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A Center conducted by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement

Director's Desk

In the Spring *Bulletin*, we announced the publication of the acts of the symposium on "Apostolic Continuity of the Church and Apostolic Succession". These have been published both in English (in the review *Louvain Studies* 21, 2 [1996]) and in Italian (as volume XI in our series *Corso Breve di Ecumenismo*).

Our annual Summer course "Introduction to the Ecumenical & Interreligious Movements from a Roman Catholic Perspective" was attended by 28 men and women from North America, Mexico, Belgium, France, the Philippines and Ethiopia. We hope that we will be able to serve others through the course which we organize. Further information is to be found in the brochure which is enclosed or by writing to us at the **Centro Pro Unione**. In this *Bulletin* we publish one of the lectures given during the Summer course by Cardinal Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Activities of the **Centro** for the Fall include a series of eight lectures given in Italian on "Religion, Post-Modernity and New Religious Movements and Sects": what is meant by the phenomenon of modernity and post-modernity, how does this phenomenon challenge religion and, in particular, the Christian churches, what are the various responses to this phenomenon (the question of the birth of sects and new religious movements), how do we understand the relationship between unity, uniformity and legitimate diversity, and how can the churches respond together to these realities. In addition to this series of lectures, the **Centro** proposes an important lecture to be given by the former director of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order, Dr. Günther Gaßmann on "The Search for Christian Unity and Common Moral Orientations — Three Case Studies".

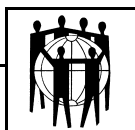
Finally it is our honor to welcome the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey who will deliver a lecture sponsored by the Anglican Centre in Rome on "Common Ecumenical Mission in a Pluralistic World".

The **Centro** is in the process of revising the *International Directory of Ecumenical Research Centers and Publications* last published by us in 1986. We would like to ask your help in this task. If any of you know of new Centers or publications which have begun since 1986, please send us their complete addresses so that we might contact them for inclusion in the new revised edition which we hope to publish by Easter 1997.

Pro Unione Ecumenical Gatherings (P.U.E.G.) continues to welcome visitors to Rome. We have had two groups of Lutherans from Denmark, a mixed group of Catholics and Protestants from the United States, several Anglican groups as well as taking part in the ROMESS program run by the Anglican Centre in Rome. We are pleased to be able to introduce our brothers and sisters from other Christian traditions to the ecumenical dimension of Rome as well as to help them understand the Judeo-Christian roots of the Church of Rome.

I would like to close this letter with a word of congratulation to some of our co-workers in the ecumenical field. The Congregation of the Ladies of Bethany staffed the Foyer Unitas from 1952-1992 which was located in the same building as the **Centro Pro Unione**. The Ladies have recently published their memories of these 40 exciting years which took in the Second Vatican Council. Their book is entitled *Hearth of Unity: Ladies of Bethany and Ecumenism in Rome*, (Rome: Fratelli Palombi Editori, 1996, ISBN 88-7691-458-5, pp. 187, \$US 30). Copies of the book may be obtained by writing to the Ladies of Bethany, via Santa Maria dell'Anima, 30, I-00186 Rome.

James F. Puglisi, SA
Director





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Centro Conferences

Vatican II and Catholic Principles on Ecumenism

by

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(Lecture given during the **Centro Pro Unione's** annual Summer course, Tuesday, 25 June 1996)

1. Introduction

One of the great Christian achievements of the Millennium that is fast drawing to a close has been the development over the past century of the Ecumenical Movement. Beginning with the *World Missionary Conference* in Edinburgh, June 1910, and then taken up by two world-wide Protestant movements *Faith and Order* and *Life and Work*, this movement found its expression eventually in the formation of a *World Council of Churches* in Amsterdam, Holland, in 1948.

The attitude of the Catholic Church to this Movement was, from the beginning, extremely cautious, not to say negative. The post-Reformation attitude of defence and the theory that error had no rights kept the Catholic Church at a distance from the ecumenical strivings of other Christians, although there were notable exceptions to this among individual Catholics in various places. This year, we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Malines conversations, in which a Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Malines and a leading Anglican made an early contribution to ecumenical dialogue.

Pope John XXIII, in calling together the Second Vatican Council, was determined that the question of Christian Unity should be on the agenda and chose a German Jesuit biblical scholar, Augustin Bea, to prepare and guide through the Council discussions a document which has become known by its opening words in Latin *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

For a deeper understanding of the Principles on which the Catholic Church's commitment to Ecumenism is based one must look also to two other Council Documents: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and the Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*.

Already during the Council, it was obvious that the principles set down in *Unitatis Redintegratio* would need to be developed and promoted once the Council had completed its work. This task was entrusted by Pope Paul VI to a special *Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity*, which in turn issued an *Ecumenical Directory* in two parts, published respectively in 1967 and 1970. This handbook of ecumenical principles and practice was brought

up-to-date and enlarged in 1993¹.

It is particularly in these documents that we find the Catholic understanding of Ecumenism and it is on these documents, mainly, that I shall base my Conference. There is, however, another document that will be mentioned often, namely the 1995 Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II *Ut unum sint on Commitment to Ecumenism*. In many ways this Encyclical is the Pope's personal reflection on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, to which reference has already been made, in the light of the experience of the past thirty years.

From this brief introduction it is clear that, while the Catholic Church was slow to enter into the Ecumenical Movement, it has, in the short period of thirty years, take its commitment very seriously and can be said to be now at the forefront of the whole movement.

2. Ecumenism

It is important for us to have a clear idea about the nature of the movement which has been called *ecumenical*. The Council Decree itself gave a description of the ecumenical movement as including "those activities and initiatives which, according to the various needs of the Church and opportune occasions, are started and organized for the fostering of unity among Christians"². Inter-religious dialogue with other great Religions, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, etc., is not to be confused with ecumenism. At times, the methods used and the initiatives undertaken are similar in both cases, but the goal is quite distinct and the doctrinal basis for our efforts fundamentally different.

The Vatican Council situates the mystery of the Church within the mystery of God's wisdom and goodness that draws the

¹ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity with the express approval of Pope John Paul II on March 25th 1993, Vatican City: Vatican Press (hereafter *Ecumenical Directory*).

² *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 4.

whole human family and indeed the whole of creation into unity with himself³. In this sense, the work of ecumenism is part of the universal striving for unity. It is not a movement against others, nor can it be considered a purely internal question of concern to Christian alone. Yet it has its own distinct goal, means and doctrinal basis.

3. The doctrinal basis of Catholic Ecumenism

We can say that ecumenism sets out from two basis premises: the will of Christ and the shared communion of all Christians through baptism.

a) *Ut unum sint!* It is this prayer of Our Lord that challenges all his disciples to strive to free the Church from the divisions that have come to separate those baptized into the one body of Christ. As he prepared to offer his life for the salvation of the world, Our Lord prayed “to his Father for those who believe: That all may be one even as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou has sent me” (Jn. 17:21). It is here that we find the fundamental motive for the ecumenical movement. It is the will of Christ!

At the same time, we are well aware of the importance of Christian Unity for the work of evangelization: “that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”! We have to keep firmly before our minds the opening words of the Vatican Council Decree on Ecumenism:

“The Church established by Christ the Lord is, indeed, one and unique. Yet many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true heritage of Jesus Christ. To be sure, all proclaim themselves to be disciples of the Lord, but their convictions clash and their paths diverge, *as though Christ himself were divided* (1 Cor. 1:13). Without doubt this discord openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature”⁴.

It may be good to recall that the ecumenical movement took its beginning from such considerations within a Conference on Mission. Pope John Paul II sets out this challenge before all the members of the Catholic Church with the following statement:

“When I say that for me, Bishop of Rome, the ecumenical task is *one of the pastoral priorities* of my Pontificate, I think of the grave obstacle which the lack of unity represents for the proclamation of the Gospel. A Christian Community which believes in Christ and desires, with Gospel, fervor, the salvation of mankind can hardly be closed to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who leads all

³ *Lumen Gentium*, N° 1-4; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 2.

⁴ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 1.

Christians towards full and visible unity”⁵.

b) And yet, as the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* immediately points out, we divided Christians are not strangers one to the other, but brothers: “for those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church”⁶.

This is the doctrinal basis for our ecumenical commitment. The Church is not divided. It is we Christians who are divided. And even though divided, we are still in communion one with the other, because we are baptized into the one body of Christ. Pope John Paul II sees this realization as being the most important acquisition of the ecumenical movement. In his Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, we read:

“The *universal brotherhood* of Christians has become a firm ecumenical conviction”⁷.

4. The unity that we seek

Under this heading, I would like to deal briefly with the goal of our ecumenical striving, with the distinction between unity and uniformity, and with the relationship between the Catholic Church and the “one, holy catholic and apostolic Church” founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

a) Until recent times, there was a fairly general agreement about the ecumenical goal. For the Second Vatican Council the unity that we seek is unity in faith, sacramental life and ministries: a visible, organic unity. This teaching is clearly put forward in the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*:

“The Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* explains how the unity that Christ wishes for his Church is brought about *through the faithful preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles and their successor at their head - through their administering the sacraments, and through their governing in love*, and defines this unity as consisting of the *confession of one faith...the common celebration of divine worship...the fraternal harmony of the family of God*. This unity which of its very nature requires full, visible communion of all Christians is the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement”⁸.

Not all those engaged today in the ecumenical movement accept this as their goal. The difficulties encountered along the ecumenical way, especially with regard to doctrinal differences,

⁵ *Ut unum sint*, N° 99.

⁶ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 3.

⁷ *Ut unum sint*, N° 42.

⁸ *Ecumenical Directory*, N° 20.

have led some to look for less distant goals

Among the various expressions used in this connection, the closest to the Catholic vision would be that of what has come to be known as *Reconciled Diversity*. Many in the *World Council of Churches* speak of *Conciliar Fellowship*. There are other similar attempts to describe a goal for Christian unity that falls short of the one proposed by the Catholic Church, but it is not our task now to look into these alternate goals. Most of these visions of unity would have us concentrate on the communion that we already share, on greater reconciliation of our differences, and on unity in action and witness.

Despite the problems encountered in our search for unity, Pope John Paul II in his recent Encyclical has once again committed the Catholic Church to the goal of *full visible unity among all the baptized*⁹.

b) This unity is, however, not to be understood as uniformity. In fact, the unity of the Church is realized in the midst of a rich diversity, a diversity that is a dimension of the Church's catholicity. The Second Vatican Council made it clear that the unity which we seek by no means requires the sacrifice of the rich diversity of spirituality, discipline, liturgical rites and elaboration of revealed truth that has grown up among Christians in the measure that this diversity remains faithful to the apostolic tradition¹⁰.

The principle is clear; the application more difficult. In his Encyclical on *Commitment to Ecumenism*, Pope John Paul II states that in the *journey towards the necessary and sufficient visible unity, in the communion of the one Church willed by Christ...one must not impose any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary (cf. Acts 15:28)*¹¹.

There are several complex and profound questions involved in this aspect of ecumenism. The first issue concerns the fundamental distinction between the deposit of faith and the theological formulations by which that faith has been transmitted down through the centuries. While it is clear that unity is concerned with the deposit of faith and not with the formulation of that faith as such, any new formulation must of course be seen to be saying *the same thing* as the traditional expression¹². That this is possible is shown by the success achieved with the Ancient Churches of the East through Christological Declarations that have resolved disputes which have lasted for some 15 centuries.

Yet, there is a great reluctance on the part of Churches and Ecclesial Communion to let go of their formulations in order to seed common consensus. This is a factor that has to be given due

⁹ *Ut unum sint*, N° 77.

¹⁰ Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 4 and 15-16; also *Ecumenical Directory*, N° 20.

¹¹ *Ut unum sint*, N° 78.

¹² *Ibid.*, N° 38.

consideration. A possible solution is to be found, at times, in allowing the dialogue partners to retain particular formulations which, while not identical, are not contradictory, or at least are not judged to be Church-dividing.

The Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* also indicated another principle or criterion that needs to be kept in mind when seeking to determine *legitimate diversity*, namely *that in Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened for this kind of rivalry to incite all to a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ*¹³.

c) The one Church of Christ and the Catholic Church

This was one of the questions that required considerable discussion and reflection during the Second Vatican Council. The Council eventually came up with a formula that satisfied the Church's understanding of itself, while leaving open the relationship of other Churches and Ecclesial Communion to the one Church of Christ.

It is the firm teaching of the Council that the one Church of Christ **subsists in the Catholic Church** which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him. This means that within this Church, one can find the entirety of revealed truths, the sacraments, and the ministry which Christ gave for the building up of the Church and the carrying out of its mission¹⁴.

This is a principle that creates much concern for our partners in dialogue; yet it is an essential element of our self-understanding as a Church. In this connection it is necessary to remind ourselves that the ecumenical search is above all a search for truth. We are not asked to give-up anything that is of the essence of our faith. We are required to approach the dialogue humbly and with an openness to deepen our understanding of the truth in a sincere inquiry with others, to *speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15)*: love of our brother and sister in Christ; love of the truth.

5) The Church as Communion

Communio or *koinonia* is a concept that, particularly in recent times, has come to enrich and facilitate the understanding of the relationship between the Churches. The Ecumenical Directory explains this concept in the following words:

“The communion in which Christians believe and for which they hope is, in its deepest reality, their unity with the Father through Christ in the Spirit. Since Pentecost, it has been given and received in the Church, the communion of saints. It is accomplished fully in the glory of heaven, but is already realized in the Church on earth as it journeys

¹³ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 11.

¹⁴ Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium*, N° 8.

towards that fullness. Those who live in faith, hope and love, in mutual service, in common teaching and sacraments, under the guidance of their pastors are part of that communion which constitutes the Church"¹⁵.

It is obvious from this description that there can be various degrees of communion, in relation to the degree of unity that exists between various Christian communities. Since they share to some degree the same faith, hope and love, partake in mutual service, and are formed by the same teaching and sacraments, to that degree they share communion.

This is not just a pleasant idea or superficial link, but a deep, ontological reality that forms the very basis of the unity that we share and calls us forward towards the fullness of that unity. The Second Vatican Council was thus able to declare that, while due to the serious dissensions and the divisions of the past, the communion between Churches and Ecclesial Communities has been damaged but never destroyed. "In fact", the Council states, "the fullness of the unity of the Church of Christ has been maintained within the Catholic Church, while other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, though not in full communion with the Catholic Church, retain in reality a certain communion with it"¹⁶.

Fundamental to the Second Vatican Council's teaching on Ecumenism was the understanding that "all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honored by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers in the Lord by sons and daughters of the Catholic Church"¹⁷. But this is not all.

"Moreover, some, even very many of the most significant elements or endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church herself can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, along with other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit and visible elements. All these, which come from Christ and lead back to him, belong by right to the one Church of Christ"¹⁸.

For the Council Fathers, it was obvious that other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, "though they suffer from defects..., have beyond no means be 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 deprive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church"¹⁹. The sacred actions carried out in these

Churches and Communities "truly engender a life of grace"²⁰.

However, as the Ecumenical Directory points out, "no Christian should be satisfied with these forms of communion. They do not correspond to the will of Christ and weaken his Church in its mission"²¹. The whole ecumenical movement is orientated towards bringing this real, though imperfect communion to full, visible unity.

6. The agents of Ecumenism

If, as I have just said, "no Christian should be satisfied with these less than perfect forms of communion", then it follows that every Christian is called upon to be an active agent of ecumenism. And indeed the Ecumenical Directory states that "those who are baptized in the name of Christ are, *by that very fact*, called to commit themselves to the search for unity. Baptismal communion tends towards full ecclesial communion. To live our baptism is to be caught up in Christ's mission of making all things one"²².

While it is clear that "the Bishops, individually for their own dioceses, and collegially for the whole Church, are, under the authority of the Holy See, responsible for ecumenical policy and practice"²³, the Second Vatican Council makes it clear that:

"concern for restoring unity pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the potential of each"²⁴.

Reflecting on these statements, Pope John Paul II, in the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, develops this theme in a way that must remove all doubt about the right of Catholics to oppose or be indifferent to the ecumenical commitment of the Church. Let me quote the more striking of his declarations:

- "...the way of ecumenism is the way of the Church" (N° 7);

- "Thus it is absolutely clear that ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian Unity, *is not just some sort of appendix* which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does; it must be like the fruit borne by a flourishing tree which grows to its full stature" (N° 20);

- "To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire

¹⁵ *Ecumenical Directory*, N° 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, N° 18.

¹⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ecumenical Directory*, N° 19.

²² *Ibid.*, N° 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, N° 4.

²⁴ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 5.

the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer: *Ut unum sint*" (N° 9).

We Christians have not chosen one another; we have been chosen. And because it is the one Christ who has done the choosing, we have been chosen to be his together. Unity is not then our choice. Ecumenism is not optional. Ecumenism is not our effort to achieve a unity that does not exist. Rather it is our response to the gift of unity already given. "Like it or not, the gift and the problems that come with the gift, are already ours"²⁵.

Let me conclude this section of my paper with a further quote from the introduction to the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*. Under the heading "*Christ calls all his disciples to unity*", Pope John Paul II refers to the magnificent Good Friday 1994 *Via Crucis* in the Roman Colosseum and the meditations prepared for that evening by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomeos I, and writes:

"There I stated that believers in Christ, united in following in the footsteps of the martyrs, cannot remain divided. If they wish truly and effectively to oppose the world's tendency to reduce to powerlessness the Mystery of the Redemption, they must *profess together the same truth about the Cross*. The Cross! An anti-Christian outlook seeks to minimize the Cross, to empty it of its meaning, and to deny that in it man has the source of his new life. It claims that the Cross is unable to provide either vision or hope. Man, it says, is nothing but an earthly being, who must live as if God did not exist.

"No one is unaware of the challenge which all this poses to believers. They cannot fail to meet this challenge. Indeed, how could they refuse to do everything possible, with God's help, to break down the walls of division and distrust, to overcome obstacles and prejudices which thwart the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in the Cross of Jesus, the one Redeemer of man, of every individual?"²⁶.

7. Ecumenical Formation in the Catholic Church

To undertake effectively such a task, the Christian must be given an adequate formation. To send a Christian into the field of ecumenism without such preparation could be prepared to exposing a soldier to battle without previous training. The results would be negative both for the person involved, as indeed for the movement itself.

I cannot treat here of the requirements for adequate ecumenical

²⁵ Cf. a paper by Richard John Neuhaus, entitled "A New Thing: Ecumenism at the Threshold to the Third Millennium" given at Rose Hill in May 1995.

²⁶ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 1-2.

formation. I can only refer you to the *Ecumenical Directory* which dedicate a whole Chapter, N° III, to "Ecumenical Formation in the Catholic Church". Suggestions are given for the formation of all the faithful and for those engaged in pastoral work.

Special attention is given to the ecumenical preparation of those studying for the priesthood and for the ecumenical dimension of permanent formation.

In my opinion, the key to the future development of the ecumenical movement in the Catholic Church will depend, to a large extent, on the way in which this section of the *Ecumenical Directory* is implemented.

8. The manner of living out the ecumenical commitment

The documents of the Catholic Church that deal with ecumenism indicate clearly the means that we are to use in order to build this great edifice of the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" Church, in which there are "neither Jews nor Greeks", but in which all are brothers and sisters in full communion with one another, in Christ Jesus the Lord.

We place these "tools of our trade" under three headings: spiritual means; practical co-operation and common witness; theological dialogue.

a) Spiritual ecumenism

It was the Vatican Council document *Unitatis Redintegratio* that called the Catholic Church to begin the search for ecumenism by taking a good look at itself. The Council Fathers understood well "that there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart"²⁷. They saw the ecumenical commitment of the Church as part of the renewal which the Council was bringing about, a renewal which would not hesitate to recognize "deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline, or even in the formulation of doctrine" if these had occurred in the past²⁸. What was needed now was a "newness of attitudes arising out of self-denial and unstinted love" and prayer to the Holy Spirit "for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others, and to have an attitude of brotherly generosity toward them"²⁹.

Pope John Paul II reflects on this aspect of ecumenism in the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, where he speaks of the need for repentance: "an awareness of certain exclusions which seriously harm fraternal charity, of certain refusals to forgive, of a certain pride, of an unevangelical insistence on condemning the 'other side', of a disdain born of an unhealthy presumption", and urges all Christians "to let themselves be shaped, as it were, by a concern for ecumenism"³⁰.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, N° 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, N° 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, N° 7.

³⁰ *Ut unum sint*, N° 15.

And the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, His Holiness writes at some length of that “painful chapter of history to which the sons and daughters of the Church must return with a spirit of repentance when acquiescence was given to *intolerance and even the use of violence* in the service of truth”. There were of course mitigating factors that have to be taken into consideration in making such judgements, but these, states the Holy Father, “do not exonerate the Church from the obligation to express profound regret for the weaknesses of so many of her sons and daughters who sullied her face, preventing her from fully mirroring the image of her crucified Lord, the supreme witness of patient love and of humble meekness”³¹.

This spirit of renewal, conversion and reform, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement³². Pope John Paul II speaks of the “primacy of prayer” in the ecumenical movement, and sees in prayer “a genuine expression of the ties which even now bind Catholics to other Christians, and invitation to Christ himself to visit the community of those who call upon him”³³.

Experience shows just how true is the observation made by His Holiness that “when Christians pray together, the goal of unity seems closer”. He goes on to explain this in the following words:

“If Christians, despite their divisions, can grow ever more united in common prayer around Christ, they will grow in an awareness of how little divides them in comparison to what unites them. If they meet more often and more regularly before Christian prayer, they will be able to gain the courage to face all the painful human reality of their divisions, and they will find themselves together once more in that community of the Church which Christ constantly builds up in the Holy Spirit, in spite of all weaknesses and human limitations”³⁴.

b) Practical co-operation and common witness

The Second Vatican Council called on all Christians to “profess their faith in God, one and three, in the Incarnate Son of God, our Redeemer and Lord before the whole world”, to bear witness to their common hope, and to work together in social matters. In a truly beautiful expression, the Council Fathers declared that “co-operation among all Christians vividly expresses that bond which already unites them, and it sets in clearer relief

³¹ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, N° 35.

³² Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 8 and *Ut unum sint*, N° 21.

³³ *Ut unum sint*, N° 21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, N° 22.

the features of Christ the servant”³⁵. Pope John Paul II calls for Christians to exercise “every form of practical co-operation at all levels: pastoral, cultural and social, as well as witnessing to the Gospel message”³⁶. He describes such co-operation based on our common faith as “a manifestation of Christ himself” and as “a true school of ecumenism”³⁷.

The *Ecumenical Directory* devotes a special chapter to “*Ecumenical Co-operation, Dialogue and Common Witness*”. There is so much that we Christians can already do together in order to express and live out the unity that we already share, thus making ever more smooth the road to full, visible unity.

c) Theological dialogue

All the Vatican documents have stressed the importance of dialogue. The Second Vatican Council warned that “nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its assured genuine meaning”³⁸. Unity cannot be the fruit of compromise, but must be sought in a dialogue with other Christians that is founded in a love for truth, deep Christian charity and humility³⁹.

Thus theological dialogue involves both listening and explaining, seeking both to understand and to be understood, to be forthcoming about oneself and trustful about what the others have to say. There can be no hidden agenda! Both the Council and Pope John Paul II point out that “the manner and method of expounding the Catholic Faith should not be a hindrance to dialogue with our brothers and sisters”. One should take into account both the way of thinking and the actual historical experiences of the other party⁴⁰.

In pursuing theological dialogue, there are certain principles indicated by the Second Vatican Council, illustrated in the *Ecumenical Directory* and confirmed in the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, that are vital for success in this important field of ecumenical activity.

The first of these principles has already been mentioned and is thus described in the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*:

“They (Catholics) should remember that in Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened for this kind of fraternal rivalry to incite all to a deeper realization and a

³⁵ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 12.

³⁶ *Ut unum sint*, N° 40.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 11.

³⁹ *Ut unum sint*, N° 36.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ”⁴¹.

I have also referred to a second principle of great importance in the dialogue, namely the distinction between the deposit of faith and the formulation of doctrine. Different ways of expressing a doctrine may simply be different words saying the same thing. Pope John Paul II writes in this connection:

“Intolerant polemics and controversies have made incompatible assertions out of what was really the result of two different ways of looking at the same reality. Nowadays we need to find the formula which, by capturing the reality in its entirety, will enable us to move beyond partial readings and eliminate false interpretations”⁴².

A third principle is that expressed by the Holy Father in the following statement:

“This journey towards the necessary and sufficient visible unity, in the communion of the one Church willed by Christ, continues to require patient and courageous efforts. In this process, one must not impose any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary (cf. Acts 15:28)”⁴³.

Unity is not uniformity; there is a place for legitimate diversity.

9. Reception of the dialogue results

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has entered into serious theological dialogue with representatives of all other mainline Churches and Ecclesial Communion. Quite a number of agreed statements have been published, but relatively few of these have been officially examined and received by the Churches concerned.

There is a growing awareness that much more has to be done by the ecclesiastical authorities to promote the diffusion, study and eventual reception of the dialogue results.

In his Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II draws attention to what he calls “this new task”. The dialogue results cannot remain simply statements of the bilateral commissions, but —he writes— “must become a common heritage”⁴⁴. Since we are dealing with matters of faith, universal consent is required, “extending from the Bishops to the lay faithful, all of whom have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is the same Spirit who assists the Magisterium and awakens the *sensus fidei*”⁴⁵. His

⁴¹ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 11; see also the *Ecumenical Directory*, N° 176 and *Ut unum sint*, N° 37.

⁴² *Ut unum sint*, N° 38.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, N° 78.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, N° 80.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Holiness describes this process of analyzing the results and testing them in the light of the Apostolic Tradition in the following works:

“This process, which must be carried forward with prudence and in a spirit of faith, will be assisted by the Holy Spirit. If it is to be successful, its results must be made known in appropriate ways by competent persons. Significant in this regard is the contribution which theologians and faculties of theology are called upon to make by exercising their charism in the Church. It is also clear that ecumenical commissions have very specific responsibilities and tasks in this regard. The whole process is followed and encouraged by the Bishops and the Holy See. The Church’s teaching authority is responsible for expressing a definitive judgement. In all this, it will be of great help methodologically to keep carefully in mind the distinction between the deposit of faith and the formulation in which it is expressed, as Pope John XXIII recommended in his opening address at the Second Vatican Council”⁴⁶.

10. Communion of life and Spiritual Activity

I should like to conclude these reflections with a special word on *Communion of life and Spiritual activity among the Baptized*. This forms the subject matter of Chapter IV of the revised *Ecumenical Directory* and is of special importance to members of the clergy.

The basis for such sharing is of course the fact that, through baptism, Christians enter into a real communion by becoming members of the one body of Christ.

At the same time, because of the divisions that exist among Christians, this communion is not always perfect.

Hence when we consider the possibility of sharing in spiritual activities and resources -prayer in common, participation in liturgical worship, common use of sacred places, sharing in sacramental life, etc.), we are guided by these

- the real communion in the life of the Spirit which we already share;

- the incomplete character of this communion.

In applying these principles, we come automatically to a distinction between the various Eastern Churches on the one hand and Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communion on the other.

The Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Churches are looked upon by the Catholic Church as “Sister Churches”, having with the Catholic Church a very close communion in matters of faith, discipline and sacramental life. The Second Vatican Council Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* speaks of “the Church of God being built up and growing in stature through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches”⁴⁷. They

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, N° 15.

possess true sacraments and, above all, through the apostolic succession the priesthood and the Eucharist.

Hence there are solid grounds for allowing and even encouraging some sharing in liturgical worship. The *Ecumenical Directory* draws the consequences of this reality by stating that Catholics may receive the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing from an Orthodox priest, whenever necessity so requires or there is a genuine spiritual advantage to be gained, provided that the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided. Similarly, Catholic ministers may lawfully administer these sacraments to members of the Eastern Churches who ask for them of their own free will and are properly disposed. Other possibilities open for such sharing are the reading of lessons during the liturgy, participation of a Catholic minister in the celebration of a marriage in the Orthodox Church, the participation as bridegroom or bridesmaid of a Catholic in a marriage in the Orthodox Church, or vice versa.

Since the degree of communion shared with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities is less complete, the sharing of sacramental life with Christians of these communities is also more limited.

The celebration of a sacrament —and in a special way of the Eucharist— is linked to unity in faith, worship and community life. Though we share a real communion with other Christians, there is not the same unity in faith and sacramental life that exists with the Orthodox.

As a consequence our sharing in sacramental life is limited to the following:

- in case of danger of death, Catholic ministers may administer to members of these other Churches and Ecclesial Communities the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing of the sick, on condition that the person concerned cannot have recourse to a minister of his or her own Church, asks for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, manifests Catholic faith in the sacrament to be received and be properly disposed. The diocesan bishop can take into account situations of grave and pressing need, other than that of danger of death;

- a catholic who finds himself or herself in similar circumstances may request the same sacraments from a minister of another Church in which sacraments are known to be valid or from a minister who is known to be validly ordained according to Catholic teaching on ordination.



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Centro Conferences

The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Preparation of Vatican II

by

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In this brief paper I wish to bring together, to summarize, and on a few points to supplement materials treated at greater length in a chapter of the first volume of the new *History of Vatican II*¹. I will be principally concerned with the work of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) in preparing texts to foster the ecumenical dimension which from the beginning Pope John XXIII had included among the purposes of the Second Vatican Council².

The Establishment of the SPCU

Within two weeks of Pope John XXIII's announcement of the Council, calls began to be made for an institution which could promote its ecumenical finality. Yves Congar noted that while the Congregation for the Oriental Church dealt with the Orthodox and the Holy Office had a general supervisory role over the orthodoxy of ecumenical endeavors, the Roman Curia did not have "any complete organism capable of following the immense problem of the reunion of Christians". Private initiatives had been taken in full accordance with the Church's rules, but something more official was now necessary³.

At the same time, C.-J. Dumont, director of the ecumenical study-center "Istina", proposed the establishment of "institutions with sufficient authority and competence to engage in permanent conversations and negotiations with the other Christian communions even after the Council is officially closed". During the Council these institutions could maintain contacts with

whatever communions agreed to take part; and even before the Council began, they could by such contacts help to address the sensitive question of possible invitations to other communions and to outline realistic goals for the Council itself⁴.

Dumont also prepared two memoranda on the question for the Oriental Congregation. He recommended that public contacts with the Orthodox Churches be pursued within the Oriental Congregation and that the Propaganda Congregation institute a similar section for public dialogue with Protestants and with the World Council of Churches. The two bodies should cooperate closely, however, and even constitute "a single organism—or mixed commission"⁵.

In the spring of 1959, Dumont and O. Rousseau were approached by Patriarch Maximos IV for suggestions he might send to the Holy See on how "to address the questions being discussed with the Orthodox"⁶. On May 23, 1959, Maximos IV proposed the establishment of a Roman congregation or commission for promoting unity⁷.

The need for such a Vatican office became painfully evident in the "Rhodes incident" in the summer of 1959. A meeting to discuss conversations between Catholic and Greek Orthodox theologians, planned earlier, was postponed until the occasion of the meeting of the central committee of the World Council of Churches held in Rhodes, 19-28 August. Rumors soon spread that the Catholic participants were making use of the WCC meeting to attempt to isolate the Orthodox from the World Council. Attempts to explain the real nature of the encounter

¹ G. Alberigo & J.A. Komonchak (eds.), *History of Vatican II*, volume I: *Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II, Toward a New Era in Catholicism*, Maryknoll/Louvain: Orbis/Peeters, 1995, pp. 167-356.

² For the SPCU's part in securing the participation of non-Catholic observers at the Council, see *History of Vatican II...*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 318-326.

³ "Les Conciles dans la vie de l'Église", *Informations Catholiques Internationales*, n. 90 (February 15, 1959), pp. 17-26, at p. 25; reprinted in his *Sainte Église: études et approches ecclésiologiques*, Paris: Cerf, 1964, pp. 303-25; late in 1959, Congar repeated the proposal in "Le Concile, l'Église et... «les autres»", *Lumière et Vie* (Lyon), 45 (November-December 1959) pp. 69-92, at 84-87.

⁴ C.-J. Dumont, "Le prochain Concile et l'unité chrétienne", *Vers l'unité chrétienne* 12 (1-2), 1959, pp. 1-5; reprinted as "Concile d'union ou Concile d'unité?", in *Informations Catholiques Internationales* n. 93 (April 1, 1959), pp. 1-2, 29-31; an English translation was quickly published in *Unitas* 11 (1), 1959, pp. 37-45.

⁵ The texts can be found in the typescript of Dumont's autobiography, a copy of which is at the Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, Bologna.

⁶ Dumont to Congar, 16 April 1959.

⁷ S. Schmidt, *Agostino Bea: il cardinale dell'unità*, Rome: Città Nuova, 1987, p. 347.

were undercut by a transmission on Vatican Radio which described it as promoting “a resumption, on a larger and more representative basis than in the past, of conversations between the separated Church of the East and Rome”. The leadership of the WCC was incensed at what it saw as evidence of a “*divide et impera*” policy on the part of Rome, and it took several months before the air was cleared.

If the Rhodes incident soured relations between Catholic ecumenists and the WCC just as they were beginning to move to a new phase, it also threatened to provoke a backlash in Rome. From Dumont's correspondence it appears that all of the Curial Congregations, particularly the Oriental, were reminded “that it is not their role to establish the Holy See's policy and that anything that affected dissidents, even the Orientals, was the exclusive competence of the Holy Office”. Dumont feared that Rome would now be tempted to return to the practical attitude displayed in Pius XI's “*Mortalium animos*”, which would be quite contrary to the dispositions of John XXIII.

The Rhodes incident was in the minds of those who appear to have been chiefly responsible for the establishment of the SPCU, Archbishop Lorenz Jaeger of Paderborn and Fr. Augustin Bea. In November 1959 Jaeger used the incident to press home to Bea the need for creating “an office of experts with a press-office attached”. Bea replied by agreeing that a commission “*pro motione oecumenica*” was needed and that he would speak about it with Pope John. Bea must have been encouraged by his conversation with the Pope, for on 1 January 1959, only two weeks after having received the red hat, Cardinal Bea wrote to a German theologian, Edward Stakemaier, asking that the Johann Adam Möhler Institut in Paderborn prepare a draft proposing the establishment of a Roman commission for the ecumenical movement⁸. Bea reviewed the proposal, which eventually was presented by Archbishop Jaeger, and forwarded it with his own support to Pope John XXIII on March 11, 1960.

Two days later, Bea was notified that the Pope had accepted the proposal in principle and wished Bea to begin drafting statutes for the new commission. Shortly after, the Pope decided to call the new office a “Secretariat” rather than a “Commission”, in order to give it greater room to move in a rather new area⁹. In the *motu proprio*, “*Superno Dei nutu*”, 5 June 1960, with which Pope John established the preparatory bodies for Vatican II, he assigned the SPCU the role of helping other Christians “to follow the work of the council and to find more easily the path by which they may arrive at the unity for which Jesus prayed so ardently”.

⁸ See Heinrich Bacht, “Kardinal Bea, Wegbereiter der Einheit”, *Catholica* 35 (3), 1981, pp. 173-188; Thomas F. Stransky, “The Foundation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity”, in: Alberic Stacpoole (ed.), *Vatican II Revisited by Those Who Were There*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1986, pp. 62-87; Stjepan Schmidt, “Giovanni XXIII e il Segretariato per l'unione dei cristiani”, *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 8, 1987, pp. 95-117.

⁹ S. Schmidt, *Agostino Bea...*, *op. cit.*, p. 348; T. Stransky, “The Foundation...”, *op. cit.*, p. 66; see Giovanni XXIII, *Lettere 1958-1963*, ed. L.F. Capovilla, Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1978, p. 495f.

Membership

The personnel of the SPCU were drawn from a wide variety of geographical areas, including in particular regions where ecumenical relations were especially important (North America, England, Holland, Germany, and Switzerland), and represented all the major Catholic ecumenical organizations. The Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions supplied not only J. Willebrands, appointed to serve as the secretary, but several others also: J. Höfer, C.-J. Dumont, J. Hamer, F. Thijssen, F. Davis, and C. Boyer, the last of these being also the head of the closest thing to a Vatican ecumenical office, “Unitas”. L. Jaeger, founder of the J.A. Möhler Institute of Paderborn, H. Volk, E. Stakemaier, F. Charrière, and J. Feiner represented the German and Swiss areas. North America was represented by five men: G. Weigel, G. Tavad, G. Baum, J. Cunningham, and E. Hanahoe. P. Dumont represented the ecumenical monastery of Chevotogne.

Of curial representation, the most important figures were C. Boyer and M. Maccarone, both associated with the Congregation for Seminaries and Universities. Conspicuously absent from the UC was any representative of the Holy Office, although Maccarone, Boyer and Hanahoe, a close friend of Fenton, tended to defend the Roman idea that the purpose of ecumenical conversations was the return of the erring brethren to the one true Church.

Competence

The role of the SPCU in the preparation of Vatican II was a matter of some controversy down to the eve of the Council. The vague description given in *Superno Dei nutu* was not clarified in the “*Quaestiones*” approved by the Pope on 2 July, which did not include a section on the new organism. This imprecision enabled Fr. Sebastien Tromp, secretary of the Preparatory Theological Commission (PTC), later to maintain to Willebrands that the SPCU was only “an information-office”¹⁰, a view apparently shared by Cardinal Ottaviani, president of the PTC.

Cardinal Bea and the members of the SPCU had grander ideas, however. In Bea's recommendation of the establishment of the SPCU, he included among its conciliar roles the study of the hopes and fears others were expressing about the Council and the preparation of appropriate responses¹¹. From the men who would soon be appointed members and consultants of the SPCU, Bea also received recommendations that its activities not be limited to providing information to non-Catholics but include also bringing their views to the attention of the preparatory commissions¹².

¹⁰ S. Schmidt, *Agostino Bea...*, *op. cit.*, p. 362n.

¹¹ See S. Schmidt, *Agostino Bea...*, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

¹² See, for example, C.-J. Dumont, “Le ‘motu proprio’ du 5 juin 1960”, *Vers l'unité chrétienne* 13 (5-6), 1960, p. 25, and Dumont's “Note sur le ‘Conseil’ ou ‘Secrétariat’ pour les rapports avec les non-catholiques institué par le motu proprio du 5 juin 1960”, sent to Bea on 8 July 1960; Dumont Papers.

It is not known whether the statutes of the SPCU, prepared by Bea himself and still unpublished today, contained a broader agenda than that outlined publicly by the Pope. But by July the SPCU had prepared a first draft of a program of work that included the study of doctrinal, liturgical, and spiritual questions as well as concrete actions to be taken to promote Christian unity¹³. In mid-September Bea and Willebrands took advantage of the meeting of the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions at Gazzada to discuss problems and procedures with several of the members and consultors. At the beginning of October a program of work was sent out to the members and consultors for comments. Many of the responses listed theological and practical questions the SPCU should address, preparing, if not schemata, then *vota* that would keep the CPR informed about the ecumenical dimensions of their work¹⁴.

At the first plenary session of the SPCU, a work-agenda was distributed and discussed. It outlined six major topics: I. the Secretariat itself, its purpose, the roles of participants, relations with the Oriental Commission; II. Catholic Ecumenism: principles and spirit, relation to conversion-work, contemporary tasks; III. Ecclesiology: hierarchical structure: episcopacy, papacy, and diaconate; the laity; the position of heretics and schismatics in the Church; IV. Theology: 1) the Word of God, its sovereignty, Bible and Tradition, its vital power; 2) liturgical applications: eucharistic celebration, communion under both kinds, use of vernacular, preaching; 3) religious freedom and tolerance; 3) mixed marriages; V. Practical questions: non-catholic observers, information, prayers for unity, the formula of abjuration, a proposed "Catholic-Evangelical Church", Protestant missions in Catholic lands, an ecumenical directory; VI. the Jewish question: relation between the two Testaments, reform of Christian education with regard to Jews, liturgical texts, a feast of "the just of the Old Testament"¹⁵.

Cardinal Bea's opening address at the first meeting began with the purposes of the SPCU. Equating the Secretariat to the preparatory commissions, he appealed to the general papal norms to argue that the SPCU also was "to study and investigate the matters selected by Us, taking into account the proposals of the bishops and the advice and proposals of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia. The Secretariat, therefore", he concluded, "is not a mere 'information-office,' but also is to prepare materials that concern the unity of Christians and that should therefore be

proposed to the Council"¹⁶.

As for areas of competence, Bea told the SPCU that, in response to many requests, Pope John had assigned questions concerning the Jews to the SPCU¹⁷. Relations with the Orthodox churches, on the other hand, would remain the competency of the commission for Oriental Churches, with the expectation, however, of close collaboration. This division of ecumenical labors was significant during most of the preparatory period, with the SPCU initially concentrating on relations with Protestants and only becoming concerned with the Orthodox when the commission for the Oriental Churches proved to be rather lethargic. Bea also noted that many of the questions the SPCU would discuss were concerns also of other preparatory commissions, particularly the PTC and the commissions on Bishops and on the Liturgy. "With all these Commissions the matters will be treated in such a way that, after we have discussed them in our meetings, we will transmit our proposals to them to be discussed by them or even, if need be, by a mixed Commission". At this early point, then, it does not seem that the CU intended to prepare schemata of its own to be proposed to the Council, but rather to prepare texts that would ensure that ecumenical concerns were taken into consideration by the other Preparatory Commissions. It would only be when this effort seemed to be fruitless that the SPCU began to prepare texts on its own authority.

As a result of the ensuing discussion it was decided to distribute the work among ten subcommissions which would study: 1. The relation of baptized non-Catholics to the Church (membership); 2. The Church's hierarchical structure; 3. The conversion of individuals and of communities; the restoration of the diaconate; 4. The priesthood of all believers and the condition of lay people in the Church; religious liberty and toleration. 5. The "Word of God" in the Church; 6. Liturgical questions: the vernacular; communion under both kinds; 7. Mixed marriages; 8. Octave of Prayers for Christian Unity: a new formula; 9. The central ecumenical problem according to today's orientation of the World Council at Geneva and especially according to that

¹³ S. Schmidt, *Agostino Bea...*, *op. cit.*, p. 363, who suggests that "the program relied heavily on the report submitted by the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions".

¹⁴ Many of the responses received can be found in the Stransky papers, St. Paul's College, Washington.

¹⁵ A copy of the program is found in the Stransky papers.

¹⁶ A. Bea, "Sermo introductorius Em.mi Cardinalis Praesidis", 14 November 1960; Stransky papers. Schmidt, Willebrands, and Carbone all agree that this judgment of Bea must have been authorized by Pope John himself; see S. Schmidt, *Agostino Bea...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 364-65; Johannes Willebrands, "Il Cardinal Agostino Bea: Il suo contributo al movimento ecumenico, alla libertà religiosa e all'instaurazione di nuove relazioni con il popolo ebraico", in *Atti del Simposio Card. Agostino Bea (Roma, 16-19 dicembre 1981)*, Rome: Pontificia Università Lateranense-Istituto «Ut Unum Sint», 1983, p. 7; V. Carbone, "Gli schemi preparati del Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano Secondo", *Monitor Ecclesiasticus* 96, 1971, p. 84.

¹⁷ For the background of this decision, see S. Schmidt, *Agostino Bea...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 351-56; J.M. Oesterreicher, "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: Introduction and Commentary", in: H. Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, New York/London: Herder & Herder/Burns & Oates, 1969, III, pp. 1-17.

Council's concept of unity; 10. Questions concerning the Jews¹⁸.

Method

The SPCU eventually established fifteen subcommissions¹⁹, composed of four or five men and headed by a bishop who served as *relator*. Within each subcommission a text was prepared by the bishop or by a theologian and then sent to the other members for comments. These subcommissions do not seem to have met often, instead communicating mostly by letter. These texts were then discussed, revised and approved at plenary sessions.

The method the subcommissions generally followed was the one the SPCU recommended to the Council itself in an epilogue to its document, *De structura hierarchica Ecclesiae*. Evoking a Pauline phrase frequently on the lips of Pope John, it inquired *Quomodo veritas in Concilio futuro facienda sit in caritate*. It found its model in the procedures of the Council of Trent, at which Catholic scholars first gathered accurate information about the views of the Reformers, examined and evaluated these in the light of Scripture and tradition, and finally offered a presentation of Catholic doctrine that would respond to the questions raised by the separated brethren. This method the SPCU recommended to the Fathers of Vatican II: they would not present the truth abstractly or independently of contemporary questions but from the beginning would study the questions and views of others in order to be able to respond to them from the fullness of Catholic faith²⁰. The studies undertaken by the SPCU's subcommissions and the *vota* they prepared would represent an introduction to ecumenical conversation necessary for the majority of the members of the preparatory commissions, and not just the Romans, who had had very little experience of such encounters before.

The Texts of the SPCU

The principal means by which the SPCU sought to have an effect upon the preparatory work was the communication to other Commissions of various texts that outlined the ecumenical implications of themes being considered. In this section we will review several of these texts, leaving to the next section a consideration of the major points at which it found itself in direct

confrontation with the orientations of the PTC²¹.

The subcommission on the laity produced a text *De sacerdotio fidelium*²². It was intended to respond to the Protestant criticism that the Catholic Church regarded the laity simply as passive subjects and neglected the doctrine of the common priesthood. The text studied the NT doctrine of the priesthood of the faithful and then offered eighteen *vota* about how this doctrine should be taught, particularly by showing that it is an authentic and not merely metaphorical priesthood, complementary to the ordained priesthood, and to be exercised by every Christian in the everyday course of his life. Although this text was sent to the PTC and to the AL, it does not appear to have had great influence on the texts they prepared.

The subcommission on liturgical questions offered a response to Protestant criticisms of the reduced role of Scripture in Catholic worship and of the passive role of the laity. This text asked the bishops to recognize the centrality of the eucharist over private devotions, to approve the restoration of communion under both kinds, concelebration, and *communicatio in sacris*, and to halt the practice of rebaptizing Christian converts to Catholicism. But the text also included a response to the exaltation of Latin that had recently resulted in the issuance of *Veterum sapientia*; the SPCU's *votum* asked "that the Council, when it presents the principles of liturgical renewal, carefully refrain from any expressions which might suggest that the Catholic liturgy is identified with the Latin Roman liturgy and that the Latin language is a necessary bond of Catholic unity". In May this text was sent to the LI, with which this subcommission had already been collaborating and a majority of whose members were grateful for this proposal²³.

The subcommission *De matrimoniis mixtis* at first proposed a text that would have asked for major changes in the Church's legislation with regard to marriages of Catholics to non-Catholic Christians: the restoration of the more lenient pre-Code attitude so that mixed marriages without proper form would not be considered invalid, the removal of the requirement that the Catholic party seek the conversion of the non-Catholic party, and the permission of some kind of religious ceremony. Opposition to these proposals was strong, however, both in the subcommission and in the plenary sessions, and the text was softened before it was approved in November 1961 and sent to the commission on Sacraments²⁴. The latter's text on the subject recommended certain changes in the Code for the sake of ecumenical sensitivity, but not enough for Bea, who at the Central Commission again urged the SPCU's position.

¹⁸ T. Stransky, "The Foundation of the Secretariat...", *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁹ This number was reached by the differentiation of subcommissions for the consideration of the questions of religious freedom and of Scripture and Tradition and by the addition of subcommissions to discuss the permanence of the Secretariat, the preparation of an ecumenical directory, and the invitation of non-Catholics to the Council.

²⁰ UC, "De structura hierarchica Ecclesiae" (May 1961) 47 (A-Stransky).

²¹ See also M. Velati, "La proposta ecumenica del segretariato per l'unità dei cristiani", in: G. Alberigo & A. Melloni (eds.), *Verso il Concilio Vaticano II (1960-1962): Passaggi e problemi della preparazione conciliare*, Genova: Marietti, 1993, pp. 273-350.

²² See M. Velati, "La proposta ecumenica...", *op. cit.*, pp. 293-296.

²³ See M. Velati, "La proposta ecumenica...", *op. cit.*, pp. 296-300.

²⁴ See M. Velati, "La proposta ecumenica...", *op. cit.*, pp. 309-314.

Another subcommission in which major disagreements appeared was the one appointed to reconsider a new orientation and formula for the Octave of Prayers for Christian Unity. E. Hanahoe, an American member of the Atonement Friars, the community founded by Paul Wattson, the originator of the Octave, resisted efforts to alter its orientation away from prayers for the return of other Christians to the Catholic Church²⁵. When the effort stalled, the subcommission was reoriented so that it would prepare a text simply on the general question of prayer for Christian unity. Here too objections were posed, particularly by Hanahoe and Boyer, whose model remained that of the “return” of the separated brethren and who found the proposed text in conflict with the chapter *De oecumenismo* that was being prepared in the PTC's schema *De Ecclesia*. A text was eventually completed and approved in April 1962. This was sent directly to the Central Commission, where it was discussed in June²⁶.

In the subcommission *De conversionibus individualibus et de conversione communitatum*, similar disagreements appeared. The main problem was the relationship between ecumenism and conversion, with Hanahoe tending to reduce the first to a search for the second. An effort was undertaken to elaborate a theology of ecumenism that would be sent to the PTC, but this was abandoned and work began instead on a more pastoral text that could be submitted directly to the Central Commission at its last meeting. This text, *De oecumenismo catholico*, was subtitled a “pastoral decree” in order to appear as a complement to the dogmatic approach followed in the PTC's chapter on the subject in its schema *De Ecclesia* and perhaps also to avoid appearing to infringe upon the PTC's competency. But besides giving practical guidance on how to engage in ecumenical activity, the SPCU's text also contained important doctrinal sections on the unity and uniqueness of the Church, on the salvific value of elements of the Church found outside the Catholic Church, and on ecumenism as an exercise of the Church's catholicity.

These views contrasted rather markedly with the positions adopted in the PTC's *De Ecclesia*, whose chapter on ecumenism, while acknowledging the existence of links between the Catholic Church and other Christian individuals and communities, emphasized their return as the goal of ecumenical activity, stressed the legitimacy of working for individual conversions, and devoted its longest section to a set of restrictive norms on *communicatio in sacris*. The two texts were brought together to the Central Commission in June 1962, where the majority of members urged that they be joined together, along with the text *De unitate Ecclesiae* of the commission on the Oriental Church-

es, into a single schema²⁷. The PTC refused to undertake the collaboration needed, however, and of the three texts, the SPCU's was the only one not printed for submission to the Council²⁸.

Finally, a subcommission of the SPCU took up the question of the Church's relationship with the Jewish people²⁹. In the elaboration of the text the chief roles were played by G. Baum and J. Oesterreicher, both converts from Judaism. The latter prepared a rather lengthy draft which repeated themes contained in an earlier text by Baum but placed them in a biblical and theological context and ended with several concrete proposals urging the Council to acknowledge the Church's roots in Judaism, to oppose the idea that the Jewish people are the object of a divine curse, to proclaim that the reconciliation of Jews and Christians is part of the Church's eschatological hope, and to condemn anti-semitism. To this first draft, prepared and discussed at the April 1961 meeting, it was later proposed to add a *votum* that Catholics show a more friendly and humble attitude towards the new state of Israel.

But the discussion of the text at the August meeting already revealed the difficulties that would await a text on the Jews. Besides the objections that could be foreseen from Arab countries, there was also, as Oesterreicher notes, the fact that many Catholic bishops and theologians were simply not prepared for it, the question of the mystery of Israel in the economy of salvation being still “the Cinderella of theology”³⁰. By the November 1961 meeting, fears began to be expressed that the text might represent an intervention in the complex political problems of the Middle East and that it rested on disputable interpretations of the Scriptures. It was decided to prepare a much briefer statement for presentation to the Council, perhaps in the schema *De libertate religiosa*, with another text on the links between Israel and Church to be prepared for the PTC's text *De Ecclesia*. A single-page text was then prepared and approved. On 2 February 1962 Pope John told Bea that the text on the Jews could be submitted directly to the Central Commission, “without the intervention of any other Commission”³¹.

This brief *Decretum de Judaeis* was scheduled to be discussed at the last meeting of the Central Commission in June 1962. But on the last day of that session, Cicognani announced that after consultation with Bea, the Secretariat of State had decided to withdraw the text from the Central's agenda and not to submit it to the Council. After implying that the decree did not fit the

²⁷ *ADP* II/4, pp. 785-812.

²⁸ See M. Velati, “La proposta ecumenica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 320-326.

²⁹ See M. Velati, “La proposta ecumenica...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 331-338; J.M. Oesterreicher, “The Declaration on the Relationship...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-46.

³⁰ J.M. Oesterreicher, *art. cit.*, p. 39, and, for illustrations, see pp. 32-36.

³¹ “Prolusio Em.mi Card. Bea”, *Sessio generalis VI* (6-10 martii 1962), 1 (A-Stransky).

²⁵ See E.F. Hanahoe & T.F. Cranny (eds.), *One Fold: Essays and Documents to Commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Chair of Unity Octave 1908-1958*, Garrison, NY: Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, 1959.

²⁶ *Acta et documenta Concilio oecumenico Vaticano II apparando; Series secunda (praeparatoria)*, Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanus, 1969ff, II/4, pp. 813-816, 822-834. Hereafter cited *ADP*.

purposes of the Council and asking why this particular decree was being offered —“If we speak about the Jews, why not also about Muslims?”— Cicognani alluded to the real reasons for the decision:

“Everyone knows the bitter disputes today between Jews and Arabs; suspicion of politics easily arise: that we are favoring one side or the other; false rumors about this are already spreading”³².

The rumors to which Cicognani referred were aroused by the announcement that Dr. Chaim Wardi, an official in the state of Israel's Ministry of Religious Affairs, would attend the Council as a representative of the World Jewish Congress. This action, which appears to have surprised the Vatican, led Arab governments to protest at the special treatment seemed to be accorded to Jews and, it seemed, to Israel. In these circumstances, Cicognani decided to follow the ways of political prudence and ordered the text withdrawn³³.

Relations with the Preparatory Theological Commission

During the whole of the preparatory period, the PTC insisted on its supreme and exclusive competence in any matters that concerned doctrine. For this reason it consistently refused invitations to form mixed commissions with other preparatory bodies while demanding that the latter submit any material other than the merely practical for its review. It was particularly inclined to this policy with regard to the SPCU which the PTC's leaders did not believe was authorized to prepare schemata for the Council's consideration. Since the Secretariat did not share this reductive view of its own competency, the ground was prepared for some major controversy³⁴.

Two areas where clashes occurred concerned issues of primary significance for Pope John's Council and with great ecumenical consequence: the Scriptures and the Church. The question of the Bible arose in two distinct ways: the interpretation of the Scriptures and the relation between Scripture and Tradition. On the first, the PTC's schema *De fontibus revelationis* adopted a position which reflected apprehensions widespread in the Church over recent Catholic biblical scholarship. These had recently been given fierce and unnuanced expression in the very aggressive article in which A. Romeo criticized even the Pontifical Biblical Institute for its endorsement of methods he

believed were threatening the faith. The PTC's text was largely devoted to warnings against contemporary biblical hermeneutics and to insistence on the prerogatives of magisterial authority. When this text reached the Central Commission, Cardinal Bea made a vigorous defence of Catholic biblical scholars; but subsequent revisions of the PTC's text did not greatly alter the tone or content of the schema.

In the view of the SPCU, the PTC's text also ignored the vital role of the Scriptures in the Church. To compensate, the SPCU prepared its own “Pastoral Schema on the Word of God” in which it outlined a theology of the Word of God not simply as a set of doctrines found in Scripture and Tradition but as a living source of life for the Church through the reading of the Bible, in the liturgy, and in preaching and catechesis. This material, without notable effect during the preparatory period, would later be used in the final chapter of *Dei verbum*.

On the question of relations between Scripture and Tradition, the PTC's text stated that these represent two “sources”, both of which are necessary since the Scriptures do not contain all the truths revealed by God. This position had become the common interpretation of the Council of Trent and as such was taken to represent the necessary response of Catholics to the Protestant *sola scriptura* principle. Recent work by Catholic scholars, however, had argued that Trent did not intend to settle the issue; and a considerable controversy was in full course during the preparatory period. Within the SPCU a subcommission was formed which prepared a text that asked that the question of the material sufficiency of the Scriptures not be settled by the Council on the grounds that legitimate differences existed among Catholic theologians on the matter. Surprisingly, Cardinal Bea did not raise this issue when the PTC's text came before the Central Commission, perhaps because the controversy over biblical interpretation occupied his interest. But the SPCU's *votum* on the question was ready for use when this question erupted at the first session of the Council. And in the end *Dei verbum* left the question open.

Differences between the SPCU and the PTC were also acute with regard to ecclesiological issues. The PTC's schema *De Ecclesia* and various *vota* of the SPCU were in open disagreement (a) on the basic image of the Church to be presented by the Council, with the PTC concentrating on visible and institutional elements and the SPCU on the Church's relationship to Christ and on dimensions of mystery; (b) on membership in the Church, on which the SPCU followed Cardinal Bea's proposal of a distinction between being a member of the Mystical Body in virtue of baptism and being a Roman Catholic while the PTC insisted on Pius XII's identification of the Mystical Body with the Catholic Church; (c) on episcopacy and primacy, where the PTC's text stressed that bishops derive their jurisdictional authority from papal delegation while the SPCU argued that this question too should be left open; and (d) on the question of religious freedom on which the PTC urged a restatement of the classical modern view that in principle states have an obligation to favor the one true religion and may at most simply tolerate other religions, while the SPCU wished to go

³² ADP II/4, pp. 22-23.

³³ See J.M. Oesterreicher, *art. cit.*, pp. 41-42; S. Schmidt, *Agostino Bea...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 400-401; J. Willebrands, “Cardinal Bea's Attitude to Relations with the Jews: Unpublished Details”, *Simposio Card. Agostino Bea...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-83, who reports that the same circumstances led the Secretariat of State to ask Bea to suppress an article about to appear in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, “Are the Jews a deicide people and ‘cursed by God?’” Bea agreed but then allowed the article to appear, over the name of L. Hertling, in *Stimmen der Zeit* 88, 1961-62, pp. 16-25.

³⁴ On what follows, see the detailed discussion in *History of Vatican II...*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 272-300.

beyond the notion of mere toleration and to urge the right to religious freedom for all.

On all these ecclesiological matters some informal communications took place between the two bodies, but without much effect. Frustrated by this lack of cooperation, Bea obtained from Pope John permission to send his Secretariat's statement on religious freedom directly to the Central Commission without prior reference to the PTC. This may explain the dramatic confrontation which took place at the Central's last meeting when Ottaviani openly stated that the SPCU had no authority to prepare such a text, all such questions, because they imply doctrinal issues, being subject to the PTC. Bea vigorously repudiated this position, and the Central Commission itself ordered that a mixed commission be appointed to reconcile the two texts on religious freedom and tolerance. Once again, however, and largely because of the intransigence of the PTC, this mixed commission never met and the PTC undertook on its own a revision of its chapter on the question. At the first session of the Council, this latter text was included in the schema *De Ecclesia*; the SPCU's views would only enter the Council's deliberations at the second session.

Conclusion

During the preparatory period, the SPCU represented the institutional counterweight to the other preparatory commissions and in particular to the PTC. In establishing it, Pope John left its organization and purpose deliberately vague in order to give it room to operate and find its own way. With the Pope's apparent support at every point, it went far beyond the modest role he had assigned to it in *Superno Dei nutu*. He assigned it particularly sensitive issues, such as that of the Jews. He supported it in its determination to be more than an "information bureau". At a certain point he authorized it to prepare schemata which would go directly to the Central Commission without having to be reviewed by the PTC. When the commission for the Oriental

Churches proved incapable of advancing discussions with the Orthodox, Pope John also assigned this task to the SPCU. Finally, the Pope's own stated ecumenical interests, reflected in his meetings with the heads of other Christian bodies, was well known and served as a brake upon criticisms of the SPCU, not least of all from the PTC.

It cannot be said that the SPCU greatly influenced the texts prepared for the Council's consideration. Its position on mixed marriages was not reflected in the text on the question prepared by the commission on the Sacraments. It was unable to cooperate with the commission on the Oriental Churches whose text on ecumenism totally ignored questions raised by Protestants. Above all, it had little effect on the texts of the PTC on revelation and on the Church. All these relations with other preparatory bodies illustrate what was called the "original sin" of the preparation of Vatican II: nearly air-tight divisions of labor and the lack of effective general coordination.

On the other hand, in the *vota* it prepared, the SPCU had available, for use both in the conciliar discussions and in the eventual revision of the official prepared texts, a series of arguments that would ensure that the ecumenical dimension would be an integral part of the Council. One may think here of the questions of liturgical languages, the relation between Scripture and Tradition, the role of the Word of God in the life of the Church, the historicity of the Scriptures, a theology of the Church as mystery and as People of God, membership in the Church, the laity, the relation between episcopacy and primacy, religious freedom, the Jews. Because the SPCU had done its work well, the Council Fathers were to have resources available with which to effect, particularly during the Council's first period, the revolution in perspective and purpose that defined the Council's great drama and historical accomplishment. In the end the Second Vatican Council, both as an event and in its texts, far more closely represented the vision of the SPCU than that of any of the other preparatory bodies.



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On the Path to Christian Unity: Will Words Alone Suffice?

by

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Introduction

Sixty-eight years ago, on January 6, 1928, Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical entitled *Mortalium Animos* which was to serve as the guide for Roman Catholic "participation" in, or should I rather say, non-participation in the Christian Unity movement! In a certain respect this letter attempted to bring to light the dangers inherent in certain movements such as the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements and other such movements which were described as "panchristian". While these movements were not mentioned explicitly, it is clear from the Roman Catholic Church's refusal to accept invitations to participate in meetings organized by them that these and others, which were influenced by "indifferentism and modernism" that relativized dogmatic truths, were intended. In one respect then, the words of this encyclical letter attempted to establish the Catholic Church's way to Christian unity, namely the path of a "great return" or reunion to the Roman Catholic Church. Were these words sufficient? How was this received by both Catholics and other Christians?

On the other hand, since the 1960's, innumerable official and unofficial theological dialogues have been in progress. To date there are over 25 dialogues alone on the international level. They have produced a myriad of texts; enough to fill two volumes of over 2500 pages¹. Obviously the spirit has changed since 1928. Indeed the Roman Catholic Church has been in the forefront of initiating these dialogues which exist among all sorts of fellow Christians and often at times in spite of mounting psychological and political pressures from within the Churches themselves. The goal of most of these dialogues is "full communion", namely the re-establishment of a *koinonia* which recog-

nizes fully one another's ministry, sacraments, service and Christian witness and life. However, on this path to Christian unity have words alone been sufficient to reach the goal? What else is needed?

What I would like to share with you are some thoughts on the way the whole search for the re-establishment of Christian unity is going. Obviously I will be speaking as a Roman Catholic but one who seeks to critically evaluate my own tradition. The human word is a powerful instrument. Is the word alone capable of producing the effect that it signifies? If we believe that human speech is constitutive of our reality then the words which we speak should be true to the very depths of our being. There is something which religious speech takes into account which many positivists are not willing to accept: namely that which goes beyond what can be verified in language. Paul Ricœur in an essay in a completely different context speaks of the need to reach the very memory of humanity and seek its healing². From my perspective then this aspect of the search for Christian unity needs to be evoked more frequently. Rather if I am true to my way of looking at reality, then I need to really say it needs to be allowed to have the upper hand in all of our dealings. But we shall return to this later. First let us look at how, on the path to Christian unity, words have not been able to stop or slow down the search nor have they been able to realize its goal.

1. The Modern Day Ecumenical Movement

Obvious I do not want to trace here the beginnings of the ecumenical movement, others have done this is an extremely thorough way. But what I do want to discuss here is the fact that this modern ecumenical movement has a very short existence. While already in the last century there were those who felt that the scandal of the divisions of Christians could not continue and that the agenda which the **world** was setting needed to be taken

¹ The most complete collection of the agreed statements is found in the four volume Italian edition of the *Enchiridion Ecumenicum* published by Dehoniane in Bologna (1986 and following). Here I am referring to volumes 1 and 3 which concern only the dialogues on the international level, see S.J. Voicu & G. Cereti (eds.), *Enchiridion Ecumenicum. Documenti del dialogo teologico interconfessionale. 1 Dialoghi internazionali 1931-1984*, Bologna: EDB, 1986 (pp. 1447) and G. Cereti & J.F. Puglisi (eds.), *Enchiridion Ecumenicum. Documenti del dialogo teologico interconfessionale. 3 Dialoghi internazionali 1985-1994*, Bologna: EDB, 1995 (pp. 1175).

² P. Ricœur, "Quel éthos nouveau pour l'Europe?", in: P. Koslowski (ed.), *Imaginer l'Europe. Le marché intérieur européen tâche culturelle et économique*, Paris: Cerf (coll. "Passages"), 1992, pp. 107-116. See the stimulating articles by J.E. Vercausse, "Memoria ecclesiale e perdono", *Studi ecumenici* 13, 2 (1995), 141-158 and B. Brown Zikmund, "What is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?", *Ecumenical Trends* 25, 9 (1996), 129-136.

more seriously, the real start of this movement is at the beginning of this century precisely at the famous missionary conference of 1910 in Edinburgh, Scotland where a young African missionary issued a call to put an end to the divisions among Christians because these divisions were impeding the missionary spirit and task of preaching the Gospel. The Edinburgh conference was more than one of a series of events whereby divided Christians were expressing a desire to get beyond their painful divisions. In the light of the distant divisions growing out of the separation of the East from the West and of the disastrous splintering of Western christianity at the time of the Reformation, 86 years is not a very long period of time. What seems peculiar, especially to this American-living-in-Europe, is the vivacity of the memory of these historic events which have not been forgotten. In some parts of Europe today as we have seen just a few weeks ago in Northern Ireland, the struggles and pains of centuries ago are present to the memories of people today as if they were events which occurred yesterday. We shall return to this theme in a moment.

What is important for me is the fact that the time span over which this ecumenical movement has been active is a relatively brief period of human history. This is one of the reasons why I remain a person of hope in spite of those who talk about the slowing down of the forward movement or an apparent waning of interest. So much has happened in such a short time that there is a need for assimilation of the results of our progress. However, this need not be an excuse for not pushing even more energetically for progress in the relationships between Churches.

I began this lecture by citing the papal encyclical *Mortalium Animos*. I wanted to evoke its memory because it shows how far Roman Catholics have come in their understanding of what Church unity is about. Obviously the position taken in that document represented the first official statement of how Catholics understood this new ecumenical movement that was coming to birth. There was not an enthusiastic embracing of the movement but rather a '*mise en garde*' even a fear of what the document called a panchristian movement. It should be noted that there seems to be a rehabilitation of this concept from its negative connotations to more positive ones. John Paul II has recently used it in his Apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (n. 55) when he calls for a panchristian meeting of Christians of other denominations and traditions.

To prove our point here that words alone are insufficient to either bring about or to retard Christian Unity, it should be noted that this letter of Pius XI neither stopped the Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants from going ahead with plans for meetings of Christians in Europe nor did it prevent Roman Catholics from being engaged in one way or another in these meetings and other encounters where Christian theologians and scholars were gathering.

Today we know how painful and costly it was for some of the important theologians of our century. One need only think of the experiences of Cardinals Yves Congar or Henri de Lubac. It was only at the end of this century that they were recognized by the Catholic Church for their important contributions made to the

ecumenical movement and the evolution of theology in general. The words of interdiction did not stop these two men who obediently accepted their imposed silence but through their constant research, reading and eventual writings gave a strong witness that moving to action without words had a lasting effect.

Père Congar once told me that it was during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity when he was giving a series of conferences which were to eventually become his famous book on ecumenism *Chrétiens désunis. Principes d'un "œcuménisme" catholique*³ that he realized that this mission of christian unity was to be under the sign of the cross and suffering. It was at this time that the disease which was to plague him made its appearance. I could not but help think of something that another theologian said much later when talking about his experiences in the concentration camps. Jürgen Moltmann noted that it was in the solidarity of sin and of suffering that we come closer together. The closer we come to the cross of Christ the closer we come to one another. Christ who assumed our human condition to redeem it, draws all to himself in being lifted up upon the cross (John 3, 14f). Evidently in the context of the camps, it was not words that mattered but a unity of action which enabled men and women to rise above their divisions and offer themselves for each other. This experience brings me back then to something which is urgently needed on the path to Christian unity, namely that of a healing of memories.

2. The Healing of Memories

Words alone will not suffice in our search for Christian unity. We might even observe that we are committed to ecumenism but ask are we really committed to Christian Unity? Some may say that this is nit picking and is of little importance. In all sincerity each of our ecclesial traditions needs to ask this question. In my own tradition, I often feel that this is the case. We become very much involved in the theological and scientific aspect of ecumenism today (the dialogues, the composition of more and better "agreed statements" and so on). But the searing question needs to be put: Are we truly committed to Christian unity?

It is at this level that we need to raise the issue of the healing of memories. This is so because we all too often return to some stumbling block raised up from the dark of our past, our historical memories. It is maybe in this light that the reflections of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur might prove helpful. In a very intriguing essay that he prepared on the efforts for the unification of Europe in the future that he raises the point of the inability of peoples to go beyond their past. Needless to say he does not propose that we forget or cancel our past; this would be irresponsible since we always learn from our past. However, the dangerous hurts which reside in our memories need to somehow be healed. For the Christian we cannot give up our memories since it is there that we encounter God. But how do we encounter God there except in and through our own proper histories. This is precisely where the problem arises. When we recount or

³ Paris: Cerf (coll. "Unam Sanctam", 1), 1937. English translation published as *Divided Christendom. A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion*, London: The Centenary Press, 1939.

re-tell our histories we often do so with selective memories. That is, we tell the things which we want to emphasize or which will support the points that we want to make. What is established is a “*narrative identity*” of those involved in the story. For example the story of the split between the churches of the West and of the East can be told by vilifying one or the other (this is usually done!) side depending on who is telling the history. The sequence of events can be re-ordered and thereby give a different twist by the other who recounts the same story. This effect is referred to as a mobile identity. What happens then is “the narrative identity participates in the mobility of the recounting and in its dialectic of order and disorder”⁴. This serves as a good example of what we do when we tell the history of others and why we have several histories of the same event retold.

“If each one receives a certain narrative identity from the histories which are told of them or that they tell of themselves, this identity is mixed with that of others in such a way as to engender stories on a second level which are themselves the intersections between several stories”⁵.

To put this another way, every history of an individual or a religious denomination is at the same time a segment of the history of the life of another. What needs to be done then in the context of the reconciliation or exchange of memories is to translate with imagination and sympathy the history of the other. The mobile identifications contribute to the refiguration of our own past and of the past of others through a constant remodeling of the histories which we tell about ourselves and about others⁶. What is needed then on this path to Christian unity is the beginning of the re-telling of our histories, not each one doing theirs apart from the other but a re-telling of our stories together. Moreover, words alone will not suffice because it is not by the composition of “new histories” that the wounds of the past will be healed and the corrections of misperceptions righted but rather by the pardon which will be granted. This is perhaps the most powerful aspect of this “putting into practice”. Ricœur sees the importance of tradition at this point. What he understands by “tradition is transmission, transmission of things said, of beliefs professed, of norms assumed, and so forth. However, such a transmission is only lively if tradition remains the other partner of the pair which it forms with innovation”⁷. This innovation is the necessary part the dynamic liberating the future from tradition. For we cannot simply repeat what we have received (lest we betray what we have received!) but we must constantly reinterpret what we have received for our generation and for the next. This is the way in which tradition becomes intelligible.

⁴ P. Ricœur, “Quel éthos...”, *op. cit.*, p. 110 (“l’identité narrative participe à la mobilité du récit, à sa dialectique d’ordre et de désordre”).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Another element which Ricœur considers necessary in this whole process is pardon or forgiveness. We shall return to this element in a minute.

3. Words which are not spoken from the depths of one's existence betray

It would be necessary to explore a whole discourse on symbolic expression to be able to adequately say something about how words are constitutive of the reality spoken. Be it sufficient here to affirm that when one speaks a word, that person projects herself into her other but in speaking the word she comes to possess herself. This is why words are necessary for an intelligent being. One also makes it possible for oneself to disclose oneself to others. The production of the word is that process by which I am constituted as an intelligent being, the process whereby I come to possess myself and I also make it possible for others to know and love me by my own self-knowledge.

Language is therefore a dis-closure moment - as it were a moment of truth. Truth in the sense that it confronts what is *said* with what *is*. Words which are not spoken from the very heart of our Christian identity are not moments of authenticity. We have all had experiences where we perceive an “inauthenticity” of a person whose actions belie what is spoken in verbal discourse. If we were to take that person at “face value,” namely “on his/her word alone”, we would easily be duped by him. It does not take long to see that their real beliefs are not in conformity with their speech when all that they do goes contrary to all that they say. So too, with our ecumenical discourses. Far too often our many “words of agreement,” (substantial, partial or otherwise), the results of our theological dialogues, some how are not confirmed or verified in what we do.

Obviously the converse can be true. In some cases what the churches do, demonstrates a higher level of agreement than what they say together. However in other cases there still needs to be a change in the very way we do this to bring our actions more into conformity with our words. Perhaps this can be illustrated by reference to the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Statement on the Eucharist which affirms that both churches believe in the same way that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist⁸. We need to seek a verification of this statement in the Eucharistic celebrations of both churches. Why would Lutherans take eucharistic bread left over after a celebration and either dispose of it in a waste basket or reuse it at another celebration? On the other hand, Lutherans might ask their Catholic partners why is it, if we agree that the Eucharist is a *gathering* of God's people, a *sharing* of the Word of God and of the bread broken and the cup poured out, that Roman Catholic priests continue to “say private masses”

⁸ Joint Roman Catholic - Lutheran Commission, “The Eucharist. Final Report of the Joint Roman Catholic - Lutheran Commission, 1978”, §§48-55 in H. Meyer & L. Vischer (eds.), *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, New York/Ramsey/Geneva: Paulist Press/World Council of Churches (coll. “Faith and Order Paper”, 108), 1984, pp. 203-205.

without the presence of God's people?

Or again we might consider the fact that officially the Roman Church does not recognize the ministry of other churches from the Reformation tradition. However, when Pope John Paul II has received some Finnish Lutheran bishops he has given them pectoral crosses. Obviously he does not consider these bishops to be simply lay people but rather spiritual leaders of their people; there is a kind of reception going on which goes beyond our words and maybe we say, in spite of them! Just another way of realizing that something more than words is needed and that we need to be sure that the words that we speak are, in fact, constitutive of our true being and will not turn on us in condemnation and betrayal.

4. The Dialogue results are sincere but we need them to live in our ecclesial structures.

I would certainly not call into question the sincerity of the dialogue progress which has gone on now for over 30 years between some Churches and ecclesial communions. However we are now entering into a new phase of the dialogue process. This new phase can be called one of reception of the results. Far too often we do not correctly understand what this means. The term "reception" is a technical term which involves a critical evaluation in light of the apostolic tradition. As the word itself indicates it involves a process of doing something again. Since the goal of the search for Christian unity is that of "communion" which does not mean the amalgamation of chunks of ecclesial material taken from different traditions but rather, as Jean Tillard has said, "an acceptance of conversion: *together* we are converted to that which *together* we have rediscovered or reaffirmed concerning the apostolic faith and the demands of the Gospel".⁹

For me this is the focal point where words alone will not suffice. Again here some of the insights of Tillard are helpful. When speaking about the process of ecumenical reception he notes:

"...when ecclesial groups are presented within agreement formulated by commissions of experts they are not asked to consider as their first question, 'can it be seen as complying with our tradition?'; but rather, 'is it in harmony with the authentic, i.e., apostolic, tradition?'"

"When understood in this perspective, it is clear that ecumenical 'reception' is wholly dependent upon a re-reading (i.e., a studying afresh), on a re-evaluating and a re-confessing of the apostolic faith itself, the sole norm of an ecclesial communion of faith."¹⁰

It is at this level that we *together* need to transform our very existence. That which we speak must become enfleshed in the structures of our churches and ecclesial communions. In other words, reception of the results of the ecumenical dialogues in

⁹ J.M.R. Tillard, "«Reception»; A Time to Beware of False Steps", *Ecumenical Trends* 14, 10 (1985), 145.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

each of our traditions necessarily demands conversion. We should be careful here since we are not talking about converting the other side to our way of seeing things or doing things but rather we are talking about something which involves both partners. What must prevail is a collective conversion to the apostolic faith itself. This faith is rooted in the very Word of God and hence it is a conversion to that WORD spoken once but heard always afresh and new in each generation. It is this WORD which must govern our decisions and our mutual understanding of the apostolic faith and how we seek to live it in our structures. We need to ask ourselves if these agreed statements represent an authentic reception in the sense that we have been describing it above or rather if they are words which have been multiplied and stock piled without being words of authentic, communal conversion. If they do not lead to a change of heart which in turn leads to a change in the way of being for the world, then we have every right to consider them as words which betray our very existence (or at least what we say we are and are trying to achieve on this path to Christian unity).

Once again Jean Tillard warns us of these temptations that we can fall into very easily. First the "temptation to be content with a union based on what is little more than a triviality held in common ... and the second ... is that of the total absorption of the frailest group by the most forceful, without the latter having even acknowledged the prerequisite of personal involvement."¹¹ This leads us to our point which affirms that what is at the heart of the quest for Christian unity is profound conversion; and conversion is not a matter of words alone!

5. Conversion is the heart of the matter (conversion of ecclesial structures needs to take place)

It is at this point that I believe it opportune to return to the models proposed by Paul Ricœur especially that of the model of pardon. At the heart of the Gospel is the call for forgiveness. Starting from this perspective Ricœur understands this model of pardon as a new way of revising the past and, through it also the narrative identity of each one. Seeing these personal histories, stories, pasts being intertwined is likewise a way of seeing that these histories, stories, pasts must be told mutually. It is where one can see the real fruit of the exchange or healing of memories taking place. Ricœur says that "pardon is likewise a specific form of this mutual revision from which deliverance of promises not kept in the past is a very precious effect."¹² What I am talking about is not a cancellation of the past but rather a going beyond those things which tend to perpetuate a state of alienation. In this sense then we can talk about changing our common future.

At this level, it is once again Paul Ricœur who offers a fresh way of looking at the situation. He writes:

"the exchange of memories required by our second model

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹² P. Ricœur, "Quel éthos...", *op. cit.*, p. 113.

demands, according to this new model [of pardon], the exchange of the memory of suffering inflicted and experienced. Now this exchange requires more than imagination and sympathy that I have evoked above. This more than anything else has something to do with pardon, to the degree that pardon consists in «releasing the debt»...” He continues affirming that “the ‘poetic’ power (of pardon) [that refers both to the ‘creativity on the level of the dynamic of action, and to song and hymn on the level of verbal expression] consists in the breaking of the law of the irreversibility of time, changing, if not the past (referring to the collection of those things which happened) at least its meaning for men and women of the present. It does this by removing the weight of the guilt which paralyzes the relationship of men who act out and live their own story. It does not *abolish* the debt since we are and remain the inheritors of the past but removes the suffering of the debt.”¹³

What I want to maintain here is that this type of pardon is based on a deep and abiding conversion of heart which is manifested in a new way of thinking and living. This in fact is the point that the Groupe des Dombes, an independent group of Catholics and Protestants founded by Abbé Paul Couturier together with Rev. Richard Bäuml in 1937 in France, was trying to make in its statement “For the Conversion of the Churches” published in 1991¹⁴. Obviously this is not the first time that the search for Christian unity has been attached to the idea of conversion. The Second Vatican Council in its Decree on Ecumenism states emphatically that “there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion” (UR 7). The quotation goes on to state that “for it is from newness of attitudes of mind, from self-denial and unstinted love, that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way”.

In a similar way, the statement from the Groupe des Dombes spoke about three types of *conversion* which correspond to three *identities*: Christian, ecclesial and confessional. At first hearing we might find the correlation “identity-conversion” a bit odd but in reality they are like flip sides of the same coin. What makes this discovery so relevant is the fact that the social sciences are used as an aid for theologizing and hence enable a discovery of new relationships.

Identity is seen as a “living reality: it is a concrete expression of continuity and change”¹⁵. Identity refers back to a history which precedes us; it makes us what we are in advance of ourselves. This identity is like a “construction” or a “pilgrimage” as it is always building onto a foundation, moving from reality to another reality and hence combines a stable, unchangeable part and new elements. Therefore our identity is progressively built

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 113f.

¹⁴ Groupe des Dombes, *Pour la conversion des Églises*, Paris: Centurion, 1991. English translation *For the Conversion of the Churches*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, §10.

while respecting the essential core. Anthropology and sociology teach us that there is a collective identity as well. The Groupe des Dombes expresses its conviction that “conversion is an essential constituent of an identity which seeks to remain alive and, quite plainly, faithful to itself”¹⁶. This is the link that can be proposed between these two realities of identity and conversion. I would use the expression of the philosopher Gabriel Marcel who talks about “creative fidelity” being at the heart of this dynamic.

Briefly, we can describe the distinctions made by the document this way: at the heart of each of the three identities differentiated into Christian, ecclesial and confessional, is a corresponding conversion which gives each identity its foundation and form.

Christian identity consists in the mystery of “God’s fatherly initiative in communicating himself to human beings by sending his Son Jesus Christ and bestowing his Holy Spirit”¹⁷. The conversion that gives foundation and form is the appropriation by faith and the implementation of that mystery, which baptism inaugurates and celebrates¹⁸.

Ecclesial identity means that the church is the body of Christ where “by reason of the gift of the Spirit ... the irreversible and unfailing presence of the gift God has given of himself to human beings in Jesus Christ”¹⁹ is made manifest. “Ecclesial conversion is the constant effort of the church community as such to strive towards its Christian identity”²⁰; for example *ecclesia semper reformanda*. Ecclesial identity therefore is at the service of Christian identity²¹.

The third element in this triad is **confessional identity** which relates to the particular form and mode each church has of confessing its faith. Conversion at this level is the most difficult. Hence “confessional conversion is first of all conversion to the God of Jesus Christ and consequently a fraternal reconciliation among the churches as they seek full communion and full mutual ecclesial recognition — not to the detriment of confessional identity, but for purification and deepening in line with the Gospel”²².

I have chosen the document by the Groupe des Dombes to illustrate my principal thesis that while the dialogue process is important and has produced some significant, clarifying statements and agreements, these words alone are insufficient for achieving Christian unity. What is needed is a radical conversion — a change in the way of thinking and acting toward oneself and toward the other. Unless changes are made in our structures, in our thinking modes, in our witnessing, we can produce all the words and statements we want but we will not arrive at our goal

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, §14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §17.

¹⁸ *Cf. ibid.*, §19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, §41.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §25.

²² *Ibid.*, §51.

of Christian unity!

6. Words will suffice if they are constitutive of our new, converted reality

We have seen that words were insufficient to stop the forward march of the ecumenical movement at the beginning of this century just as they are inadequate for bringing about the fulfillment of that movement at the end of this century. If it is true that “one picture is worth a thousand words”, then we need to imagine us, all, gathered around the table of the Lord. We need to be seen standing together behind gospel values in solidarity with the world's poor and in protest in the face of the destruction of this planet whose care we have been entrusted with. These will indeed be words that are constitutive of our new, converted identity. Needless to say I am not proposing the elimination of our agreed statements nor the dissolution of our bilateral and multilateral dialogues. What I am making, is a plea for the reception of their results which involves a “going beyond” the words that compose them to a new way of being together for the sake of gospel. I realize that this is going to cause each of our churches pain and suffering, and maybe even the loss of some of our brothers and sisters as we begin to live out of our conversion and our renewed identities. However, if we move forward with that sense of healing of memories and of the realization of pardon that Paul Ricœur indicated, I also believe that we will have made a step in the right direction. The more that we tell and retell our own personal and communal stories, the more we will discover that they are intertwined in the one story of Jesus Christ.

The grace given moment of conversion is the one reality we need to keep always before our eyes. What will this mean for some? It might mean a letting go of a view of church life which seeks to justify the exclusion of some members from full participation by seeking to justify a practice with a debatable epistemological stance. For others, it might mean a shedding of political interference in the organization of the structure and the

exercise of the ministry of direction in the church, in short the end of the practice of the “*cuius regio, eius religio*” formula applied since the peace of Augsburg in 1555 or the cessation of erastianism. Still for others, it could mean making liturgical changes to bring about a greater consistency between “what is said and what is done” in the principle of the *lex orandi, lex credendi*. This conversion will help some rediscover that “unity and holiness are not only the characteristics of the church *invisible* but are also to be lived out in the historical and confessional reality of the *visible* church”²³. On the other hand, others could better relate the catholicity and apostolicity of the church to its unity and holiness by going beyond an exclusively hierarchical understanding of the church which often times has disqualified religiously the laity from exercising its proper role as authentic witnesses to the apostolic faith in its articulation and transmission.

Conversion then, is at the very heart of the ecumenical movement because it is always a *kairos* moment, a graced time. If we believe that there is a slacking off, a slowing down or even an abandonment of the ecumenical movement, then each of us needs to attend more attentively to our own conversion experience both individually and collectively as churches. This path, this pilgrimage to Christian unity is a place for us to recount our stories of these moments of conversion. Maybe some of these stories will resemble those of Chaucer on the road to Canterbury or those of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. What is important is that they be true stories of conversion on the journey from despair to hope, from death to life and let them not be told by words alone. The only sermon which can give a credible witness to the world is our conversion to Christ and this can never be given by words alone but only be our being together for the *diakonia* of the world.

²³ *Ibid.*, §123.