principles of the ecumenical movement.

1. Repentance

Within the 2nd paragraph of the first document released by the ECT initiative, it was written, "We together, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples." In the Vatican II decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio,* the Catholic Church made it clear that "people of both sides were to blame". Ecumenical dialogue has often started with repentance for past injustices and abuses, perpetrated by both sides.[11] One particular example I find fascinating is in 2015, when Christians representing nearly every type met in Albania (where my wife is from) to discuss the persecution of Christians around the globe and without planning, the conference quickly turned into a time of repentance for our persecution of each other.[12]

2. Truth

Unity or reunion cannot be our end; God must be our end. As such we cannot ignore truth. For this purpose the guiding pillars of the ecumenical movement have rightfully been a dialogue of truth and a dialogue of love. The ECT initiative thus made this point:

> In our continuing discussions, we seek no unity other than unity in the truth. Only unity in the truth can be pleasing to the Lord and Savior whom we together serve, for he is "the way, the truth, and the life.[13]

The Vatican II documents are "clear and unequivocal in their rejection of the irenicism and relativism which reduce everything to banality."[14] Though there should be a great desire to be visibly one, we must of course be wary of excessive toleration and accommodation of heretical beliefs.

3. Brothers and Sisters

In their first writing, ECT asserted:

> All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He has chosen us, and he has chosen us to be his together. However imperfect our communion with one another, however deep our disagreements with one another, we recognize that there is but one church of Christ. There is one church because there is one Christ and the church is his body.[15]

Vatican II made a decisive step towards ecumenism in stating that the *One* Church "*subsists in"* the Catholic Church, replacing the previous formula 'est'. That is, rather than the fullness of the Church being equated with only the Catholic Church, "the one Church of Jesus Christ is concretely real and present in the Roman Catholic Church, and on the other hand, many essential elements of the Church of Jesus Christ can be found outside the institution-

Other, 27

[9] *Ut Unum Sint*, 9

[10] *Unitatis Redintegratio,* 4

[11] For more examples see Gros, Meyer, and Rusch, *Growth in Agreement II, 782-95.* See also *Lumen Gentium* 8*, Unitatis Redintegratio* 3, 6, *Ut Unum Sint 34, 83.*

[12] Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, *The Biggest Apology for Christian Persecution of Other Christians Ever,* Christianity Today, 2015

[13] *The Gift Of Salvation*, FirstThings, January 1998

[14] Cardinal Walter Kasper, Former President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Decree on Ecumenism – Read Anew After Forty Years.* See also *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 5, 11, 24; Ut Unum Sint, 18, 36, 79

[15] *The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium, FirstThings,* May 1994

A Christian Ecumenical Conference in Sweden

al boundaries of the Catholic Church."[16] The Council further stated that:

> The children who are born into these [Reformation] Communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection. For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect…. It follows that the separated Churches and Communities as such, though we believe them to be deficient in some respects, have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church.[17]

Similarly, from a Protestant perspective, I have seen a general change in attitude towards Catholics from one which was skeptical of them being true Christians, to that of appreciating and valuing the many rich spiritual, intellectual and ministry traditions that have been developed within the Catholic Church, along with of course the many Catholic Christians themselves.

4. An Exchange of Gifts

Much more than trying to sort out a puzzle of ideas, traditions and definitions, the ecumenical movement is an exchange of Spiritual gifts between the churches.

> Each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase.[18]

We should look at each other's spiritual gifts (e.g. spiritual and intellectual traditions, preaching, ministry to the poor and marginalized, worship, etc.) with appreciation and encouragement, recognizing where we can learn from each other, and work together; collectively spurring us onto greater unity.

5. Conversion to Christ

Rather than all converting to the Catholic Church, or leaving the Catholic Church, all need to be converted ever more fully to Jesus Christ. There can be no ecumenism without personal conversion. "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."[19] Prior to Vatican II, Catholic ecumenism had aimed at persuading non-Catholic Christians that their separation was schismatic, and that they must return to the unity they had broken—a so-called "ecumenism of return." (Many Protestants would have similarly argued that Catholics should simply join them.) With the adamant recognition of our definite brotherhood in Christ, we can now aim at together being converted to Jesus and letting the Spirit guide us towards a transformed and renewed Church that is recognizably catholic.

> Unity in the sense of full *communio* does not mean uniformity but unity in diversity and diversity in unity. Within the one church there is a legitimate multiplicity of mentalities, customs, rites, canonical orders, theologies and spiritualities…The consequence of this distinction is that the aim of ecumenism is not directed towards amalgamation but has as its goal a communio which does not mean either reciprocal absorption or fusion.[20]

Practically, this means that we must aim to find legitimate, complementary understandings of concepts in place of contradictory ones.[21] This certainly does

[16] Cardinal Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today*, 65-66. See also Lumen Gentium 8, 15, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3, 14

[17] *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3; see also *Ut Unum Sint* 10-14

[18] *Lumen Gentium,* 13, see also *Ut Unum Sint*, 28, 57, Cardinal Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today*, 67

[19] *Unitatis Redintegratio* 5-8; *Ut Unum Sint,* 15-18, 83

[20] Card. Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Decree on Ecumenism – Read Anew After Forty Years*. See also *Lumen Gentium*, 13; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4; 16

[21] Walter Kasper, *That they all May be One, The Call to Unity Today*, 67-68. See also Peter Kreeft, *Catholics and Protestants, What Can We Learn from Each Other*, 87. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has similarly stat-

not mean that any and all theological understandings can be correct. One type of precedence already within the Catholic Church for unity within diversity is the various movements, schools and orders found therein. A second example is the growing appreciation for the eastern (Orthodox) theological traditions, being both compatible in the essentials but varied in some of their matters of emphasis.

6. Visible Unity

We must not settle for obtaining a stronger spiritual unity, though that certainly should be a desire. We must insist on visible unity, where Christ's one body is truly united across the world. As a vivid imagery underscoring his hope and prayer that the 3rd Christian millennium would be that of Christian reunion, Pope John Paull II frequently expressed that "the Church must breathe with her two lungs!" (referencing Eastern and Western Christianity)... realizing a vision "of unity in legitimate diversity"[22]

7. The Spirit

This movement is "fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit"[23]. "Unity is not a manufactured article, not a human product, but a gift from God" and "it is our task to allow the Spirit full freedom of action."[24] As a work of the Spirit, our participation demands our prayers, for prayer is the heart of the ecumenical movement and "the oxygen of ecumenism." [25]

How Far Have We Come on Our Path to Unity?

Those guiding principles alone would have been unfathomable to most 70 years ago.[26] Sadly, those principles, the recent sincere and fruitful dialogue (filling over 2000 pages[27]), and mutual affirmations mentioned in this article are still a surprise to many, including myself when I first started investigating the matter about a year or so ago (notably after I had been through most of college)[28]. I am not looking to criticize, but I find it sadly shocking that I heard very little, if any mention, of these things from my Baptist church back home (but rather very much the opposite, though I am pleased to know that this has largely changed), or during my time in college from other Christians. (I am pleased to say that both my church in Cambridge and the local MIT Catholic community have taken part in "UniteBoston"[29] events.) As previously noted, I do grant that Christian unity is not the center of the gospel or the Christian life. I appreciate that cultivating a relationship with Jesus and Christian discipleship is a priority, especially for students who are up to their necks with many other commitments besides. I fully understand from experience that pursing unity can be tiring, and it is wrong to be jumping around churches searching for unity; we have to settle down and commit to growing and serving in a limited space, usually one church community. Further, I realize that our remaining differences are not in all cases insignificant, and as such they may deter many Christians from even hoping for (or thinking about) Christian unity.

All need to be converted ever more fully to Jesus Christ. There can be no ecumenism without personal conversion

However, I would argue that there is hope because the Spirit is at work in the ecumenical movement. What "unites is so much greater than what divides us"[30]. It is absolutely worth knowing the extent to which we are bonded as brothers and sisters in Christ, both spiritually and theologically, as we follow Christ together to advance his kingdom of peace, love and truth. Such knowledge should help us to start seeing each other differently, which by God's grace will pave the way to fuller unity.

A few of the significant ecumenical steps taken

ed in his book *The Orthodox Church, 309-10*: "Orthodoxy desires unity-in-diversity, not uniformity; harmony-in-freedom, not absorption. There is room in the Orthodox Church for many different cultural patterns, for many different ways of worship, and even for many different systems of outward organization"

22 *Ut Unum Sint,* 54

23 *Unitatis Redintegratio* 1,4

24 Karl Bart, quoted by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, "A Lecture on Catholic-Orthodox Unity", Atlanta, GA, 2011.

25 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 5-8; *Ut Unum Sint*, 15, 21-27. Quote by Pope Francis, *Pope to WCC: ongoing ecumenism of blood urges us to go forward,* Vatican News, 2018.

26 For a great overview of the changes in attitude, willingness to work together, and reduction of centuries old polemics, I suggest the first few chapters of the book *Is the Reformation Over?* By Mark Knoll and Carolyn Nystrom.

27 It would appear that the majority of the dialogues have been recorded in *Growth in Agreement, Volumes 1-4,* By Gros, Meyer, and Rusch.

28 Though part of my interest was in understanding Christianity from a historical perspective, I also had the opportunity to worship in many different traditions across the world, often for multiple month long periods. These included a Pentecostal church in Ghana, a Catholic Church in India, and an Anglican Church in Jordan. While certainly of a different kind of impact, while passing through airports I was able to also attend Mass in the Vatican, Notre Dame and Munich, the Divine Liturgy in Istanbul and Evening Song in Westminster.

29 UniteBoston nurtures Christian unity through relational connections in the Boston area.

30 A common ecumenical phrase, found in *Ut Unum Sint* 20, see also *Ut Unum Sint,* 22 "If Christians, despite their divisions, can grow ever more united in common prayer around Christ, they will grow in the awareness of how little divides them in comparison to what unites them". The President of the Lutheran World Federation also used this phrase in his interview, *What Unites Us is Stronger Than What Divides Us,* Lutherworld.org

Signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, Augsburg Germany, 1999

in the last century begin with the letter sent in 1920 by the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople to all the Churches worldwide, encouraging them towards unity. As the result of this letter and other movements such as the World Missionary Conference in 1910, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was eventually formed after WWII. Though the Catholic Church has only ever been an observer, rather than a member of the WCC, it did irrevocably place itself on the path towards unity with multiple of its Vatican II decrees (1964-5). After meeting the year prior in Jerusalem, the first occasion on which a Pope and Ecumenical Patriarch had met face to face since the Council of Florence (1438-9!), in 1965 Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I removed the mutual excommunications and committed them "to oblivion"[31] The decades that followed saw many bilateral discussions and joint statements between Churches, with perhaps the most famous being the Joint Declaration of Justification between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999. A second notable example is the fruitful dialogue in the 70s and 80s between the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Coptic Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church et al.) in which after nearly 1700 years, they were able to conclude that their historic disagreement on the doctrine of the internal division of Christ, was only divergent on the level of phraseology, with no real disagreement on the nature of Christ.[32] During the latter half of the last century, many ecumenical prayer services and Bible studies were formed, my personal favorite being the Taizé prayer, and much collaborative ministry work was realized. Starting in 1994, the Evangelicals and Catholics Together Initiative issued four relatively brief statements over the next 10 years wherein greater unity was realized, appreciation for the other was expressed, and concrete differences were articulated for future ponderings.[33] Finally, in 2015 a joint commission of Turkey's major Christian denominations published a historic book of concise Christian doctrine, *Christianity: Fundamental Teachings*, receiving the unprecedented endorsement of all the nation's Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian, Syriac, and Protestant churches.[34]

The Church: The Major Obstacle to Unity

When "discussion turned to the Church and its way of life, the ecumenical movement hit a wall. Different churches may agree on many questions about God and salvation, but they do not agree on how to live together in Christ." In practice this is the reality. The Theological counterpart to this is the question of the Church—its structure and interpretative authority of scripture and tradition are central to our divisions.[35]

Catholics see Protestants as an ecclesially deficient community that needs to be strengthened with the fullness of sacraments and gifts that Christ intended for his Church. Evangelicals see Catholicism as centered on an idea of the Church that obscures the Gospel and adds unnecessary truths beyond what Scripture clearly teaches. Division within the Church at the time of the Reformation was the last thing either the reformers or the Catholic Church wanted. The goal of the reformers was not to create another church(s), (that was unthinkable to them), but rather to reform and purify the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Both sides understood that the Church, as the body of Christ, cannot be divided. Sadly, in our post-Reformation world we don't blink when a central square of a small town has often more than four different church denominations. Consider though how at her trial in 1431, Joan of Arc replied, "about Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they are just one thing and we shouldn't complicate the matter." Or for example, in confronting Saul for his persecution of the church, Jesus asked, "why are you persecuting me?"

While we certainly will need a miracle to overcome our current divisions on the question of the church, it is helpful, I believe, to consider how the Catholic Church has reformed itself since the Reformation, giving us hope that mutual trust, understanding, and agreement may be possible in the future. (That is sadly and certainly not to say that either the

[31] *Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration of His Holiness Pope Paul Vi And The Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I*

[32] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 312

[33] The four statements are *The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,* 1994, *The Gift of Salvation*, 1997, *Your Word is Truth,* 2002 and *The Communion of Saints*, 2003. All can be found on Firsthings.com

[34] Barbara Baker, *Turkey's Churches, Famous for Historic Schism, Finally Agree on Doctrine*, Christianity Today, 2018

[35] For a well written overview of the state of unity between Catholics and Protestants see the article *The Five Solas of the Reformation and Christian Ecumenism* by Rich Girardin in the *MIT et Spiritus* Spring 2017 issue.

Luther at the Diet of Worms, von Werner, 1877

Catholic Church or the many Protestant or Orthodox Churches are without corruption.) The second reason I mention, in brief, the past corruptions, is that they help to make sense of the Reformers, for in their opinion, these abuses so negatively colored the proper understanding of Justification and the sacrament of the Eucharist that they found it necessary to break with Church authority.

The unfortunate historical reality is that it had long been aware to many that the Church at the time of the Reformation was in need of moral and spiritual reform. Specifically Luther, among others[36], was aghast at the selling of church offices (simony), nepotism in positions of power, bishops holding more than one ecclesial office at a time and rarely stepping foot in their diocese, illegitimate children being born to priests and even popes, a lack of theological instruction to the laity, an overemphasis on religious rituals at the expense of encouraging a moral civilian life, forced or theological coercion to make binding vows to join monastic orders, especially in the case of ignorant minors, and of course the selling of indulgences to the poor German peasants to reduce the time one or a loved one spent in purgatory, the profits of which were used to fund the extravagances of the Church. In truth, all of these abuses were condemned at the Council of Trent (its intermittent sessions being held between 1545-1563) with new guidelines enforced to correct the various shortcomings (such as more instruction to the laity, including a catechism of church teaching). Unfortunately, these measures occurred much too late to have any real chance at halting the division in the Church.[37]

As for theological issues, though the details are much too great to cover here, the celebration of the Eucharist was criticized for its being presented as a work to merit grace, and separated from the word of God, the Gospel, and the sure promises of Jesus. Further, the reformers were critical of the liturgy being in Latin, with portions recited in a low voice and with the priests back facing the congregation, making it difficult for them to take part. Of further criticism was the practice at the time in which the laity received the Eucharist rarely, perhaps about once a year, out of an extreme cult of reverence, and when they did they were given only the bread, with the cup reserved for the priests. Finally, private masses were also undertaken in exchange for pay-

[36] Some who remained a part of the Catholic Church and worked for reform are Thomas Cajetan, Philip Neri, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola, Anthony Zaccarria and Matteo di Bassi.

[37] In 1536 Pope Paul III appointed a commission to examine the state of the corruption of the church. Protestants obtained a copy and published it as evidence of the church's corruption. There were numerous geo-political delays before the Council of Trent could begin in 1545. In the 22nd session on the Eucharist the following was stated: "Outlawing the abuses of the Mass first, as relates to covetousness:--they shall wholly prohibit all manner of conditions and bargains for recompenses, and whatsoever is given for the celebration of new masses; as also those importunate and illiberal demands, rather than requests, for alms, and other things of the like sort, which are but little removed from a simonical taint, or at all events, from filthy lucre. They shall not allow anyone who is publicly and notoriously stained with crime, either to minister at the holy altar, or to assist at the sacred services. They shall wholly banish from the Church the observance of a fixed number of certain masses and of candles, as being the invention of superstitious worship, rather than of true religion; and they shall instruct the people, what is, and whence especially is derived, the fruit so precious and heavenly of this most holy sacrifice."

ment. Again, the majority of these grievances were corrected and/or addressed either at the Council of Trent (where it was also affirmed that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was once and for all, accomplishing the work of meriting justification for us[38]) or the rest were addressed much more recently at Vatican II and within the new Roman mass promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1969[39]. Finally, though Martin Luther will never be fully accepted by the Catholic Church, it is pretty telling that the Vatican recently gave support to name a square in Rome near the Colosseum after him.

What binds us together as Christ's body is much greater than what separates our communities

While our remaining differences in understanding of the Church are central to our division, what binds us together as Christ's body is much greater than what separates our communities. In the document "The Communion of Saints" by the Evangelicals and Catholics Together Initiative, the following was stated:

> The Church itself can be understood as a sign and instrument of grace, instituted by the one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, and, through the gospel, mediating his grace to the world. While the ancient formula "Outside the Church no salvation" may lend itself to misunderstanding, we agree that there is no salvation apart from the Church, since to be related to Christ is necessarily to be related, in however full or tenuous a manner, to the Church which is his body. Although Catholics believe that the Church is visible in its universal dimension and not only in local congregations, we as Catholics and Evangelicals together affirm the [Evangelical] statement of Amsterdam 2000:
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> 'The Church is the people of God, the body and the bride of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The one, universal Church is a transnational, transcultural, transdenominational, and multiethnic family, the household of faith. In the widest sense, the Church includes all the redeemed of all the ages, being the one body of Christ extended throughout time as well as space. Here in the world, the Church becomes visible in all local congregations that meet to do together the things that according to the Scripture the Church does. Christ is the head of the Church. Everyone who is personally united to Christ by faith belongs to his body and by the Spirit is united with every other true believer in Jesus.'
>
> Similarly, we together affirm the statement of the Second Vatican Council:
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> 'All are called to belong to the new People of God. Wherefore this People, while remaining one and unique, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the purpose of God's will may be fulfilled… It follows that among all the nations of earth there is but one People of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly and not an earthly nature. For all the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit.' (*Lumen Gentium* II.13)

One particular articulation of the state of the Church from a Catholic perspective which I think is very helpful and properly generous, is summarized well in the article *Evangelicals in the Church of Mary,* by Fr. Maloney, the Catholic Chaplain at MIT. The article describes how in 1987, at his annual address which marked the beginning of a year that was dedicated for special reflection on the importance of the Virgin Mary, Pope John Paul II, with the Ecumenical Patriarch notably in attendance,

> spoke of two dimensions or "profiles," or, one might even go so far as to say, two Churches within the one Church that is the Body of Christ: the Church of Mary and the Church of Peter. The Church of Peter or the "Petrine profile" refers to the exercise of the authority of jurisdiction and office, "the official concern of the bishops", while the Church of Mary or "Marian profile" consists of those who with Mary say "Yes" to God's call. The Marian dimension is "supreme and

[38] In the 22nd session on the Eucharist it was stated: "He, therefore, our God and Lord, though He was about to offer Himself once on the altar of the cross unto God the Father, by means of his death, there to operate an eternal redemption". In the 6th session on Justification it was stated: "our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when we were enemies, for the exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, merited Justification for us by His most holy Passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father." See also the Catholic Catechism 613-618

[39] In particular the new mass is in the vernacular, and there is an even further increased emphasis on preaching of the word, the laity are given both bread and cup, the priest always faces the congregation, and the laity are involved in scripture reading and even giving the elements.

Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I embrace

> preeminent," said the Pope, "richer in personal and communitarian implications" than the Petrine dimension. Pressing this image, the Pope insisted that the Petrine profile be thought of as in service to the Marian profile, that the chief purpose of office in the Roman Catholic Church is not to protect God's interests or those of the Church's institutions, but to minister to, "that is, to aid and serve" all those who with the Mother of God respond faithfully and lovingly to the person of Jesus.

The power of this analogy is that it generously removes past fear and animosity from Catholics towards Protestants in its recognition that Protestants, Orthodox and Catholics together make up the Church of Mary. On the other hand, it provides a way for Protestants and Orthodox to have a greater appreciation for the many ways in which "the Church of Peter" may serve, support and "feed all the sheep" of the Church of Mary.[40]

[40] It is interesting to note that Pope John Paul II borrowed this metaphor from Hans Urs von Balthasar, one of the few in the 1950s who believed it possible for statements such as the Joint declaration of Justification.

The Papal Question

Given the sad reality of our division, I suppose it is only fitting that the Petrine ministry, what should be "the sign and servant of the unity of the universal Church", has become a source of division, most pointedly between the Orthodox and Catholics. Ignatius of Antioch described the primacy of Rome as the 'primacy of love'. Since Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), a title given to the Bishop of Rome has been "servus servorum Dei' (Servant of the Servants of God), echoing of course Jesus's teaching that the first must be last and servant of all. Catholics would argue that there is clear biblical support for the primacy of Peter among the disciples and that early tradition quickly gave to Rome primacy in combating heresy and centering the growing universal church. Protestants and Orthodox argue that scripture and tradition is not clear in this regard, and official Christian truths, including dogma on the role of the Bishop of Rome, should be realized through the guidance of the Spirit, in accord with Scripture, and validated by ecumenical councils.

I think there are two key realizations that can help us move forward towards a common understanding. First, the Catholic Church believes that the Petrine ministry is a gift from the Spirit which it

believes it has received to contribute to a visibly united Church. It is simply unavoidable that for any real visible unity among Christians, the pope must have a distinct role. Second, I find it encouraging that the Catholic Church and the recent popes have talked a good deal about a spiritually renewed form of the Petrine ministry, inviting others into the dialogue, particularly the Orthodox[41].

In particular, "Ratzinger [Pope Benedict] and Cougar [an instrumental author of Vatican II] have spoken of a rereading and re-reception of the First Vatican Council's dogma on the pope. Part of the rereading would be [the] integration of the primacy within the whole context of ecclesiology." Further, Kasper talks of how "we too can learn from the Orthodox and Reformation traditions, and consider further how best to integrate the episcopate and the Petrine ministry with synodical and collegial structures."[42] Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel),* similarly stated, "in the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality."[43]

From the Orthodox Perspective, Bishop Kallistos Ware has stated,

> We recognize him as first—but only as first among equals. He is the elder brother, not the supreme ruler. We do not consider that, in the first ten centuries of the Church, the Pope possessed direct and immediate power of jurisdiction in the Christian east, and so we find it impossible to grant such power to him today.

Based on the Apostolic Canon #34, the Orthodox insist on a principle of reciprocity and mutual concord, in which the bishops are to recognize the Bishop of Rome as the one who is first, but neither the bishops nor the Pope should do anything without the consent of all.

> Surely we Orthodox should be willing to assign to the Pope, in a reunited Christendom, not just an honorary seniority but an all-embracing apostolic care. We should be willing to assign to him the right, not only to accept appeals from the whole Christian world but even to take the initiative in seeking ways of healing when crisis and conflict arise anywhere among Christians. We envisage that on such occasions the Pope would act, not in isolation, but always in close co-operation with his brother bishops. We would wish to see his ministry spelt out in pastoral rather than juridical terms. He would encourage rather than compel, consult rather than coerce.[44]

In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II declared that "In our ecumenical age…the mission of the Bishop of Rome is particularly directed to recalling the need for full communion among Christ's disciples." In a homily in the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch, he told how he "insistently prays that the Holy Spirit shines his light upon us, enlightening all the Pastors and theologians of our Churches, that we may seek—together, of course—the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned".

Apostolic Succession

Although there are issues of disagreement between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, the papal question being the preeminent disputation rather than the Filioque[45], their mutual recognition of each other's sacraments, liturgy and in some part "theological traditions" gives significant precedence and, I would argue, opportunity. Kasper in commenting on *Unitatis Redintegratio* states:

> The second Vatican council recognized anew the treasures and the independence of the spiritual, liturgical, theological and canonical traditions of the Eastern churches and their power to govern themselves according to their own discipline.[46]

In particular, while the reformed Churches for the most part (the Anglicans are the notable exception, though Rome has argued that they did break off[47])

[41] *The Petrine Ministry, Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue,* 2003. A symposium was conducted by the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity with the Orthodox churches in May 2003.

[42] Cardinal Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today*, 73

[43] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium, 246*

[44] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 316. See for example the statement from the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue at Ravenna, Italy in 2007.

[45] The main theological issue for the Great Schism of 1054 (that of the filioque) is often seen (though not by all of course) as no longer a contradiction in understanding but as complementary, each formulated within a context to address separate heresies. Moreover, the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation in 2003 was able to sign an agreement stating that the filioque need not be a Church-dividing issue. When for example the Orthodox and Catholics attempted to resolve their differences at the council of Florence (1438-9), 10 months were spent debating the filoque, 4 months to the subject of purgatory and the blessedness of the saints and no more than 10 days on the papal question at the end of the conference when everyone wanted to go home. (See "A Lecture on Catholic-Orthodox Unity" by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware" Atlanta, GA, 2011.)

[46] Cardinal Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today*, 144. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 14; 16

[47] See *Apostolicae Curae On the Nullity of Anglican Orders*, Pope Leo

Billy Graham and Pope John Paul II became very good friends.

were willing to break with a conception of apostolic succession, in favor of promoting the priesthood of all believers, the Orthodox have maintained the insistence and understanding of such. As a result, the Orthodox and Catholic Church fully recognize the legitimacy of each other's holy orders, despite having disagreements on certain points of doctrine and tradition that are not related to the question of Salvation—details of purgatory, the immaculate conception and assumption of Mary[48], celibacy of the priesthood, varied views on contraception and divorce, the filioque clause in the Nicene Creed, the authority of the pope—to name the most prominent.

I wish there was a visible way towards a "third recognized strand" of apostolic succession, in which pastors of Protestant churches would be given apostolic succession contingent on them accepting certain necessary dogmas, especially to those relating to salvation and the seven major sacraments, while perhaps also forming a more organized church structure. Of course, what is necessary would be a heated debate, but I think the Orthodox situation provides some very clear examples of what may and what may not be necessary. Alas, I admit that such hopes have little chance of coming to fruition, at least in the near future.

There is however another model that may provide precedence for Protestant Christians to have their own legitimate "branch" within one visibly catholic church—the Anglican Ordinariate initiated in 2009. The Catholic Church established this concept in order to enable groups of Anglicans who profess all that the Catholic Church believes on faith and morals to join the Catholic Church, while preserving elements of their liturgical, spiritual, theological and pastoral heritage.[49] Like the Catholic Church's recognition of the Eastern Churches, this model understands the Anglican traditions as a source of nourishment for the members of the Anglican Ordinariate and as a treasure to be shared with the Catholic Church.[50] Similar arrangements have been considered between Catholics and Lutherans.

Normal Ecumenism

Root in his article "Ecumenical Winter" goes on to argue that we need to focus on "normal ecumenism", in which rather than rushing towards the next major breakthrough, we should work to deepen the real but limited communion in Christ that already exists. For example, he argues that while discussions on the theological nature of the Church should continue, the focus of the last 50 years on officially sponsored theological dialogues, while very productive at times, has reached the point of diminishing returns.

Normal Ecumenism according to Root will resist two temptations. First, we must avoid being simply content that we no longer curse (or kill) one another, more easily marry one another, agree on many fundamental doctrines and have learned to work with each other in various missionary and service efforts. The second, opposite temptation to be resisted is the desire for ecumenical progress to continue no matter how tenuous the theological grounds.

Root contends that our stalemate on the questions of the Church (and more recently on ethical matters) will likely not be resolved anytime soon by more dedicated theological commissions. Rather, we need to "seek common mission, where common mission is possible". A few examples include working for the protection of the unborn (in addition to the care of pregnant women, single mothers, and those who have had abortions, and encouraging men to take more responsibility), the dignity and resettlement of refugees, prison reform, care for the environment, the dignity of all in our world rapidly changing by the power of technology, the growing gap between rich and poor, and responding to the secular forces of relativism, scientism and materialism. Our shared Christian tradition is full of riches for addressing the greatest questions of life which will be perpetually pondered by young adults. For example, the names and works of CS Lewis and Bishop Robert Barron (among many others from across the traditions) should be appreciated and advocated by those who are disciplining Christians or corresponding with people who are seeking to learn about the Christian faith.

An Ecumenical Spring?

XIII, 1896

[48] See the article by Ben Myers on Mary on page 18 in this same issue of *MIT et Spiritus*

[49] *Anglican Patrimony in the Catholic Church,* Ordinariate.net

[50] Pope Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus,* 2009

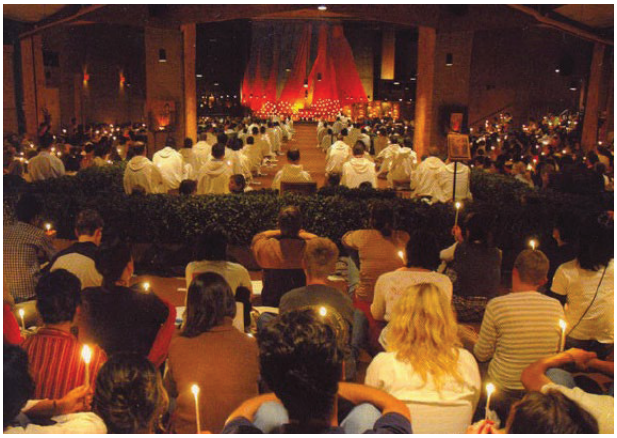
Jesus wants Harmony. When we achieve this harmony, "Catholics discover the fire, and Protestants discover the fireplace"

Pope Francis, however offers a more optimistic forecast, believing that it is possible to talk of an "Ecumenical Spring". Pope Francis has made the call for Christian unity one of the main missions of his papacy. While he is supportive of formal dialogues, he, like Root, believes that relationships and shared mission are key to realizing greater unity. Especially key according to Pope Francis is for the Church to be inwardly oriented to Christ and outwardly oriented to the Gospel. As detailed in his first papal encyclical *The Joy of the Gospel,* he believes that as we together live out and preach the gospel we will find ourselves moving closer together. This understanding of his is built on his own experience of working with Pentecostals and Evangelicals in Argentina, and the realization within the Catholic Charismatic movement that Christians who are open to the Spirit are much closer than their varied ecclesial structures would traditionally suggest.[51]

What will Unity take?

A continued commitment to truth is necessary. Though it seems unlikely that we will ever agree on everything, Jesus promised that when we seek truth, we will find it. We also know that Jesus wills for our unity, so if we seek truth according to his will, we can be sure we will be ever more reunited. This is going to mean letting the Conductor lead. Rather than simply looking at our own music scores, when we focus on "His baton, His mind, His will, we will play in harmony. It will not be in unison, but it will not be division either. Harmony. He wants Harmony." When we achieve this harmony, "Catholics discover the fire, and Protestants discover the fireplace". [52]

Kreeft argues that "if we all became brilliant theologians (a consummation devoutly to be wished), reunion would still be far away. If we all became saints, it would be at our doorstep… The fundamental reason why reunion has not happened [is that] we have not obeyed Saint Paul's command to 'have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus'. Christ-mindedness is our first necessity. This alone will 'work'".[53] Cardinal Suenens correctly stressed that "in order to unite, we must first love one another. In order to love one another, we must first get to know one another." As we learn to love each other more, through simple encouragement, prayer, joint service, worship, Bible study, Christian speaking forums, etc., in my experience I have found that it is inevitable that one will come to appreciate and love many newly rediscovered brothers and sisters in Christ.



An Ecumenical Prayer and Song Service in Taizé France.

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[51] Cruxnow, *Pope redefines press for unity with call for 'new ecumenical spring',* June 2018. Martin Brauer, *Pope Francis Ecumenism,* The World Council of Churches Ecumenical Review 2017, Jamie Manson, *Is Pope Francis ecumenical, evangelical, or both?,* National Catholic Reporter, March 2013, Fr. Peter Hocken, *Pope Francis and Ecumenism, Openness to the Holy Spirit,* Catholic Charismatic Renewal

[52] Peter Kreeft, *Catholics and Protestants, What Can We Learn from Each Other*, 29, 77.

[53] *Ibid,* 76, 106