

Chapter 10

Meeting *par cum pari*

Unitatis Redintegratio and Ecumenical Progress

Hans Boersma

The spirit of mutual appreciation and friendship that permeated the conference on which this essay is based is reason for gratitude. Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, mentions how important it is for Catholics to "become familiar with the outlook of our separated brethren," and it goes on to call for "meetings of the two sides—especially for discussion of theological problems—where each can treat with the other on equal footing (*par cum pari*)."¹ The conference "*Ad Limina Apostolorum: Vatican II and the Future of Catholic-Protestant Ecumenism*" seems to me one such meeting intended by the Council in its decree, promulgated on November 21, 1964.² To be sure, the notion of meeting "on equal footing" (*par cum pari*) is

1. Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio [UR]*), in *The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, vol. 1 of *Vatican Council II*, edited by Austin Flannery, rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello; Dublin, Ireland: Dominican, 1975), no. 9 (p. 461); *Acta Apostolicae Sedis (AAS)* 57 (1965): 90–112, at 98. The notion of meeting *par cum pari* first occurred in the 1949 Instruction *Ecclesia Catholica* of the Holy Office, which for the first time and cautiously gave an opening to ecumenical dialogue with non-Catholics: "All the aforesaid conferences and meetings, public and non-public, large and small, which are called for the purpose of affording an opportunity for the Catholic and the non-Catholic party for the sake of discussion to treat of matters of faith and morals, each presenting on even terms (*par cum pari*) the doctrine of his own faith, are subject to the prescriptions of the Church which were recalled to mind in the *Monitum*, '*Cum compertum*,' of this Congregation under date of 5 June, 1948. Hence mixed congresses are not absolutely forbidden; but they are not to be held without the previous permission of the competent Ecclesiastical Authority" (<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/on-the-ecumenical-movement-2070>; *AAS* 42 [1950]: 142–47, at 145).

2. For a historical overview of the origin of the decree, see Werner Becker, "History of the Decree," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 2, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. R. A. Wilson (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1–62.

a delicate one. When Karl Barth used the expression *Ad Limina Apostolorum* for the title of the book in which he reported on his 1966 visit to Rome, which took place exactly fifty years prior to the conference with the same name, he playfully compared his visit to the quinquennial visits of Catholic bishops to the bishop of Rome, honoring with their visits not only the “thresholds of the apostles” (*limina apostolorum*) but also the universal jurisdiction of Rome.³ His quasi-subservient attitude, however, did not prevent Barth from engaging in frank dialogue and asking probing questions. The elderly Swiss theologian evidently came away from Rome convinced that his meetings with Catholic leaders in Rome had conformed to the principle of meeting *par cum pari*.⁴

Unity and a New Spirit

In this chapter I intend to probe some of the difficulties surrounding the desire to meet “on equal footing.” I will press the question of what unity means according to the Decree on Ecumenism, and the general drift of my considerations will be that the principle of meeting *par cum pari* is a difficult fit with the overall ecclesiology at work in *Unitatis Redintegratio* and, by extension, in Catholic doctrine. Before arriving at this more critical analysis, however, it is incumbent on me to observe that the decree presents a remarkable opening for ecumenical dialogue, one that would have been unthinkable in the context of earlier magisterial teaching on ecumenism. Although the language of the “spirit of Vatican II” may be controversial and can be misused, there is little doubt that the council documents breathe an unprecedented spirit of openness or *aggiornamento*. Johannes Feiner rightly observes that the attitude expressed in *Unitatis Redintegratio* toward ecumenism marks a new beginning:

The content and tone of this evaluation [of the ecumenical movement] are in marked contrast to the encyclical *Mortalium Animos* of Pius XI (6 January 1928); but it is also more positive than the instruction *Ecclesia Catholica* of 20 December 1949, which

3. See Karl Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum: An Appraisal of Vatican II*, trans. Keith R. Crim (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1968) (hereafter, *ALA*). Barth’s visit took place from September 22 to 29, 1966 (*ALA*, 11).

4. This is perhaps clearest from Barth’s humorous description of his exchange with Pope Paul VI: “We did not pass over the difficult point of Mariology. The Pope had heard that I preferred Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, as the prototype of the nature and function of the church, to the ‘handmaiden of the Lord’ who was subsequently elevated to the position of Queen of Heaven. He assured me he would pray for me, that in my advanced age I would be given deeper insight into this problem” (*ALA*, 15). Barth reports the outcome of his visit with the comment: “I returned from Rome just as stubbornly evangelical—I would really rather say, evangelical-catholic—as before” (*ALA*, 18).

was the beginning of a change in the attitude of the Catholic Church. The decree begins by looking at the whole of Christianity, including Catholic and non-Catholic Christians, and affirms that the movement for unity in our own time has undergone a remarkable strengthening and extension.⁵

In good part as a result of this new ecumenical spirit of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, collegial friendships, shared academic endeavors, as well as numerous forms of ecumenical dialogue have flourished and created an atmosphere that is markedly different from that of the pre-Vatican II years. We may even gratefully acknowledge that doctrinally some progress has been made, perhaps most notably in the form of the much-applauded Lima statement of Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) and the Catholic-Lutheran *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1997).⁶ The Evangelicals and Catholics Together statements too, though not all arriving at the kind of consensus one might hope for, have done a great deal to draw evangelicals and Catholics more closely together.⁷

Much of this ecumenical progress has become possible as a result of *Unitatis Redintegratio*. The decree evinces genuine openness to what it calls “separated churches and ecclesial communities,” the members of which “the Catholic Church accepts . . . with respect and affection as brothers,” who are “in some, though imperfect (*etsi non perfecta*), communion with the Catholic Church.”⁸ What is more, *Unitatis Redintegratio* expresses joy “that our separated brethren look to Christ as the source and center of ecclesiastical communion.”⁹ “Very many” of the “most significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside of the boundaries of the Catholic Church,” and here the decree makes mention particularly of “the written Word of God,” of “the life of grace,” of the theological virtues, and of various “visible elements.”¹⁰ Doctrinal divisions notwithstanding, the Second Vatican Council recognizes that a spiritual unity persists in the midst of serious disagreements.

5. Johannes Feiner, “Commentary on the Decree,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 2, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. R. A. Wilson (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 57–164, at 60.

6. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983); The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000).

7. For the ECT statements, see *Evangelicals and Catholics Together at Twenty: Vital Statements on Contested Topics*, ed. Timothy George and Thomas G. Guarino (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2015). For an (at this point somewhat outdated) discussion of developments surrounding ECT, see Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005).

8. UR §3; AAS 57 (1965): 93.

9. UR §9; AAS 57 (1965): 105.

10. UR §3; AAS 57 (1965): 93.

Nor does this spiritual unity pertain only to individual relationships, as if it were abstracted from ecclesial life and practice. Repeatedly, the decree speaks of baptism as creating a common link. Some of those separated from the Church are “joined (*appositi*) to her by baptism.”¹¹ With reference to Colossians 2:12—You were “buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead”¹²—the decree insists that baptism “constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are re-born.”¹³ This baptismal bond points to some kind of shared liturgical life, since the “brethren divided from us also carry out many liturgical actions (*actiones sacrae*) of the Christian religion.”¹⁴

In what is perhaps the most remarkable acknowledgment of a shared ecclesial life, the decree insists that these liturgical actions “truly engender a life of grace, and, one must say, can aptly (*aptae dicendae sunt*) give access to the life of salvation.”¹⁵ Apparently, liturgical actions among the “separated brethren” can function as means of divine grace.¹⁶ As such, the practice of baptism is part and parcel of a rich devotional and liturgical life among the “separated brethren”:

The Christian way of life of these brethren is nourished by faith in Christ. It is strengthened by the grace of baptism and the hearing of the Word of God. This way of life expresses itself in private prayer, in meditation on the scriptures, in the life of a Christian family, and in the worship of the community gathered together to praise God. Furthermore, their worship sometimes displays notable features of a liturgy once shared in common.¹⁷

The recognition of fraternity on the part of Vatican II goes well beyond a meager acknowledgment that God is at work within individuals separated from the church. To my mind, this recognition must be applauded without reserve as it bequeathed a different spirit both to the Council and to ecumenical discussion ever since.

11. *UR* §4; *AAS* 57 (1965): 96.

12. Throughout I quote from the *English Standard Version*.

13. *UR* §22; *AAS* 57 (1965): 105.

14. *UR* §3; *AAS* 57 (1965): 93.

15. *UR* §3; *AAS* 57 (1965): 93.

16. Cf. Johannes Feiner’s comment that it is not the case “that non-Catholics can attain salvation, *although* they live outside the Catholic Church. Rather, one must say that Christ gives them salvation through the reality of non-Catholic communities . . . in so far as within them the effect is present of the elements of the Church through which Christ effects the salvation of the faithful in the Catholic Church also” (“Commentary on the Decree,” 76).

17. *UR* §23; *AAS* 57 (1965): 106.

In this light, it may not go unmentioned that the council fathers speak both generously and truthfully when they maintain that for the separation of the church often “both sides were to blame,”¹⁸ so that the council fathers “beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren.”¹⁹ Both sides of the Reformation divide have guilt to admit, and although this acknowledgment lacks specificity, the plea for forgiveness does express a welcome desire to heal the horrible rift to which both parties of the sixteenth-century schism were guilty.²⁰ Both the Catholic Church and the Reformation churches need to address past wrongs and hurts in charting a common path forward toward a full and complete restoration of unity.²¹

Unity and Other Churches

Also important, from an ecumenical perspective, is the decree’s language of the church’s unity subsisting (*subsistere*) in the Catholic Church. To Protestants this may seem like a massive claim, but it nonetheless carefully delineates the manner in which the Catholic Church is identified with the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of the creed. The verb *subsistere* occurs most famously in paragraph 8 of *Lumen Gentium*:

This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards Catholic unity.²²

18. *UR* §3; *AAS* 57 (1965): 93.

19. *UR* §7; *AAS* 57 (1965): 97. Cf. Timothy George, “*Unitatis Redintegratio* after Fifty Years: A Protestant Reading,” *Pro Ecclesia* 25 (2016): 53–70, at 58–60.

20. The plea for forgiveness was not included in the initial 1963 schema *De Oecumenismo* and was added because many of the written submissions of the council fathers “demanded a humble confession of the guilt which also lies upon Catholics for the separation of Christians” (Becker, “History of the Decree,” 26–27).

21. The overall tone of openness toward non-Catholics in *Unitatis Redintegratio* was a deliberate corrective move on the part of the council after the early schema *De Ecclesiae Unitate* (*Ut omnes unum sint*), dealing with the Eastern Churches, had largely been received negatively by the council fathers in their debate from November 26 to November 30, 1962 (Becker, “History of the Decree,” 7–19). The schema that directly lies at the basis of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *De Oecumenismo*, was initially drawn up in the spring of 1963 by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, headed by Cardinal Augustin Bea (along with Mgr. J. G. M. Willebrands). The SPCU had been established in November 1960, and on October 22, 1962 Pope John XXIII had given it the same rank as the other commissions within the Vatican Council (Becker, “History of the Decree,” 6).

22. “Dogmatic Constitution of the Church” (*Lumen Gentium* [LG]), in *The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, vol. 1 of *Vatican Council II*, edited by Austin Flannery, rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello; Dublin, Ireland: Dominican, 1975), §8 (p. 357); *AAS* 57 (1965): 5–67, at 12.

Whereas in 1950 *Humani Generis* had stated that “the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing,”²³ *Lumen Gentium* modifies this language by replacing *est* with *subsistit in*.

To be sure, many Catholics will be quick to clarify that the change in wording is not a change in teaching. Avery Cardinal Dulles has gone so far as to suggest that “the council agreed with *Mystici Corporis* that the mystical Body had full or substantive existence in the Catholic Church *and nowhere else*.”²⁴ This analysis is borne out by a 2007 statement of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which explains that the language of “subsistence” refers to the “perduring, historical continuity and the permanence of all the elements instituted by Christ in the Catholic Church, in which the Church of Christ is concretely found on this earth.”²⁵ In terms of the difference between “subsists in” and “is,” the Congregation explains that

this expression [i.e., “subsists in”], which indicates the full identity (*plenam identitatem*) of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church, does not change the doctrine on the Church. Rather, it comes from and brings out more clearly the fact that there are “numerous elements of sanctification and of truth” which are found outside her structure, but which “as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, impel towards Catholic Unity.”²⁶

Thus does the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith reassert the earlier insistence on the proper identity between the church of Christ and the Catholic Church, while at the same time making clear by the language of *subsistere* that the separated brethren also have a link with the Catholic Church.

As an aside, I must confess that I find the Congregation’s clarification less than compelling. If it is true that “subsists in” intimates full identity between the church of Christ and the Catholic Church, then how can that same verb bring out more clearly the presence of truth elements among the

23. *Humani Generis* (HG), §27; http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html; AAS 42 (1950): 561–78, at 571.

24. Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Nature, Mission, and Structure of the Church,” in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25–36, at 28; emphasis added. Dulles points out that in response to complaints about the word “is” (*est*) in an early draft, a subcommittee replaced it with “is present in” (*adest in*). He goes on to write: “However, the council fathers were not content to assert that the Church of Christ is present in Roman Catholicism, which had always claimed to possess in itself the fullness of the Church. Thus the Theological Commission on November 25, 1963, dropped the term ‘adest’ and replaced it with ‘subsistit.’ The new term was proposed by Sebastian Tromp, SJ, who had previously favored ‘est’ and was a stout defender of the positions of *Mystici Corporis*” (ibid.).

25. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Responses to Some Questions regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church”; http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_en.html; AAS 99 (2007): 604–8, at 606.

26. “Responses to Some Questions”; AAS 99 (2007): 607.

“separated brethren”? It seems to me that only if it weakens the identity between the church of Christ and the Catholic Church, can the language of *subsistere* be of help in bringing to the fore “elements of sanctification and of truth” outside the Roman Catholic structure. Only if *subsistere* is less intensive than *est* does it facilitate recognition of ecclesial elements outside the Roman Catholic Church.

The overall point nonetheless remains: in several key places the documents of Vatican II use the verb *subsistere* rather than *esse* to identify the relationship between the church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church, and the purpose, according to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, is to draw attention to the numerous elements of sanctification and truth found outside the institution of the Catholic Church. As such, there is an acknowledgment that the separation of fellow Christians from the unity of the church of Christ wounds also the unity of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁷

All this is in line, I think, with *Lumen Gentium*’s insistence that there are multiple ways of being related to the catholic unity of the church: “The Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind” belong to or are related to (*pertinent vel ordinantur*) the church’s unity in different ways.²⁸ After mentioning those who belong to the visible Catholic Church—adding the salutary warning that “even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not . . . persevere in charity is not saved”²⁹—*Lumen Gentium* goes on to speak of other baptized Christians “who do not . . . profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter.”³⁰ Here the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church deals with believers in various “Churches or ecclesial communities” that display varying degrees of adherence to the truth of the gospel. In a manner consonant with *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Dogmatic Constitution speaks of Christians being “in some real way joined to us in the Holy Spirit,” who “stirs up desires and actions in all of Christ’s disciples in order that all may be peaceably united.”³¹ Finally, *Lumen Gentium* turns to “those who have not yet received the Gospel,” dealing in turn with Jewish believers, Muslims, as well as others “who, through no fault of their own,

27. Cf. the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “The ruptures that wound the unity of Christ’s Body—here we must distinguish heresy, apostasy, and schism—do not occur without human sin” (2nd ed. [Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000], §817 [p. 216]).

28. *LG* §13; *AAS* 57 (1965): 18.

29. *LG* §14; *AAS* 57 (1965): 19.

30. *LG* §15; *AAS* 57 (1965): 19.

31. *LG* §15; *AAS* 57 (1965): 19.

do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church.”³² Even concerning this last category the council fathers acknowledge (though with some important qualifications) that “whatever good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel.”³³

In short, the various ways in which people belong to or are related to the people of God may be depicted by way of a widening set of concentric circles, with Catholic believers in the center, and moving outward via other Christians to Jews, Muslims, and non-believers.³⁴ Also here, though the constitution in no way negates that the church’s unity fully and only subsists within the Catholic Church (and other Christians are not explicitly said to “belong” [*pertinere*] to the church of Christ),³⁵ *Lumen Gentium* does attempt to do justice to the complexity of the various ways there are of relating to the gospel and to the church: Eastern Orthodox believers, and to some degree also Protestants, are more closely related to the church than are others.

Unity and Hierarchy of Truths

We should also duly note that *Unitatis Redintegratio* does not treat every aspect of Catholic teaching as equally central to the church’s unity. By insisting on a “hierarchy of truths” in paragraph 11, the Vatican Council intended to give a new impetus to ecumenical dialogue:

Furthermore, in ecumenical dialogue, Catholic theologians, standing fast by the teaching of the Church yet searching together with separated brethren into the di-

32. *LG* §16; *AAS* 57 (1965): 20.

33. *LG* §16; *AAS* 57 (1965): 20.

34. Cf. the critical description in Gregg R. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2014), 175–77.

35. In part because the bull *Exultate Deo* (1439) insists that through baptism “we are made members of Christ and of the body of the Church,” the Council was unwilling to deny that also Protestants in some way belong to the church. See Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Saint Louis, Mo.: Herder, 1955), no. 696 (p. 221). The notion of “imperfect” (*non perfecta*) communion (*UR* §3; *AAS* 57 [1965]: 93) with the church, conjoined with the statement that all baptized people are “incorporated into Christ” (*Christo incorporantur*) (*UR* §3; *AAS* 57 [1965]: 93), suggests that all baptized Christians can in some way be considered to belong to the church. Charles Morerod comments: “All baptized people are ‘members of Christ’s body,’ which means of the Church (or of the communion of the Church, at least imperfectly)” (“The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*,” in *Vatican II*, ed. Lamb and Levering, 311–41, at 316). Cf. also Johannes Feiner’s comment that this phrasing of the decree “is based upon a vision which on the one hand does not regard the body of Christ and the Catholic Church as two separate entities, but on the other hand does not regard them as simply identical. Those who are outside the communion of the Catholic Church are brought to faith in Christ and are baptized, are incorporated into the mystical body of Christ; thus while they do not belong to the Catholic Church as this clearly defined community of faith with the ordered structure of a society, nevertheless they are fundamentally in communion with it through faith and baptism” (“Commentary on the Decree,” 73).

vine mysteries, should do so with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility. When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or “hierarchy” of truths (*‘hierarchiam’ veritatum*), since they vary in their relation to the foundation (*fundamento*) of the Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened whereby this kind of “fraternal rivalry” will incite all to a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ.³⁶

Many have commented on the ecumenical import of this statement, the wording of which appears to have been influenced by the Lutheran ecumenical theologian Oscar Cullmann.³⁷ Undoubtedly inspired in good part by this paragraph, Cullmann himself commented: “This is more than the opening of a door; new ground has been broken. No Catholic document has ever spoken of non-Catholic Christians in this way.”³⁸ The Dutch Reformed theologian Gerrit C. Berkouwer went even further in commenting on the notion of a hierarchy of truths: “It is not enough to merely gauge the meaning and scope of this expression. It is undoubtedly flabbergasting that this ‘concentration’ (on the fundamentals) that pretty much occupies all churches today is unexpectedly set forth in a conciliar decree and that this did not elicit more opposition despite its ‘strangeness’.”³⁹

It is important, however, carefully to note what paragraph 11 does and does not affirm by speaking of a “hierarchy of truths.” The quotation given above begins by stating that Catholic theologians engage in ecumenical dialogue while “standing fast by the teaching of the Church,” and it is preceded by the important caveats that it is “essential that the doctrine be clearly presented in its entirety” and that “nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism (*ille falsus irenismus*) which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its genuine and certain meaning.”⁴⁰ These preliminary comments make clear that a hierarchy of truths should not be construed as an excuse to render irrelevant those doctrinal issues on which Catholics and Protestants may disagree.

Eduardo Echeverria, in his treatment of Berkouwer, cautions against an understanding of a hierarchy of truths that “breeds theological indiffer-

36. UR §11; AAS 57 (1965): 99.

37. Edward Iris Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 10–11, drawing on Thomas Stransky, “The Observers at Vatican II: A Unique Experience of Dialogue,” *Centro pro Unione Bulletin*, no. 63 (Spring 2003): 8–14.

38. As quoted in Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, 11.

39. G. C. Berkouwer, *Nabetrachting op het Concilie* (Kampen: Kok, 1968), 103; as quoted in Eduardo Echeverria, *Berkouwer and Catholicism: Disputed Questions*, Studies in Reformed Theology 24 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 103.

40. UR §11; AAS 57 (1965): 99.

ence,” as if, for example, the Assumption of Mary can “no longer remain a church-dividing issue because of its low rank—nonfundamental truths—in regard to the foundation of faith and hence the fundamental revealed truths at its base.”⁴¹ Berkouwer, explains Echeverria, recognized that this would be a wrong understanding of a hierarchy of truths. Instead, as Berkouwer put it, “Embedded in this expression in the decree is the question of the connection that binds together the ‘elements’ of doctrine, and above all the ‘nexus’ with Christ as the foundation, and of the variation in the connection with this foundation.”⁴²

Archbishop Andrea Pangrazio of Gorizia, Italy, made this exact same point in presenting the expression “hierarchy of truths” to the council, commenting:

There should be a centre to which these [individual ecclesial] elements are to be related and without which they cannot be explained. This binding factor and this centre is Christ himself, whom all Christians confess as the Lord of the Church, whom undoubtedly Christians of all communities strive to serve faithfully and who condescends to work wonderful things even in the communities separated from us through his active presence in the Holy Spirit. . . . Even though all revealed truths must be believed with the same divine faith and all constitutive elements of the Church have to be faithfully retained, yet they are not all of the same importance.⁴³

Archbishop Pangrazio’s point appears to be that we may rejoice in our common agreement on the fundamental truths that belong to the *end* of the Christian faith (Trinity, Incarnation, redemption, God’s love for sinful humanity, eternal life in God’s kingdom, and so on); and that we also may rejoice that the areas of disagreement do not concern the end itself but only the *means* (doctrinal claims concerning the seven sacraments, the hierarchical structure of the church, apostolic succession).⁴⁴ The notion of a “hierarchy of truths” is thus, first and foremost, meant to elucidate the character of our disagreements, that is to say, to make clear that they concern not matters belonging to the centre or the end, but matters only of means. Not all doctrines have equal weight.⁴⁵

41. Echeverria, *Berkouwer and Catholicism*, 104.

42. Berkouwer, *Nabetrachting*, 103; as quoted in Echeverria, *Berkouwer and Catholicism*, 104.

43. Speech of Archbishop Pangrazio, November 25, 1964, as translated in Lorenz Jaeger, *A Stand on Ecumenism: The Council’s Decree*, trans. Hilda Graef (New York: Kenedy, 1965), 114–15. Cf. Morerod, “The Decree on Ecumenism,” 322.

44. Both the language of “end” and “means” and the examples are Pangrazio’s (in Jaeger, *Stand on Ecumenism*, 115).

45. See Thomas G. Guarino, *Revelation and Truth: Unity and Plurality in Contemporary Theology* (Scranton, Pa.: University of Scranton Press, 1993), 142–43.

None of this resolves the ecumenical dilemma. After all, as we just saw, Pangrazio also makes the comment that “all revealed truths must be believed with the same divine faith and all constitutive elements of the Church have to be faithfully retained.” Echeverria helpfully clarifies by drawing from Yves Congar the distinction between the *quod* and the *quo* of the faith. The *quod* is the material contents of the faith. Here not everything is equally close to the heart of the gospel. Some doctrines are more important than others. The *quo* is the formal authority that doctrines carry by virtue of their being proclaimed infallibly. In that sense all doctrines are equal and must be accepted in faith.⁴⁶ The Swiss Dominican, Charles Morerod, OP, captures this same distinction when he comments that the council fathers had in mind

two elements: (1) a hierarchy among truths as a result of their different relation to the center of revelation (that is, Christ and his mystery) and (2) a proposition that all revealed truths must be held because they are revealed, although some are more important than others. The text of the decree does not explicitly mention the second element, but the context of article 11 (‘doctrine should be clearly presented in its entirety’) implies it.⁴⁷

Thus, although Morerod acknowledges that *Unitatis Redintegratio* does not explicitly make the point that all doctrines, regardless of their ranking within the overall hierarchy, must be accepted in faith, he is right—along with Echeverria and others—that this is how we should read the decree. And, if this is true, then the “hierarchy of truths” isn’t as ecumenically promising as Cullmann and Berkouwer seem to have thought. Certainly the notion does not function as some kind of *deus ex machina* with regard to the unity of the church.

Still, the decree does spell out *how* the hierarchy of truths can assist ecumenical dialogue. It states that when we compare doctrines in ecumenical dialogue we should keep in mind that they are not all equally important. This, the decree continues, may trigger a kind of “fraternal rivalry,” which “will incite all to a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ.”⁴⁸ Without in any way suggesting that Catholic doctrines can be surrendered in dialogue, this wording nonetheless seems

46. Echeverria, *Berkouwer and Catholicism*, 106–7, drawing on Yves M. J. Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (London: SMC, 1984), 119. Cf. Johannes Feiner’s comment: “The statement in the decree concerning the hierarchy of truths is in any case a demand (addressed in the first instance to partners in dialogue, but ultimately to all Catholics), not to think, with regard to the truths taught by the Church, only of the formal element common to them all, that they are revealed, but also to bear in mind the significance of their content” (Feiner, “Commentary on the Decree,” 119).

47. Morerod, “The Decree on Ecumenism,” 323.

48. *UR* §11; *AAS* 57 (1965): 99.

to suggest that we must deal differently with doctrines that are at the heart of the faith than with those of lesser significance. Even though it is not immediately clear how the “fraternal rivalry” may allow us to make progress in discussing less fundamental doctrines (since every doctrine has the same formal authority), the decree does appear to envisage some ecumenical leeway at this point.

It also can hardly have escaped the council fathers’ attention that by introducing a hierarchy of truths they were at odds, if not with the letter, then at least with the spirit of Pius XI’s 1928 encyclical, *Mortalium Animos*. It had sharply rejected the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles of faith:

In connection with things which must be believed, it is nowise licit to use that distinction which some have seen fit to introduce between those articles of faith which are *fundamental* and those which are not fundamental (*capita fidei fundamentalia et non fundamentalia*), as they say, as if the former are to be accepted by all, while the latter may be left to the free assent of the faithful: for the supernatural virtue of faith has a formal cause, namely the authority of God revealing, and this is patient of no such distinction. For this reason it is that all who are truly Christ’s believe, for example, the Conception of the Mother of God without stain of original sin with the same faith as they believe the mystery of the August Trinity, and the Incarnation of our Lord just as they do the infallible teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, according to the sense in which it was defined by the Ecumenical Council of the Vatican. Are these truths not equally certain, or not equally to be believed, because the Church has solemnly sanctioned and defined them, some in one age and some in another, even in those times immediately before our own? Has not God revealed them all?⁴⁹

Pius XI, by appealing to the teaching role of the church (the *quo* of formal authority), seemed to reject the very distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles.⁵⁰ Although *Unitatis Redintegratio* does not use this distinction, and although it does not in any way question the authority of less important doctrines, nonetheless, its notion of a “hierarchy of truths” comports rather well with the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles, and the decree explicitly states that doctrines “vary in their relation to the foundation (*fundamento*) of the Christian faith.”⁵¹ It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the council fathers delib-

49. *Mortalium Animos*, §9; http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos.html; AAS 20 (1928): 5–16, at 13.

50. To be sure, one may read the statement in such a way that the pope merely condemns a wrong use of the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles. Still, the overall drift of *Mortalium Animos* is almost diametrically opposed to that of *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

51. UR §11; AAS 57 (1965): 99.

erately moved beyond Pius XI's 1928 encyclical. The Council's purpose in doing this was to create room for ecumenical dialogue and so to heal the wound that history has inflicted on the unity of the church.

The question does remain: how does the Council's desire to promote dialogue by inciting "fraternal rivalry" actually help us in practice? After all, regardless of the council fathers' intentions, on one point the Decree on Ecumenism does not contradict *Mortalium Animos*: Morerod and Echeverria are right to suggest that also the Decree on Ecumenism holds that no Catholic doctrine can be reformed, regardless of its place within the hierarchical ordering of truths. Therefore, whereas the council fathers spoke of a hierarchy of truths with the intent of enabling meaningful dialogue, they nonetheless leave us with a quandary: how are we to make progress in dialogue if we know beforehand that the only acceptable progress will be for Protestant dialogue partners to accept the entirety of the doctrinal deposit as it is perceived by and articulated in the Catholic Church?

At this point, Catholic ecumenical theologians often point to the distinction between affirmations and representations, a notion that Henri Bouillard brought to the fore in his controversial 1944 publication, *Conversion et grâce*:

History does not, however, lead to relativism. It allows us to know, in the midst of theological evolution, an absolute—not an absolute of representation, but an absolute of affirmation. Whereas notions, methods, and systems change over time, the affirmations that they contain remain, even though they are expressed by means of other categories. Moreover, it is the affirmations themselves that, in order to keep their meaning in a new intellectual universe, determine new notions, methods, and systems in correspondence with that universe.... History thus manifests at the same time the relativity of notions, of schemes in which theology takes shape, and the permanent affirmation that governs them. It is necessary to know the temporal condition of theology and, at the same time, to offer with regard to the faith the absolute affirmation, the divine Word that has become incarnate.⁵²

Bouillard, Henri de Lubac's younger colleague at the Fourvière scholasticate, distinguishes here between affirmations, which remain absolute, and representations, which may change.⁵³ Theological notions and schemes come and go within the context of the permanent, absolute affirmation of

52. Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin: Étude historique*, Théologie 1 (Paris: Aubier, 1944), 120–21.

53. For the controversy surrounding Bouillard's book, see Cf. Thomas G. Guarino, "Henri Bouillard and the Truth-Status of Dogmatic Statements," *Science et Esprit* 39 (1987): 331–43; Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 99–104.

the divine Word. Bouillard's approach drew sharp criticism at the time, particularly from Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, who insisted, "It is very dangerous to say, 'Notions change, affirmations remain.' If the notion of truth itself is going to change, the affirmations no longer remain true in the same manner, nor with the same meaning."⁵⁴ Pius XII appeared to adjudicate the disagreement in 1950, when in *Humani Generis* he took aim at some who

hold that the mysteries of faith are never expressed by truly adequate concepts but only by approximate and ever changeable notions, in which the truth is to some extent expressed, but is necessarily distorted. Wherefore they do not consider it absurd, but altogether necessary, that theology should substitute new concepts in place of the old ones in keeping with the various philosophies which in the course of time it uses as its instruments, so that it should give human expression to divine truths in various ways which are even somewhat opposed, but still equivalent, as they say. They add that the history of dogmas consists in the reporting of the various forms in which revealed truth has been clothed, forms that have succeeded one another in accordance with the different teachings and opinions that have arisen over the course of the centuries.⁵⁵

Pope Pius XII sharply rejected that notions and concepts are easily malleable and changeable while the truth itself remains the same, and he criticized this as "dogmatic relativism."⁵⁶ Interestingly, *Humani Generis* also drew attention to the ecumenical agenda behind the distinction: "They cherish the hope that when dogma is stripped of the elements which they hold to be extrinsic to divine revelation, it will compare advantageously with the dogmatic opinions of those who are separated from the unity of the Church and that in this way they will gradually arrive at a mutual assimilation of Catholic dogma with the tenets of the dissidents."⁵⁷ It is not difficult to see that the distinction between affirmation and representation can be fruitful ecumenically. It allows one to place particular representations, presumably less directly related to the absolute truth of God's self-revelation in Christ, lower on the scale of the "hierarchy of truths." Thus, a degree of relativity with regard to doctrinal apprehensions would allow believers to live together despite (relatively minor) differences in doctrine.

The apprehension regarding Bouillard's distinction—even the charge of "dogmatic relativism"—is understandable, however, for at least two reasons. First, Bouillard contrasted the permanent affirmation as "the divine

54. Garrigou-Lagrange, "La Nouvelle théologie, où va-t-elle?" *Angelicum* 23 (1946): 126–45, at 130.

55. *HG* §15; *AAS* 42 (1950): 566.

56. *HG* §16; *AAS* 42 (1950): 566.

57. *HG* §14; *AAS* 42 (1950): 565.

Word that has become incarnate” with changing representations subject to the “relativity of notions, of schemes in which theology takes shape.” At the very least Bouillard could have made clearer precisely how changing notions relate to the permanence of the doctrine that is firmly anchored in Christ. Presumably not every notion or theological system relates equally well to the Christological deposit of faith, and so the theological task remains to articulate precisely how, in individual cases, a certain belief or articulation relates to the incarnate Word.

Second, *Humani Generis* rightly points out that it is not indifferent which theological notions (or representations) we use. Not all changes in theological notions leave the Christological foundation untouched. Indeed, though he may well have exaggerated, Pope Pius wasn’t devoid of insight when he claimed: “The contempt for terms and notions habitually used by scholastic theologians leads of itself to the weakening of what they call speculative theology, a discipline which these men consider devoid of true certitude because it is based on theological reasoning.”⁵⁸

It is against the backdrop of these controversies over the *nouvelle théologie* of Bouillard and others, and of the fairly unequivocal denunciations of the same in *Humani Generis*, that on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council with the oft-repeated comment: “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.”⁵⁹ The pope did not explicitly choose sides in the disagreements surrounding *nouvelle théologie*, but by making a distinction between the substance and the mode of presentation he made clear where his sympathies lay and likely intended to create room for ecumenical discussion.⁶⁰ By reintroducing a much-controverted distinction, the pope placed on the Council’s agenda the question of how to deal with less significant doctrines in dialogue with non-Catholic believers.⁶¹ Whereas the

58. *HG* §17; *AAS* 42 (1950): 567.

59. *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*; http://vatican2voice.org/91docs/opening_speech.htm; *AAS* 54 (1962): 786–95, at 792.

60. See Thomas G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 148–49.

61. In line with this, *Unitatis Redintegratio* specifically accepts variations “even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth” (*UR* §4; *AAS* 57 [1965]: 95). With regard to Eastern Orthodoxy, the decree comments, “What has already been said about legitimate variety we are pleased to apply to differences in theological expressions of doctrine” (*UR* §17; *AAS* 57 [1965]: 103). Cf. Eduardo J. Echeverría,

pope in no way conveyed a desire to upend Catholic doctrine, his opening words did convey sympathy for the direction charted by *nouvelle théologie* and certainly breathed a different spirit than did *Mortalium Animos* in 1928.

Unity and Fullness

So far, the Decree on Ecumenism may seem relatively promising. Not only does it acknowledge that we all share in the guilt of disunity, that we do have a shared baptismal bond of unity, and that we are already united in Christ, but *Unitatis Redintegratio* deliberately uses language that stops short of simply identifying the Roman Catholic Church with the Church of Christ (by using the verb *subsistere*), and it at least genuinely attempts to employ the notion of a “hierarchy of truths” in an effort to create fruitful dialogue with non-Catholics. Even though the hierarchy of truths still leaves us with the difficulty of how to solve the serious ecumenical issue of the formal authority of doctrine (*its quo*), it may not be a priori impossible to make headway also on this score, by distinguishing between affirmations and representations, between substance and manner of presentation.

Still, despite all these gains, and despite the rather momentous change in ecumenical atmosphere since Barth’s visit *ad limina* fifty years ago, I am less than confident that an ecumenical breakthrough is just around the corner. The reason for my lack of optimism lies in the perceptive critical question that Barth raised, reflecting on his visit *ad limina*: “What is the significance for the definition ‘separated brethren’ (lack of ‘fullness’) of the statement (4, 10) that it is difficult for the Catholic Church herself ‘to express in actual life her full catholicity in all its aspects?’”⁶² In other words, if the Catholic Church is truly convinced that it is difficult for her to express “full catholicity” (*plenitudo catholicitatis*), then how is the lack of fullness among the “separated brethren” different from that of Catholics? This question, it seems to me, uncovers what remains *Unitatis Redintegratio*’s greatest obstacle to progress: although the Catholic Church may find it difficult to express “full catholicity,” this does not mean an acknowledgment that it is not present.

A careful reading of *Unitatis Redintegratio* makes clear that the council

Dialogue of Love: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic Ecumenist (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 15–18.

62. Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, 30. UR §4 states that because of divisions “the Church herself finds it more difficult to express (*exprimere*) in actual life her full catholicity (*plenitudinem catholicitatis*) in all its aspects” (AAS 57 [1965]: 96).

fathers treated the lack of unity (and catholicity) among Catholics rather differently from the lack of unity (and catholicity) of the “separated brethren.” Throughout, *Unitatis Redintegratio* maintains that the fullness of unity is already present in the Roman Catholic Church, so that the problem of separation is much more one of the “separated brethren” than of the Roman Catholic Church. As a result, meeting on “equal footing” (*par cum pari*) in ecumenical dialogue becomes more difficult, and ecumenical progress remains elusive.

Paragraph 3, arguably the most ecumenical in the decree, is at the same time one of most problematic ones. Though both sides are said to share blame for the Reformation, this acknowledgment is preceded by the comment that “large communities became separated from full communion (*a plena communione*) with the Catholic Church.”⁶³ It is only the “separated brethren” who “are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those to whom he has given new birth into one body.”⁶⁴ In line with this, despite its genuine outreach to “separated brethren”—and the Council’s proceedings make clear that we should in no way minimize the efforts the council fathers made in this regard—the Council nonetheless maintains that it is “through Christ’s Catholic Church alone . . . that the fullness (*plenitudo*) of the means of salvation can be obtained,” and “into which all those should be fully (*plene*) incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, *Unitatis Redintegratio* connects this statement explicitly with the “apostolic college” of which “Peter is the head,”⁶⁶ thereby making clear that restoration of unity can come about only through unity with Rome, since it alone has the *plenitudo* of the means of salvation.

Accordingly, in paragraph 4 the decree goes on to articulate the hope that through ecumenical dialogue “all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into the unity of the one and only Church, which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose (*inamissibilem*), and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.”⁶⁷ Despite the shared guilt of the Catholic Church, it is not Rome

63. *UR* §3; *AAS* 57 (1965): 92–93.

64. *UR* §3; *AAS* 57 (1965): 93–94.

65. *UR* §3; *AAS* 57 (1965): 94.

66. *UR* §4; *AAS* 57 (1965): 95.

67. *UR* §4; *AAS* 57 (1965): 95: “Omnes Christiani, in una Eucharistiae celebratione, in unius uniceque Ecclesiae unitatem congregentur quam Christus ab initio Ecclesiae suae largitus est, quamque inamissibilem in Ecclesia catholica subsistere credimus et usque ad consummationem saeculi in dies crescere speramus.”

but Protestants who are separated. The very phrase, “separated brethren” (*fratres seiuncti*), indicates as much.⁶⁸ The decree says that “we believe” (*credimus*) that the unity of the Catholic Church is something she “can never lose” (*inamissibilem*); and although the text goes on to express the hope (*speramus*) that the unity of the Catholic Church may “increase until the end of time,” it is not clear how this hope can possibly be thwarted in light of the belief that the unity of the church already subsists in the Catholic Church and can never be lost.

Thus, though an increase in unity is possible, even for believers in the Catholic Church, the decree nonetheless qualifies this in two ways. First, as we have already seen, the unity of the church already securely “subsists” in the Roman Catholic Church. Second, it is only in those who are separated that this unity of the Catholic Church is not fully realized. Paragraph 4 maintains that divisions “prevent the Church from realizing the fullness of catholicity (*plenitudinem catholicitatis*) proper to her in those of her sons who ... are ... separated from full (*plena*) communion with her.”⁶⁹ This carefully worded sentence seems to me remarkably one-sided. Only the separated brethren are lacking in terms of the fullness of the catholicity of the church. The problem experienced by the Catholic Church, then, is not a lack of unity—this cannot possibly be lost; it is proper to her—but merely the *expression* of this unity through full fellowship with Christians beyond the visible bounds of the Roman Catholic Church: the church merely finds it “more difficult to express (*exprimere*) in actual life her full catholicity (*plenitudinem catholicitatis*) in all its aspects.”⁷⁰ The unity of the church, so it seems, is not really endangered by the Reformation—with two exceptions: (1) separated brethren are lacking in unity since they do not yet share the Eucharist of the Catholic Church and as such do not yet fully share in the full unity that

68. Pope Leo XIII is sometimes credited with first using the expression “separated brethren.” Thomas Cahill, for instance, comments: “He was the first pope to speak of Protestant and Orthodox Christians as ‘separated brethren,’ rather than as heretics and schismatics” (*Pope John XXIII: A Life* [London: Penguin, 2002], 78). It is not clear to me, however, that Pope Leo XIII actually used this term. I have not been able to locate instances of Pope Leo XIII referring to Orthodox or Protestant believers as “separated brethren.” English translations of Pope John XXIII’s encyclicals do use the phrase “separated brethren.” But even in the case of John XXIII’s encyclicals, the term “separated brethren” usually translates the term *dissidentes*. I am grateful for conversation with Michael Root on this point.

I should add that although the expression *fratres seiuncti* is usually translated as “separated brethren,” the phrase replaced the earlier *fratres separati*, which had been used in the schema *De Oecumenismo*. This change allows for the interpretation that it is not only the non-Catholics who have separated (Becker, “History of the Decree,” 35, 39). Feiner observes that the verb “*seiungere* expresses a less profound separation than *separare*. In English (as in German), however, the nuance is difficult to reproduce” (“Commentary on the Decree,” 70).

69. UR §4 (emphasis added); AAS 57 (1965): 96.

70. UR §4; AAS 57 (1965): 96.

subsists in her; and (2) the Catholic Church herself has difficulty expressing the unity that is indefectibly and properly hers.⁷¹

If this is a fair reading of the Decree on Ecumenism, I cannot but wonder what the next paragraph means when it opens with the comment that “the concern for restoring (*instaurandae*) unity concerns the whole church, faithful and clergy alike.”⁷² If unity was never lost—except from the side of those who are separated from the Catholic Church and except for certain expressions of the unity of the Catholic Church—what is there to restore? To be sure, *Unitatis Redintegratio* gives somewhat of an answer to this question when it speaks of the need for a “continual reformation” (*perennem reformationem*) in terms of moral conduct, church discipline, and even the way doctrine is formulated. Any deficiencies in this regard must be “set right” (*instaurantur*).⁷³ Accordingly, the decree applauds the “cooperation in social matters,” which today “is widespread” (*latissime instaurantur*).⁷⁴ Cooperation among Christians “has already begun (*iam instaurata*) in many countries” and “should be developed more and more.”⁷⁵ Restoration of full communion in the unity of the church is a worthy goal.⁷⁶ But the process of restoring (*instaurare*) this unity cannot hide that unity already subsists in the Catholic Church and that, according to the Decree on Ecumenism, it is lacking among the “separated brethren.”

Unity and the Eschaton

It is hardly a secret that the ecumenical movement has lost much of its initial vitality. A number of factors contribute to this ecumenical malaise, several of which are internal to Protestantism, such as the decline of mainline Protestantism and the common practice of open communion among Protestant churches, which removes much of the urgency of ecumenical dialogue.⁷⁷

71. It is interesting to observe, therefore, that one of the written submissions in response to the scheme *De Oecumenismo* in the summer of 1963 suggested “that the schema should provide an answer to the question whether by a schism ‘merely a large number of former members of the Catholic Church became separated, while the Church remained perfect and undivided’, or whether in this division, which has taken place against the will of God, the Church itself was divided in some sense” (Becker, “History of the Decree,” 27).

72. *UR* §5; *AAS* 57 (1965): 96.

73. *UR* §6; *AAS* 57 (1965): 97.

74. *UR* §12; *AAS* 57 (1965): 99.

75. *UR* §12; *AAS* 57 (1965): 100.

76. The decree also speaks of working toward “restoration (*instaurationem*) of the full communion that is desired between the Eastern Churches and the Catholic Church” (*UR* §14; *AAS* 57 [1965]: 101).

77. John Paul II’s encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003) makes a worthwhile observation in this regard: “Precisely because the Church’s unity, which the Eucharist brings about through the Lord’s

Among Protestants, evangelicals are probably closest to Catholicism—witness, for instance, the growth of the contingent of evangelical Catholics as a result of the past several papacies, of which George Weigel has given an account in his book, *Evangelical Catholicism*.⁷⁸ At the same time, the kinship between Catholics and evangelicals has primarily been due to shared moral values, of which *Unitatis Redintegratio* speaks in commenting that “ecumenical dialogue could start with the moral application of the Gospel.”⁷⁹ This “ecumenism of the trenches,” as Timothy George has called it, does lead to genuine co-belligerency, and it also lays the groundwork for discussions about ecclesial unity. But the lack of historical and liturgical awareness among evangelicals should remind us of the tremendous difficulties that we face in terms of ecumenical prospects. All this is simply to say that issues internal to Protestantism are in part responsible for the lack of progress in implementing the agenda, if we may call it that, of *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

Since, however, I have been analyzing the Decree on Ecumenism, I want to focus on what I believe to be a serious obstacle to unity within *Unitatis Redintegratio* itself. Perhaps I can best illustrate my concern by means of a question that Charles Morerod raises in his discussion of the document. He asks: “Since all Christian communities are divided, should we not say that the Catholic Church is also not blessed with ‘that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow?’”⁸⁰ Though Morerod recognizes the strength of this argument, he counters it with two comments, from Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II respectively, in which they affirm the fullness of the unity of the

sacrifice and by communion in his body and blood, absolutely requires full communion in the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesiastical governance, it is not possible to celebrate together the same Eucharistic liturgy until those bonds are fully re-established. Any such concelebration would not be a valid means, and might well prove instead to be *an obstacle, to the attainment of full communion*, by weakening the sense of how far we remain from this goal and by introducing or exacerbating ambiguities with regard to one or another truth of the faith. The path towards full unity can only be undertaken in truth” (§44; emphasis in original); http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html; AAS 95 (2003): 433–75, at 462. In an earlier publication, I was more positive about the practice of “Eucharistic hospitality” (*Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004], 215–22). I have come to see more clearly the problems that such a practice entails. It not only imperils ecumenism—since the Eucharist marks the high point of ecclesial unity—but it also sacrifices the visibility of the church’s structures, reduces the church to a private as opposed to a public entity, and makes church discipline and supervision all but impossible. In short, I worry that the practice of intercommunion renders the individual rather than the corporate church responsible for judging matters of faith and morals.

78. George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church* (New York: Basic—Perseus, 2014).

79. UR §23; AAS 57 (1965): 106.

80. Morerod, “The Decree on Ecumenism,” 317.

Catholic Church, and Morerod concludes from this: "Catholic theologians must deal with a paradox: All Christians are divided, and Catholics are in this situation of division, but the Catholic Church alone has never lost full unity."⁸¹ While I appreciate the appeal to the two pontiffs, it is not enough to appeal to the Catholic magisterium in support for the full and perduring unity of the Catholic Church. The paradox on which Morerod insists needs not just a formal but also a material theological argument.

Catholicism suffers a much deeper wound than Morerod (and, I think, the Decree on Ecumenism itself) appears ready to acknowledge. The inability of admitting this comes to the fore perhaps most clearly in the way the council fathers deal with the Catholic theological heritage. My earlier discussion regarding the notion of a hierarchy of truths is indicative of this inability. The formal authority of Catholic doctrines, including those that some may call "non-fundamental" or that at least are less important (such as transubstantiation, the immaculate conception of Mary, and so on), cannot ever be called into question. Although the Council goes as far as it possibly can by linking the hierarchy of truths to the prospects for ecumenical dialogue, I already indicated that it is not at all clear that the hierarchy of truths can assist such dialogue *in actual fact*. For that to happen, the Catholic Church would at the very least have to acknowledge that some doctrines are not essential to the unity of the church and that in those cases we can accept different points of view. It seems to me that the strictly irreformable character of Catholic teaching prevents the hierarchy of truths from serving a truly ecumenical role. Ecumenical progress hinges, therefore, on a more robust functioning of the distinction between affirmations and representations. By no means do I mean to promote a relativist attitude toward Christian doctrine. But it strains credulity that brothers and sisters in Christ, who love and care for one another, must either continue in their divided paths or accept that the uniquely Roman Catholic representations of certain doctrines are essential to Christian unity.

From all I can see, the approach to unity in *Unitatis Redintegratio* does not sufficiently take into account that the church's unity is an eschatological reality, which, although it breaks into this world and allows us provisionally to share in it through the preaching of the gospel and the celebration of the Eucharist, does not visibly take shape today as fully as it will in the hereafter. The ultimate reason, therefore, why the language of *subsistere*, the use of a set of concentric circles, and the notion of a hierarchy of truths all fail

81. Morerod, "The Decree on Ecumenism," 317.

to bring us to the point of unity is that they obscure the underlying problem, namely, that *Unitatis Redintegratio* still does not do sufficient justice to the eschatological character of the church's unity.⁸²

To be sure, paragraph 4 does quote Ephesians 5:27, where Saint Paul mentions the church as Christ's bride "without spot or wrinkle," and the council fathers envision this as an eschatological reality to which we may look forward: "Every Catholic must therefore aim at Christian perfection and, each according to his station, play his part, that the Church, which bears in her own body the humility and dying of Jesus, may daily be more purified and renewed, against the day when Christ will present her to himself in all her glory without spot or wrinkle."⁸³ This eschatological reading of Ephesians 5:27 is an important recognition that it is at the end time that the church will be without spot or wrinkle.

But the decree precedes this statement with the comment: "Although the Catholic Church has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all means of grace, yet its members fail to live by them with all the fervor that they should."⁸⁴ This statement distinguishes between the church and its members, or, we could also say, between unity *of* the church and unity *in* the church. Unity *of* the church (the church itself) is rooted in the apostolic tradition that ultimately goes back to the eternal missions of the Son and of the Spirit; unity *in* the church (that of the members) is the way in which people give expression to this unity in their everyday lives.⁸⁵ The distinction is a legitimate one, I think, as long as we keep in mind that the unity *of* the church first of all concerns the church of the *eschaton*, which does not fully manifest itself in structural unity here on earth. Perhaps, therefore, we should entertain the possibility that full unity comes to us from the end,

82. Cf. Geoffrey Wainwright's comment: "I wish to suggest that a genuinely eschatological tension allows all the notes of the church to be confessed in a dynamic sense that fosters their perfect and tangible attainment, albeit within the limits of a pilgrim existence. In that way, other authentically Trinitarian churches and ecclesial communities—marked by the Gospel, the Scriptures, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and active faith (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 20–23)—could be regarded as *part of* the 'one holy catholic Church' while praying and working toward the fullness that would come to them—and to the Roman Church—on the establishment of communion with the apostolic Petrine see in structures that still demand elaboration" ("*Unitatis Redintegratio* in a Protestant Perspective," *Pro Ecclesia* 15, no. [2006], 172–85, at 185).

83. *UR* §4; *AAS* 57 (1965): 95.

84. *UR* §4; *AAS* 57 (1965): 95.

85. Though the distinction between unity *of* the church and unity *in* the church is mine, it does justice to paragraph 4, as it is patterned on the International Theological Commission's 1999 statement, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, which distinguishes between holiness *of* the church and holiness *in* the church, with the former remaining inviolable despite problems with the latter (*MR* 3.2; http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html).

the eschatological unity to which the apostle Paul refers. To my mind, paragraph 4 is too quick in appropriating to the Catholic Church “all divinely revealed truth” and relegates any problems in this regard too easily to its members who fail to live up to it.

I applaud the Decree on Ecumenism’s encouragement that Catholics meet with non-Catholics “on equal footing” (*par cum pari*), and I am grateful for this volume of essays (and the conference on which it is based) as an example of this. Nonetheless, one of the greatest obstacles toward full unity remains the conviction that this principle of meeting *par cum pari* does not apply to the Roman Catholic Church as an institution. Individual Catholics are encouraged to meet *par cum pari*; but the discourse of *Unitatis Redintegratio* does not suggest that the Catholic Church is on equal footing with “separated brethren.” I suspect that if the principle of meeting *par cum pari* is allowed materially to affect Catholic ecclesiology more robustly than it does in the Decree on Ecumenism, ecumenical progress will become a genuine possibility.