Call to Unity

RESOURCING THE CHURCH FOR ECUMENICAL MINISTRY

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Council On
Christian Unity

Style and Substance in the New Ecumenism

F ROM THE E DITOR

New Ecumenism

This issue of *Call to Unity* brings together three articles that were first presented during "Ministers' Week" at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on January 11-12, 2005. The theme for the week focused upon understanding the call to Christian unity in a time of transition from the "old ecumenism" of the twentieth century, to a "new ecumenism" marked by new insights and understandings into the nature of unity (William Tabbernee); the empowering concept of common humanity (Ray A. Owens); and a more aggressive ecumenical agenda in the Roman Catholic Church calling for communion, evangelization and conversion (Joseph Bessler-Northcutt).

Each of these articles, written from very different theological perspectives and personal histories in the life of the church and the ecumenical movement, offers fresh and challenging insights into the style and substance in the *new ecumenism*:

· A Disciples of Christ seminary president and Professor of the History of Christianity, who lived and taught for many years in Australia, responds to the current and widely-used image of "the winter of ecumenism" by reminding us that "when it's winter in some parts of the world, it is summer in the opposite hemisphere."

· An ordained minister in the Progressive National Baptist Convention who serves as Assistant Professor of Christian Social Ethics and Black Studies, looks at the ecumenical movement through different eyes to suggest that "people of color have a valuable contribution to make toward the challenge of ecumenism, especially as it is expressed and understood in predominantly white and 'so-called' mainline denominations."

· A lay member in the Roman Catholic Church and Associate Professor of Theology reviews 40 years of engagement and leadership by the Roman Catholic Church in ecumenism and hints at a potential shift in priority from a focus on dialogue to evangelization.

I was excited when I originally listened to the tapes of these lectures and the challenge they offered to the *old ecumenism*. I am grateful to Phillips Theological Seminary for allowing me to publish these articles as a contribution to the larger discussion of the quest for Christian unity in our time of transition and new encounter.

Perhaps . . . just perhaps, what we are experiencing is indeed "a new ecumenism!"

Robert Welsh

Call to Unity
Resourcing the Church for Ecumenical Ministry

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Style and Substance in the New Ecumenism

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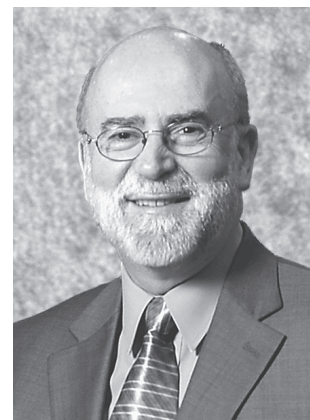
Sailing the Ecumenical Boat in the Twenty-First Century

William Tabbernee

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I thought that the lecture I had given to my Church History class at Phillips Theological Seminary in late November 2004 on Christian architecture had gone really well. I had shown slides of various early basilicas, including the remains of a particularly beautiful one at Myra, in Turkey. Myra was the ancient Lycian city where St. Nicholas had been bishop in the fourth century C.E. I, as part of the presentation, had shown photos of St. Nicholas' sarcophagus, totally oblivious to the fact that two of the students, a married couple, had brought their young daughter to class that evening as they had not been able to obtain a baby sitter. The next morning, the parents came to me and said, "You have totally blown it! After the class our daughter, who still believes in Santa Claus, cried, 'But Mommy, he can't be dead!'."

Three weeks after my monumental *faux pas*, the International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church met in Bari, on the east coast of Italy. Coincidentally, or perhaps providentially, our first day of scheduled meetings was December 6: St. Nicholas' Day! What is even more interesting (or providential) is that St. Nicholas is not only patron saint of Myra and of children but also patron saint of Bari and of sailors. On May 9, 1087, some sailors from Bari had "rescued" the bones of St. Nicholas by taking them out of the sarcophagus

(which I had shown the class during my slide show!) at Myra and bringing them to Bari. The relics are still in the crypt beneath the magnificent St. Nicholas Basilica at Bari, consecrated in 1197. On May 9 and on December 6 each year, huge festivals attract thousands of pilgrims to Bari, which rivals Santiago de Compostella as a place for pilgrimage for Catholics and other Christians.

We had intended a full day's work for our dialogue on December 6, 2004, but (again providentially!) the Archbishop of Bari had invited us to participate as his special guests in the festivities and celebrations, so we worked only in the morning. It being a new round of the dialogue, we spent time getting to know each other and becoming acquainted with the theme for this round of discussion: "The Presence of Christ in the Church with special emphasis on the Eucharist." In denominational subgroups, we also oriented new members, emphasizing the joy of being able to converse with our dialogue partners about such an important topic.

In the Disciples subgroup, we spoke, among other things, of the pain which exists for us when, although being used to an "open table" in our own context, we are unable to receive the Eucharist because our two churches have not yet reached the stage where full Eucharistic fellowship is possible—although this is our joint goal. A step along the way has been the receiving of a "blessing" at each others' Eucharists during the course of the dialogue period—a step implemented in the last stages of the last round of the dialogue. To my later shame, I expressed some hesitations about the concept of receiving a blessing—as it seemed a poor substitute and perhaps a little patronizing.

Having completed our morning's sessions at the re-

What if some of the frustrations experienced at the end of the twentieth century were, at least in part, the result of some significant changes occurring in respect of ecumenism?

treat center, we traveled to the city of Bari itself to join the Archbishop of Bari and the Dominican Fathers of Saint Nicholas' Basilica, first for a magnificent (nine course-) lunch and later for the celebrations at the cathedral. During the lunch I sat opposite one of the Dominican Fathers, a priest who was also the president of the ecumenical institute at Bari: a humble, wonderful man whose deep spirituality was immediately apparent during our conversation.

At the end of the meal, I (as co-chair of the dialogue) was asked to make a brief "thank you" speech. Among other things, I stated that we had now learned the secret of Italian ecumenism—lots of food! As I said this, I was only partly joking. The ecumenical hospitality which we received on St. Nicholas' Day in Bari gave us hope that one day we would also share full Eucharistic hospitality.

Later that day, as we were being shown around the ancient harbor of Bari, from which the sailors had set out and returned with St. Nicholas' bones, we could see a number of little boats ready to sail. This made me think of the logo of ecumenism: a boat, symbolizing the church sailing on the global waves of the *oikoumenē*: the whole inhabited earth.

The "Age of Ecumenism"

When the history of Christianity in the twentieth century is finally written, it will probably be characterized as the "Age of Ecumenism." During almost all of that century, the ecumenical boat was sailing well—full speed ahead. From the 1920s onwards there were such high hopes. Those involved in the earliest stages of the modern ecumenical movement truly believed that the movement could and would make a difference; that the church could and would not only be renewed but changed; and that there would, in their lifetime, be visible Christian unity for the sake of the whole world.

The formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948[1]; the momentous decisions made in respect of ecumenism during the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s[2]; the plethora of church unions or mergers in the 1970s[3]; the explosion of "local ecumenical initiatives"[4]; and the publication and wide

reception of the convergence document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*[5] in the early 1980s were all optimistic indicators that the ecumenical boat would undoubtedly reach its destination. By the mid-to-late 1980s, however, there were indicators that the boat had slowed down. Some wondered if the boat was still sailing. Was this the "Winter of Ecumenism"? Had the ecumenical boat run aground? Was it stuck on an iceberg? Was it in danger of sinking? At the beginning of the 1990s, there were still a few—but only a few—church unions. There was a great deal of criticism of the WCC in particular and of the ecumenical movement in general, even "by its friends."[6] Others were lamenting that Vatican II had not produced the results for which they had hoped.

As I was looking at the new boats bobbing up and down in the ancient harbor of Bari, I remembered that when it is winter in some parts of the world, it is summer in the opposite hemisphere. While in Bari on December 6 it was winter, it was summer in Australia—with some very hot people sweating in their Santa Claus suits! It gave me an idea. What if some of the frustrations experienced at the end of the *twentieth* century were, at least in part, the result of some significant changes occurring in respect of ecumenism—which those used to the "*old* ecumenism" had difficulty seeing? What if a "*new* ecumenism" was emerging? Or, to mix the metaphor, what if during the late 1980s and the 1990s a new ecumenical boat had been in the process of being constructed—a somewhat different ecumenical boat better suited to the *twenty-first* century? If so, what does that boat look like? How do we sail it? Will it really sail better than the old one? How sturdy is it?

New Planks

I know nothing about boat building, other than that in ancient wooden sailing vessels, old planks were often replaced by new ones which, because of their different size and shape, could radically improve the boat—even when much of it remained the same. I believe that during the 1980s and the 1990s we gained some insights about ecumenism which

brought about some important changes in the self-understanding and definition of ecumenism. These changes were so radical that they developed new principles which could be described as "paradigm shifts"—but as this term is overused, I prefer to refer to them as the "new planks of the new ecumenism." In my view, there are five new planks in the new ecumenical boat.

The five new planks of the new ecumenical boat were hewn and shaped during the latter part of the twentieth century because we learned to define more accurately the meaning of five important pairs of frequently used ecumenical terms——and the concepts underlying those terms. This redefinition, concentrating creatively on the *difference* between the two terms of each pair, led not only to greater precision in the way the terms were used but developed new ecumenical principles, which, using the metaphor of the new ecumenical boat, I am calling "planks." I will summarize these principles/ planks succinctly later, but first let me share with you the five pairs of terms, emphasizing what we have learned about the difference between these terms.

> *When the history of Christianity in the twentieth century is finally written, it will probably be characterized as the "Age of Ecumenism."*

I. *The Difference Between UNITY and UNIFORMITY*

In the ecumenical movement we have long known that there is a difference between *unity* and *uniformity*, but the radical implication of this difference has only recently been articulated and owned. The implication for the "new ecumenism" (the "new boat") has to do with the concept of *diversity*. We no longer say: "How much uniformity must we have in order to have Christian unity?" We now say: "How much diversity can we embrace *and* celebrate?" While there are limits to acceptable diversity, the radical new challenge before us is to see how widely we can draw the "ecumenical circle" (before "falling off the edges") and to *celebrate* the diversity which we thereby embrace.

The joyful embracing of Christian diversity frees us from a false assumption. When we enter ecumenical dialogue or work together as local churches, we *do not* need complete harmony, total agreement on matters of faith, doctrine, the nature of ministry, worship, or liturgy before we can engage in visible

unity. "Unity" and "uniformity" are not synonyms. Unity can (and must) be achieved irrespective of whether absolute uniformity of faith and practice is possible. Similarly, uniformity, by itself, does not guarantee unity.

Not one Christian community can lay claim to the whole of Christian truth and apostolic witness. *Each* Christian tradition brings on board the ecumenical boat dimensions of Christian faith and practice which are so important that in earlier generations people were prepared to die for them. The Christian Church as a whole would be impoverished if diversity of Christian faith and practice were simply to be harmonized into singular uniformity.

To recognize each others' baptism, to have intercommunion, to authorize (as our own) each others' ordained ministry, to engage in joint decision-making, and to covenant to be "church" together in the twenty-first century means to embrace, incorporate, celebrate, and to benefit from the rich, complementary diversity which is inherent in the totality of Christianity. To put it bluntly, the Church is better off, not worse off, by abandoning its earlier search for uniformity. Consequently, the new ecumenical boat should set a course which will ensure retaining and benefiting from Christian diversity rather than steering around diverse elements of faith and practice as if they were obstacles which might sink the ship. The ship is more likely to run aground from the attempt at producing an unwarranted and unnecessary uniformity. In other words, the new ecumenism of the twenty-first century must be intentional (not apologetic!) about its quest for diversity. In doing so we must ask not: "To what extent is diversity to be *tolerated*?" but: "To what extent is diversity to be sought out?" We need to ask not only: "How much diversity *can* we embrace?" but also: "How much diversity *must* we embrace?"

Claiming the seeking out, incorporation, and celebration of diversity as a new ecumenical imperative means charting a course for the ecumenical boat which takes us beyond the famous and often quoted principle formulated during the Third Faith and Order Conference held in Lund, Sweden, in 1957:

Churches . . . should . . . act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately.[7]

The first principle ("plank") of the new ecumenism, however, stresses that even the existence of deep differences of conviction is an insufficient reason for churches not to act together. Such differences are certainly no reason either to break Christian unity or not to enter into new forms of Christian unity. No matter how important the differences are, they are not important enough for us to remain separated from one another as Christians or as churches.

At the recent Disciples/Roman Catholic Dialogue in Bari, the fear was expressed by some participants that if we were to discuss women's ordination, this would become a "dialogue-breaking" issue. The new ecumenism, however, would answer strongly: "It is not!" This is the case because an ecumenism which can embrace both churches which practice the ordination of women and those who do not does not demand that churches "sell out" their deeply held convictions and long-held traditions—but it does demand that these churches engage each other (if necessary, passionately) about those issues while drawing even more closely together in visible Christian unity.

Sailing the ecumenical boat in the twenty-first century means not only recognizing that there is a difference between *unity* and *uniformity*, it also means understanding the difference between a second pair of terms, namely:

2. *The Difference Between DISAGREEMENT and DISUNITY*

Ecumenical dialogue and cooperation do not mean unwarranted compromise. There are (and must be) times when, as churches or as individual Christians, we passionately and rightly disagree with each other on crucially important issues—both in terms of theology or practice and in terms of matters which we perceive as matters of social justice, equity, or equality: ordination of women; the "proper" way to baptize; the Eucharist; pro-choice/pro-life; civil unions/gay marriage; genetic engineering; cloning; stem cell research; and a host of other issues.

By the mid-to-late 1980s, however, there were indicators that the boat had slowed down.

As Michael Kinnamon says so well in his book, *The Vision of the Church and How It Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends*:

. . . even in such moments [of disagreement], we must recognize that the "them" we oppose are in some fundamental way "us." The ecumenical church cannot fear controversy or confrontation . . . but it must hate division because the story by which we live tells us that we have been linked in communion with persons we would otherwise shun.[8]

On a recent plane trip I noticed that the pretzels I was eating were made by "Snyder of Hannover, Pennsylvania." Being a person who reads everything, I read the back of the packet and was stunned by the words, "We are not connected with Snyder of Berlin, Pennsylvania"—and wondered what was behind that statement! Whatever the context of that statement might be, the point for us is that, as Christians and churches, we *are* connected to each other. We always share a God-given unity. Irrespective of whether we have institutional memories which need to be healed or whether we rightly (or wrongly) disagree passionately with each other on some issues, we still belong to each other. Consequently, we must find ways of distinguishing between *disagreement* and *disunity* and help each other to exercise "unity-in-tension."[9]

At the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993 at Santiago de Compostella in Spain, I was sitting at lunch one day with two Dutch theologians. I was born in the Netherlands, so it was good to be able to practice my Dutch. Interestingly, in Dutch, there are two words for "Reformed": "Gereformeerd" and "Hervormd." One of the theologians belonged to the Gereformeerde Kerk ("Reformed Church"[10]); the other belonged to the Herformde Kerk (also "Reformed Church"[11]). I asked them why, with such similar names and shared history, they could not become one united church. After an awkward pause, one of them said, "It is difficult to become in full unity with a church which still has anathemas on its books against the church to which you belong." The good news is that on December 12, 2003, these churches officially united—healing four hundred

years of separated existence,[12] despite the differences on many issues which they still maintain.

A third, but closely related insight which truly makes it possible to have both unity and disagreement, comes from a deeper understanding of the difference between yet another set of terms:

3. The Difference Between COMPARATIVE ECCLESIOLOGY and ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

When the World Council of Churches sent out its convergence document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (*BEM*), to the churches as part of the process of reception,[13] it asked: ". . . the Commission would be pleased to know as precisely as possible *the extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages*."[14] In our initial response to this question, many of us pointed out where *BEM* was *wrong* because it did not exactly mirror what we or our church had always believed or practiced. That, however, was engaging in *comparative ecclesiology*, not *ecumenical theology*. We had failed to recognize that a new ecumenical principle has been initiated. When the churches, working together, have achieved a considerable measure of *convergence* (if not yet "consensus") on particular issues of faith and practice, it is no longer a matter of judging the results merely from our own denominational and historical context. Instead we must allow the text to inform, and where necessary judge, us and hold us accountable to the church ecumenical for the way in which we express the apostolic faith. The new principle, therefore, demands that we no longer ask (as in comparative ecclesiology): "How is this (or that) text/church/doctrine/practice wrong because it does not agree with what I/my church has always believed/taught/practiced?" but: "How can this text/church/doctrine/practice—even when it differs from what I/my church has always believed/taught/practiced—help us to see the apostolic faith in those other beliefs/teachings/practices?" "How can this text/church/doctrine/practice help us to recognize that the definition of the term "Christian" (genuine, apostolic faith and practice) is much broader than what delineates our own particular brand of Christianity?"

Comparative ecclesiology, although interesting for historians, is a non-productive exercise ecumenically as it has a tendency to reinforce the view that "we are right" and "everyone else is wrong." Ecumenical theology, on the other hand, recognizing that there is a difference between "unity and uniformity," "disagreement and disunity," seeks to identify and celebrate essential convergence as well as to identify remaining areas of disagreement which may (or may not) be road blocks to increased levels of unity and brings to bear insights which both enrich our own understanding and practice of the faith and which help to reduce or remove unnecessary obstacles to visible unity.

During the latter part of the twentieth century, further clarity was also gained in respect of:

4. The Difference Between ECUMENISM and INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

While some people wanted merely to broaden the definition of ecumenism to include interfaith dialogue, a consensus has arisen which recognizes the two as different but intrinsically (even symbiotically) related activities.

Ecumenism has a Christian, Christological focus. Interfaith dialogue has a broader agenda and becomes involved in specifically Christian theological issues only tangentially. It is crucial for us as Christians to continue our significant ecumenical work with other Christians. Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry (TMM), for example, while an interfaith body, has as one of its committees one titled the "Christian Unity Issues Committee." The formation of this committee was recommended by a former president of TMM: *Rabbi* Charles Sherman. Sailing the ecumenical boat in the twenty-first century, however, means never forgetting that the Christian boat is not the only boat in God's ocean.

Christian unity is ultimately rooted in the basic unity of all human beings created in the image of God. We are "one" not only with our fellow Christians but also with our fellow Jews, our fellow Muslims, and with people of all faiths (or of no faith). We have all been created by the one God—the God whom the so-called Abrahamic faiths share in common.

We no longer say: "How much uniformity must we have in order to have Christian unity?"
We now say: "How much diversity can we embrace and celebrate?"

A radical new principle of the new ecumenism (the fourth "plank" in the new ecumenical boat) is that we must never undertake our ecumenical tasks in isolation from our work with, and sensitivity to, those of other faiths. As we engage in intra-Christian ecumenical discussions, we must do so as if a member of the Jewish faith, or some other faith, were sitting at the table—and, ideally, because such a person is actually sitting there having been invited to be present. This, for example, will help us to confront and grapple with supersessionist presuppositions which may, inadvertently or otherwise, creep into our discussions. "Supersessionism" teaches that Judaism, by not recognizing Jesus as the long-promised Messiah, missed the boat (not just the *ecumenical* boat but the allegedly "superior" *Christian* boat) and that God created a new covenant with Christians which replaced and superseded the covenant which God had with Israel. This (in my view totally wrong and unsupportable) teaching has been so insidious and pervasive that it has affected negatively the way in which Christians have viewed the Hebrew scriptures, Judaism as a whole, and Jews as individuals. Recent Christian/Jewish dialogue work on parallel covenants and the nature of messiahship as well as on liturgy and the lectionary[15] have shown that it is not only possible but essential for Christians to be Christians without being supersessionists—something which must be remembered in all ecumenical discussions.

The most important word rediscovered by the ecumenical movement in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century has been "*koinonia*." At the same time, the ecumenical world discovered:

5. *The Difference Between* KOINONIA *and* COOPERATION

The Greek word *Koinonia* means "communion," "fellowship," "partnership," and "shared life." Indeed, the word is so rich in meaning that it is probably best left untranslated—which is what the ecumenical movement has done. When we say *koinonia* we mean all of the above. One of the most important statements produced by the then "emerging" and now "new" ecumenism is a docu-

> *Ecumenism has a Christian, Christological focus. Interfaith dialogue has a broader agenda and becomes involved in specifically Christian theological issues only tangentially.*

ment issued by the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra, Australia, 1991. Its title, significantly, is "The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling."[16] The underlying thrust of the Canberra statement was to encourage churches to move beyond cooperation (which is fine as far as it goes) to *shared common life* (*koinonia*), which is full visible unity. It seems to me that its central section (3.2) may be taken as *the* chart for sailing the ecumenical boat in the twenty-first century:

The challenge at this moment in the ecumenical movement as a reconciling and renewing movement toward full visible unity is . . . to call all churches:

- to recognize each other's baptism on the basis of the BEM document;

- to move towards the recognition of the apostolic faith as expressed through the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in the life and witness of one another;

- on the basis of convergence in faith in baptism, eucharist and ministry to consider, wherever appropriate, forms of eucharistic hospitality; we gladly acknowledge that some who do not observe these rites share in the spiritual experience of life in Christ;

- to move towards a mutual recognition of ministries;

- to endeavour in word and deed to give common witness to the gospel as a whole;

- to recommit themselves to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, linking more closely the search for the sacramental communion of the church with the struggles for justice and peace;

- to help parishes and communities express in appropriate ways locally the degree of communion that already exists.[17]

Koinonia includes cooperation but exceeds cooperation in finding specific ways by which ecumenical cooperation can change the way in which churches at the local, regional, denominational, and global level live together in a visible expression of Christian unity.[18]

Key Principles of the New Ecumenism

What I have been trying to show is that at the end of the twentieth century

- a new ecumenism ("a new ecumenical boat") was emerging because of some new insights about the difference between five pairs of well-known ecumenical terms; and that, consequently,

- five new key principles ("planks of the new ecumenical boat") arose which, when put into practice, can and will lead to viable forms of visible Christian unity.

These five principles ("planks") are:

1. Diversity is to be embraced, sought out, and celebrated;

2. Controversy is not to be avoided;

3. Ecumenical theology (not comparative ecclesiology) is to be the hermeneutical norm;

4. Christian ecumenism must not be isolated from dialogue with other living faiths; and

5. Shared common life (*koinonia*) must be the intentional goal of all ecumenical engagement.

Applying the Principles of the New Ecumenism

Sailing the ecumenical boat in the twenty-first century successfully means being aware of and utilizing the five key principles of the "new ecumenism" in all discussions among and between churches and in all other dimensions of our work together as churches. These principles are especially helpful in dealing with issues which still divide the churches. For example, despite the great progress made in terms of baptism, Eucharist, and ministry, as reflected in *BEM*, we do not yet exhibit full visible unity in respect of these important aspects of church life. Applying the five key principles identified above can take us to full visible baptismal, Eucharistic, and ministerial unity. Let me explain how by using each of the three components of *BEM* as illustrations.

1. *Baptism*

We live in a post-denominational age. Living in such an age does not mean that there are no longer "denominations," but it does mean that the deep-seated loyalty to the denomination of a person's Christian origins is no longer as strong as it was in previous generations. Younger people especially

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PLANKS OF THE NEW ECUMENICAL BOAT

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have little difficulty in marrying persons outside of the denomination to which their family belongs. Nor do they hesitate to swap from one local church to another one which is part of a different denomination if that particular local church meets their needs better than the one which they once attended. Given the social and geographic mobility of people nowadays, "denomination hopping" is the norm in many Protestant families and is becoming more common in Catholic and Orthodox families.

As people move from church/denomination to church/denomination, they invariably encounter the issue of baptism. At the point of marriage, the validity of one of the partners' baptism may be questioned by the officiating minister. Young couples, coming from a church/denomination which practices primarily "infant baptism" joining a church which only practices "believers' baptism," may be dissatisfied with the "child and parent dedication service" held to celebrate and give thanks for their child's entry into the world and into the family of the church. Individuals having been baptized as infants, seeing the vitality of services in which baptism of adults by immersion upon confession of faith by the candidate for baptism are conducted, may wish to be baptized in that way and may find it difficult to understand why the minister refuses their request—while others are horrified when they learn that some other minister from another church/denomination

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has "re-baptized" Christians in the Jordan River while on a pilgrimage to Israel.

The examples cited above make it clear that what is at stake here is far more than academic discussion about theoretical ecumenical issues. Ecumenism matters, because what we decide ecumenically (or fail to decide ecumenically) critically affects the lives of countless individuals at a very practical level. We simply cannot any longer say, "Well, we've gone as far as we can go with this issue. We reached convergence, we'll never reach consensus, there's no more we can do." To the contrary, for the sake of the people whose lives are affected by what we do or do not do, we *must* do more, and the five new principles of the new ecumenism helps us to do a whole lot more.

The first principle ("Diversity is to be embraced, sought out, and celebrated") moves us away from an either/or mentality. *Both forms of baptism* are to be embraced, sought out, and celebrated. It is not really the case that there are some churches/denominations which practice "believers' baptism" and some churches which practice "infant baptism." *All* churches/ denominations which practice baptism[19] practice "believers' baptism": some churches also practice the baptism of the infants of believers—in recognition of the covenantal relationship to God of these children through God's prevenient grace. Even when "infant baptism" is not part of a particular church/denomination's traditional form of baptism, the first principle of the new ecumenism should enable that church/denomination to embrace the persons who come to that church/denomination and celebrate with them the joy and validity of their baptism and find appropriate ways to do so publicly. Similarly, traditionally "infant baptism" churches/denominations can (and should) find public ways to acknowledge and celebrate the baptism of those in their midst from "believers' baptism" churches. According to the first new principle of the new ecumenism, it should also be possible for churches/denominations to each practice *both* kinds of baptism as equally valid and appropriate (although not both for the same person[20]).

Embracing both forms of baptism, including both ways in which the rite is administered (sprinkling/ affusion; immersion), does not mean that differ-

Sailing the ecumenical boat in the twenty-first century, however, means never forgetting that the Christian boat is not the only boat in God's ocean.

ences of emphasis and practice will (or should) disappear. Indeed, principle 2 ("Controversy is not to be avoided") declares that there is nothing wrong with Baptists or Disciples arguing passionately for believers' baptism by immersion as being, *for them*, the *best* (or the "most biblical" or the "most historically accurate") way of baptizing—or other churches/denominations arguing equally passionately for infant baptism. As in the new ecumen-ism we are *not* seeking for *uniformity* of faith and practice (principle 1), we may embrace and celebrate and incorporate into our own church's life and liturgy particular forms of sacramental practice which formerly divided us while retaining (and in ecumenical discussions arguing for) a preferential option for one of these forms. Such preferential option for, say, "believers' baptism" over "infant baptism" (or *vice versa*) does not negate or limit full visible unity—as long as we acknowledge that this is a preferential option *for us* and that an option preferred by churches/denominations shaped by a different historical or theological context is equally valid.

None of the above means that the new ecumenism promotes a *laissez faire*, "anything goes" approach. Principle 3 ("Ecumenical theology [not comparative ecclesiology] is to be the hermeneutical norm") stresses that church life and practice is to be theologically informed. The hermeneutical key to such theologically informed denominational or local church expressions of Christian life and practice should no longer be "comparative ecclesiology" (by which we say, "That church's practice of baptism is wrong because it differs from my church's practice") but "ecumenical theology." Ecumenical theology on baptism, as seen, for example, in the convergence document *BEM*, clearly confirms that *both* forms of baptism are authentic expressions of apostolic practice.[21]

Ecumenical theology also reveals that, while both forms of baptism are equally valid, baptizing the same person again so that she or he may personally experience "believers' baptism by immersion" as well as "infant baptism by sprinkling" is not. *BEM* puts it forcefully:

Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice

which might be interpreted as "re-baptism" must be avoided.[22]

Churches which have insisted on a particular form of baptism or which have had serious questions about the authenticity of other churches' sacraments and ministries have at times required persons coming from other church traditions to be baptized before being received into full communicant membership. As the churches come to fuller mutual understanding and acceptance of one another and enter into closer relationships in witness and service, they will want to refrain from any practice which might call into question the sacramental integrity of other churches or which might diminish the unrepeatability of the sacrament of baptism.[23]

BEM uses helpful language when it refers to the two forms of baptism as "*equivalent alternatives* for entry into the Church."[24]

In respect of baptism, the fourth principle of the new ecumenism ("Christian ecumenism must not be isolated from dialogue with other living faiths") enables us to enrich our understanding of this Christian sacrament by learning more about its background and significance through dialogue with our Jewish brothers and sisters concerning their historic and contemporary practices of initiation, including proselyte baptism. As Christians we must never forget that both John the Baptist and Jesus were Jews and that the baptism which John administered and which Jesus received was *Jewish baptism*!

Principle 5 ("Shared common life [*koinonia*] must be the intentional goal of all ecumenical engagement") focuses on the practical implications of the four other principles. In other words, principle 5 asks: "In light of what we now know about baptism as a result of our ecumenical work arising out of principles 1-4, what practical steps can we take to make our Christian unity in respect of baptism fully visible?" Each church/denomination, of course, will need to answer that question for itself, but here are some possibilities:

- members and clergy of neighboring congregations from other denominations may be specifically invited to attend, and participate in, the baptismal services of a particular local church;

- common baptismal certificates may be produced and utilized by all Christian denominations in a given region or country;

- covenantal agreements and/or "ecumenical partnerships" may be entered into by denominations formally recognizing the baptism of each others' members;

- joint services of the renewal of baptismal vows (not re-baptism!) may be held, especially at Easter or at ecumenical gatherings.[25]

2. *Eucharist*

For most churches/denominations, the Eucharist/Lord's Supper is the most important aspect of Christian life and worship.[26] Yet at eleven o'clock each Sunday morning, the Church is visibly divided, rather than united, around the Eucharist. Paradoxically, the disunity around the Eucharist is to a large extent obscured on Sunday mornings because we meet separately in "like-practicing" local expressions of denominational subgroups of Christianity. Only when we meet *ecumenically* does the division around the Eucharist become visible and painful. While we meet separately, we are confronted neither with the issue nor the pain.

The disunity over the Eucharist within contemporary Christianity consists of two different yet closely related dimensions: the first theological, the second practical. At the theological level, there are some churches/denominations which have traditionally understood the Eucharist primarily in terms of "sacrifice" and "real presence" whereas other churches have traditionally viewed the Eucharist/Lord's Supper more in terms of "memorial" and "spiritual presence." Applying "ecumenical theology," rather than "comparative ecclesiology" (principle 3), enables us to see that there is, in fact, much more common ground in respect of these different theological emphases than previously assumed— although some real differences still remain.[27] The practical dimension still inherent in the continuing separation at "the table of the Lord" is the issue of the degree to which full agreement in sacramental theology is necessary before full Eucharistic fellowship is possible. Principles 1 ("Diversity is to be embraced, sought out, and celebrated") and

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Given the social and geographic mobility of people nowadays, "denomination hopping" is the norm in many Protestant families and is becoming more common in Catholic and Orthodox families.

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2 ("Controversy is not to be avoided") of the new ecumenism would argue that it is indeed possible to meet as Christians around the Lord's Table even while we still have different (in some cases, very different) understandings of some aspects of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper and which we will continue to debate passionately. The new ecumenism also stresses that where churches/denominations, for their own good reasons, are unable to engage in what, for them, is still premature Eucharistic fellowship, their right to restrict the Eucharist to their own members and/or to those who share completely should be respected, with the prayer that further ecumenical dialogue will lead to even greater theological convergence. A "patient-impatience" is required from all partners in the work of the new ecumenism, enabling us to live out a "real but (as yet) imperfect unity" on the way to full *koinonia*.

Principle 4 of the new ecumenism reminds us that on the way to full Christian *koinonia*, we "must not be isolated from dialogue with other living faiths." For example, to avoid supersessionism (or even anti-semitism), it is important to nuance carefully what we communicate in our Eucharistic liturgies, texts, and homilies or sermons about the crucifixion of Christ and God's covenantal relationship with Christians.[28]

Because "shared common life" (*koinonia*) must be the intentional goal of all ecumenical engagement" (principle 5), even if it is not yet a reality, we, as churches sadly still separated over the Eucharist, must find more ways of making visible at our Eucharistic celebrations the unity we do share:

- as in the case of baptismal services, members and clergy from neighboring congregations from other denominations may be specifically invited to attend, and participate in, special services where the Eucharist/Lord's Supper is celebrated;

- where not forbidden by canon law or other restrictions, members and clergy from other churches may be invited to receive (and/or concelebrate) the Eucharist;

- where canonical or other restrictions prevent the receiving (and/or concelebration) of the Eucharist, a blessing (or "blessed bread"[29]) may be offered;

- covenantal agreements and/or "ecumenical partnerships" may be entered into by denominations formally recognizing the Eucharist of the partner churches;

- the range of occasions on which Eucharistic hospitality may be offered could be extended by churches/denominations which exercise such hospitality as opportunities of limited (though real) Eucharistic fellowship.[30]

3. *Ministry*

The "Canberra Statement," as well as calling on all churches "to recognize each other's baptism on the basis of the *BEM* document" and "on the basis of convergence in faith, in baptism, eucharist and ministry to consider, wherever appropriate, forms of eucharistic hospitality," called on the churches "to move toward a mutual recognition of ministries."[31] The "Canberra Statement," while taking for granted that ministry belongs to the whole people of God, both lay and ordained, was here referring specifically to *ordained* ministries.

Let me, for a moment, be pragmatic as well as theological and ecumenical. Would the Church as a whole not be better off if we were able to have a mutual recognition of ordained ministries across all (or at least "many") churches? Would churches not be enriched by and benefit greatly from the gifts and graces which ministers from other denominations could bring them, when and where necessary? Mutual recognition of ministry would mean less of a shortage of ordained ministers. The cost of educating new ministers would be less than it is now (a good point to make by the president of a theological seminary!). Women, as well as men, could share equitably in ministry across the wider Church. The mission of the Church could be accomplished more readily.

While there is a great deal of ecumenical convergence about the nature and practice of ordained ministry, there is also some diversity. For example, not all churches have the exact three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon which *BEM* takes as normative.[32] It is the case, however, that most churches have authorized, "set-aside," ordained persons who officially carry out the functional ministry of those who are in some (but not all) churches called "bishop," "presbyter/priest," or "deacon." For example, within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) we have "Regional Ministers" who carry out the ministry of *episkopē* (ecclesiastical

"oversight") even though they are not called "Bishops" (*episkopoi*).[33] Principle 1 of the new ecumenism ("Diversity is to be embraced, sought out, and celebrated") enables the mutual recognition of ministries—even when those ministries are not exactly equivalent. A good example of this is "Churches Uniting in Christ" in the U.S.A.—an ecumenical partnership between nine denominations,[34] some (but not all) of which have ecclesial officers titled "bishops."

A number of significant challenges still exist ecumenically in terms of the mutual recognition of ministry. Apart from *episkopē*, there is *apostolicity* (especially how one understands "apostolic succession" and the so-called "Petrine ministry" of the Bishop of Rome), *gender* (the issue of the ordination of women), and (a more recently highlighted challenge) *sexual orientation* (the issue of whether gays and lesbians should or should not be ordained). Some of the challenges revolve around theological, sociological, political, and cultural issues. Many of them simultaneously involve issues of justice and equality. Ecumenically, there is a great deal of work yet to do before these issues can be resolved, but as principle 2 of the new ecumenism declares: "Controversy is not to be avoided." Not one of these challenges, however, need be "church dividing."

"Ecumenical theology," rather than "comparative ecclesiology," is the hermeneutical key to resolving some of the issues mentioned in the previous paragraph. A fact of modern church life is the reality that churches are more likely to be divided *internally* on the matters listed above than across denominations. Indeed there is, nowadays, a trend toward "like-minded" people from various denominations aligning with "like-minded" persons from other denominations in support of (or against) particular positions on these and similar issues. Consequently, *ecumenical theology* has the best chance of dealing with these in an informed and responsible manner—as people from a wide spectrum of denominational backgrounds work together. As mandated by principle 4 of the new ecumenism, it is essential that such work not be isolated from the insights which may be brought to bear from dialogue with other living faiths—especially in terms of issues related to equity and justice.

Being intentional about the goal of shared common life (*koinonia*) in all our ecumenical engagements (principle 5) means that we must find practical ways of authenticating and recognizing ordained ministry not just in one's own church/denomination but across and within a multiplicity (and ultimately, hopefully, all) churches/denominations. Some possible ways are:

- making members of local churches aware of the ministries performed and offered by clergy of neighboring parishes, including those of other denominations;

- sharing ministerial functions in local ecumenical initiatives by clergy from various denominations;

- inviting, where not prevented by canon law or similar ecclesial regulations, the participation of clergy from other churches/denominations to participate publicly in regular worship and other services;

- entering into covenantal agreements and/or "ecumenical partnerships" at the denominational level whereby the ordained clergy of each partner church can function as ordained clergy in the context of all the partner churches.

> *"Ecumenical theology," rather than "comparative ecclesiology," is the hermeneutical key to resolving some of the issues.*

Conclusion

On St. Nicholas' Day, when we had toured the ancient city of Bari and seen the harbor from which the sailors sailed to "rescue" St. Nicholas' bones and which had stimulated my thoughts about a new ecumenical boat, we returned to St. Nicholas' Church for the festivities and the Eucharistic celebration! Thousands of pilgrims were there crowding noisily and happily into the church singing beautifully and being watched over benignly by a twice life-sized statue of the patron saint of Bari.

As special guests we, Disciples and Roman Catholic members of the Bilateral Dialogue, were given seats of honor on the huge chancel very close to where the Archbishop of Bari celebrated the mass. When the

bread and wine were offered to the faithful I, again to my later shame, did not go forward to receive a blessing. At the end of the service the Dominican priest, with whom I had had such a wonderful conversation over lunch and who was the president of the ecumenical institute in Bari, came over to say goodbye. He had tears in his eyes and he said to me, "Will you give me a blessing?" And with tears in my own eyes, I did. Three days later during the (so-called) "Disciples Eucharist" at the Disciples/Roman Catholic Dialogue, two of the Roman Catholic members jumped out of their seats to go forward to receive a blessing at the time of communion. Actions such as these give me hope. What also gives me hope is that, while there is still a long way to go before we can fully cross the waters which still divide us ecumenically, there are people from a variety of different Christian traditions who are as passionately committed to the goal of full visible unity as I am, that they are willing to jump onto the new ecumenical boat with me (and with you) to make it sail.

I am confident that by applying the five new principles, which have discovered in the new ecumenical boat, to the specific issues which still confront us as we steer toward full visible unity will give us the tools to sail the ecumenical boat well into the twenty-first century.

1   See "Message, First Assembly of the WCC, Amsterdam, 1948," in Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, eds., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Geneva: WCC/Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 21-22.

2   See especially "Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council, 1964," in ibid., 27-34.

3   For the most recent evaluation of the ongoing impact of united and uniting churches, see Thomas F. Best, ed., *"With a Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power": Seventh International Consultation of United and Uniting Churches*, Faith and Order Paper 195 (Geneva: WCC, 2004).

4   See, for example, the reports on a wide diversity of local and regional ecumenical projects throughout the world in Kinnamon and Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement*, 243-62. See also *Mid-Stream* 32,4 (October 1993). This whole issue of the journal was devoted to "The Drama of Local and Regional Ecumenism in the U.S."

5   *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982).

6   See the perceptive analysis by Michael Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement and How It Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2003).

7   See Oliver S. Tomkins, ed., *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order: Held at Lund August 15th to 28th, 1952* (London, SCM, 1953), 16 (punctuation altered).

8   Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Church*, 21-22.

9   See, for example, Thomas F. Best, ed., *Beyond unity-in-tension: Unity, renewal, and the community of women and men*, Faith and Order Paper 138 (Geneva: WCC, 1988).

10   That is, the Dutch Calvinist Church.

11   That is, the Dutch Protestant Church.

12   The union which also includes the Dutch Evangelical-Lutheran Church came into effect on May 1, 2004. The new entity is called the Protestant Church in the Netherlands; see Bas Plaisier and Leo J. Koffeman, in Best, *"With a Demonstration of the Spirit and Power*," vii-ix.

13   See William Tabbernee, "Readiness for Reception: Issues of Reception among Disciples," *Mid-Stream* 25,1 (January 1986): 29-33.

14   *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, x (punctuation altered).

15   See, for example, Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: Pa.: Jewish Publication Society, 2004); Mary C. Boys, *Has God only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York: Paulist, 2000); and Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al., eds., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2000).

16   See Kinnamon and Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement*, 124-25.

17   Ibid., 125.

18   See also Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann, eds., *On the way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, Faith and Order Paper 166 (Geneva: WCC, 1994).

19   There are, of course, some churches which do not practice baptism (e.g., the Salvation Army and the Society of Friends). Such churches, however, do have initiatory rites which emphasize the spiritual reality ("baptism in the Holy Spirit") reflected in water baptism; see William Tabbernee, ed. *Initiation in Australian Churches* (Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Council of Churches, 1984), 95-103.

20   See also below, under the discussion of principle 3 in relationship to baptism.

21   See *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 4-5 (§§ 11-12 plus commentary on § 12).

22   Ibid., 4 (§ 13).

23   Ibid., 5 (commentary on § 13).

24   Ibid. (commentary on § 12).

25   For further helpful practical suggestions concerning the way in which churches/ denominations can express mutual recognition of baptism, see Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, eds. *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*, Faith and Order Paper 184 (Geneva: WCC, 1999), 81-83.

26   Again, ecumenical discussions about the Eucharist acknowledge and are sensitive to the fact that, as with baptism, not all churches practice this sacrament.

27   See *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 10-15 (§§ 2-26 and commentaries on §§ 8, 14, 15). See also William Tabbernee, "*BEM* and the Eucharist: A Case Study in Ecumenical Hermeneutics," in *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller, eds. (Geneva: WCC, 2001), 19-46.

28   For helpful practical suggestions as to how to avoid supersessionism in Christian worship, see Boys, *Has God only One Blessing?,* 267-95.

29   This is practiced by Orthodox Churches.

30   For further helpful practical suggestions, including actual Eucharistic liturgies which may be used on ecumenical occasions, see Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, eds., *Eucharistic Worship: The Lima Liturgy and Beyond* (Geneva: WCC, 1998).

31   In Kinnamon and Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement*, 125.

32   *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 24-27 (§§ 19-31). See also above.

33   See William Tabbernee, "Restoring Normative Christianity: *Episkopē* and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)," *Mid-Stream* 37, 3-4 (July/October 1998): 479-81.

34   See Michael Kinnamon, "Churches Uniting in Christ: A Case Study in Identity," in Best, *"With a Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power,"* 99-104.

The Gift of "Colored"[1] Peoples: A Common Humanity Approach to Ecumenism

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Historically, the modern ecumenical movement can be characterized as the attempt of white protestant churches to promote "cooperation and union between separated Christian Churches."[2] To be sure, the first half century of the modern ecumenical movement witnessed limited participation of Christians from non-white racial ethnic communities.[3] In recent decades, however, increased involvement of people of color in national and international ecumenical organizations has helped to reduce the racial homogeneity of these institutions. This diversity bears promising implications for the future viability of the contemporary ecumenical movement. In fact, I contend that people of color have a valuable contribution to make toward the challenge of ecumenism, especially as it is expressed and understood in predominantly white and "so-called" mainline denominations. Embedded in the religious traditions of African American, Asian, Native American, African and Hispanic churches are theological resources that could well inform and enhance the ecumenical movement of the white mainline churches. These resources I term "the gift" of people of color.

This paper will employ the "Black Christian Tradition"[4] as a representative model of the type of ecumenical practices and possibilities that are ensconced in the Christian traditions of the "colored" Christian Churches. I choose to focus my paper in this way for two reasons. (1) It is impossible to give adequate attention to the variety of "colored" churches and their perspectives on ecumenism in the limited scope of this essay, and (2) the Black Christian Tradition is where I locate myself, and it is the area of my own scholarly interests and expertise. With this said, however, I theorize that there are some thematic connections between the ecumenical vision of black churches and the churches of other persons of color. I do so based on the premise that their often similar experiences of racial oppression and struggles for racial equality predispose them to the principle of inclusiveness that is fundamental to ecumenism. Hence the Black Church in North America, an institution born in the context of the struggle against racial oppression, offers only one example of the kind of contribution that diverse racial ethnic groups can make to the ecumenical movement. In particular, this paper proposes the concept of a "common humanity," a principle explicated from African American Christianity, as a theological resource for pushing forward the international ecumenical movement.

Space Matters

New Testament scholar Brian Blount uses the phrase "space matters" as a way to emphasize the idea that social, cultural and historical realities of individuals and groups dramatically shape their interpretations of sacred texts.[5] This same principle applies to the ways different groups understand and approach various theological ideas, in our case, ecumenism. That is to say that the unique historical and contemporary existential realities of black people significantly inform how they view and implement ecumenical work. For African Americans, and thus for African American churches, their experience of racial oppression and struggle for freedom is the central theological motif in their churches. C. Eric Lincoln and

Lawrence Mamiya, in their book, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, affirm this claim when they write:

> A major aspect of black Christian belief is found in the symbolic importance given to the word 'freedom.' Throughout black history the term 'freedom' has found a deep religious resonance in the lives and hopes of African Americans. Depending upon the time and the context, the implications of freedom were derived from the nature of the exigency.[6]

Take, for example, a verse from a poem written by George Moses Horton, a slave in Chatham County, North Carolina:

> Oh Liberty! Thou golden prize,
> So often sought by blood—
> We Crave thy sacred sun to rise,
> The gift of nature's God![7]

The religiously conditioned quest for freedom issues from what Anthony Pinn calls the "terror of dehumanization"[8] that black people experienced under the brutal system of North American slavery. Even beyond the antebellum experience and into contemporary black life, overt and covert practices of discrimination and dehumanization move black Christians to continue to view freedom as a necessary ideal, an ideal deeply rooted in their religious tradition. That is why historian, Andrew Billingsley, can say, "In the black church, despite the millions of sermons preached, the prayers prayed, the solemn spiritual songs lifted up to heaven, freedom is as burning an issue today as it was when God first revealed Himself and His true relationship to His black children in America."[9] Their theology of anti-racism informs African Americans' approach to the idea of ecumenism and accounts for some of the conflicts and tensions between black and white Christians' perspectives on and participation in the ecumenical movement. William Watley, author of the book, *Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land: The African American Churches and Ecumenism*, illumines the tension and misunderstanding that surrounds the views of black

Experiences of racial oppression and struggles for racial equality predispose them to the principle of inclusiveness that is fundamental to ecumenism.

and white Christians on ecumenism. He notes that white mainline ecumenical organizations have often interpreted the limited participation of African Americans and other people of color as an indication that these groups "are not ecumenically inclined."[10] "Such a conclusion," he says, "would be erroneous."[11] Many in the mainline ecumenical movement fail to see the strong ecumenical inclination of black churches: (1) because they too narrowly identify ecumenism with the predominantly white institutions and movement; and (2) they fail to take seriously (at least to the satisfaction of black Christians) the central motif of the Black Christian Tradition, namely its theology of anti-racism as reflected in their religious vision of freedom.

As Watley suggests, much of the ecumenical spirit actualized in the Black Church has taken place in the context of interdenominational cooperation and participation in efforts to address the needs and interests of black people. This activity is often beneath (or above) the radar screen of white ecumenists' conceptions of what constitutes ecumenical endeavors. Moreover, historically African Americans' experience in mainline ecumenical movements has proven to be quite frustrating and limiting. Many African American Church leaders have felt isolated and voiceless in the context of these organizations. As Mary R. Sawyer points out, blacks and whites often function with different understandings regarding the objectives of ecumenism. Sawyer writes, "The objective of black ecumenism is the bringing together of the manifold resources of the Black Church to address the circumstances of African Americans as an oppressed people."[12] Conversely, white ecumenical movements have tended to focus on structural unity and doctrinal consensus.[13] A brief historical look at the black ecumenical movement will help to illumine this distinction.

While the ecumenical spirit of black Christians is as old as the Black Church itself, the institutional expression of this spirit began with the founding of the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches in 1934. Jim Crow legislation, the over-determination and reification of black identity, oppressive limits on

black freedom and the unbridled violence against black bodies constitute some of the daily realities African Americans faced. The spirit of racist discrimination that pervaded this period was as prevalent in the white churches and their ecumenical institutions as it was in the larger white society. For example, some African American clergy were active members of the early twentieth-century white ecumenical organization, the Federal Council of Churches (FCC). However, black FCC participants were offended and discouraged by the organization's apparent complacency with racist practices. For example, blacks were outraged by the FCC's refusal to support anti-lynching legislation or to condemn the Ku Klux Klan. Moreover, it didn't help at all that around this same time the white Methodists were proposing the creation of a "racially segregated Central Jurisdiction."[14] These racist realities left black ecumenically minded Christians with no choice except to do as they had done in the independent church movement of the eighteenth century. Blacks formed their own ecumenical organizations, making the status and freedom of blacks their central concern.

The first effort at forming a black ecumenical organization was initiated by Bishop Reverdy C. Ransom, once an active participant in the predominately white FCC, who became disillusioned with the FCC's "insensitivity to compelling black concerns."[15] On January 5, 1934 he convened a meeting of 152 delegates representing six black denominations. Out of that meeting emerged a statement clearly delineating the objectives of the organization:

> While not acting under the authority of our different communions, we as officials and leaders feel that the present plight of our race in this country calls for the united strength, wisdom and influence of its religious leadership. We start with the distinct understanding that in this proposal for the Federation of Negro Churches, the question of religious doctrine, creed, polity or any interference with denominational independence, authority or control is not to enter our deliberation. We propose that the Negro religious denominations shall cooperate on all questions touching the spiritual, moral, social, political, economic and industrial welfare of our people. It is agreed that Negroes in other communities such as Methodist Episcopals, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Episcopalians may come and cooperate on equal footing.[16]

Clearly, the pursuit of freedom for black and all oppressed people served as the major organizing principle for this initial black ecumenical effort.

The motif of racial justice would permeate the theological content of all subsequent black ecumenical organizations in North America. Denominational and doctrinal differences were set aside in order to mobilize a unified effort in the struggle for racial justice. Possibly nowhere is this principle portrayed more powerfully than in the ecumenical spirit of the Southern Christian Leadership Coalition (SCLC). The SCLC, under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., was the organizational instrument of the U.S. civil rights movement. Bringing together black Christians from multiple denominations, the SCLC built upon and extended the efforts of previous generations in the fight for racial justice. Again, the quest for freedom functioned as the unifying ideal among diverse denominational traditions. The National Conference of Black Christians (1966), the National Black Evangelical Association (1964) and the Black Theology Movement (1977) are examples of other black ecumenical institutions that embodied and continued this tradition.

The Tie That Binds

The quest for freedom that binds the ecumenical efforts of black denominations is rooted in what Peter Paris refers to as the "spirituality of African and African American people."[17] As he puts it: "Spirituality pertains to the integrated network of fundamental values and perspectives by which a people orient themselves to the world."[18] A central tenet in African and African American spirituality is a belief in the notion of a common humanity and the social and political realities that this vision

The spirit of racist discrimination that pervaded this period was as prevalent in the white churches and their ecumenical institutions as it was in the larger white society.

implies. That is to say that for black people, based on the principle of the parenthood of God and the Kinship of all people, there is no essential differentiation or hierarchy among humanity. Moreover, this principle presupposes an ontological unity between nature, history, and spirit. The implication of this ontology is that all of creation is so interconnected and interdependent that the well-being of each individual is linked with the well-being of the wider human community as well as the whole of the created order.[19]

For a people whose humanity has literally been questioned and consistently denied, the idea of humanity is an important moral and religious principle in their lives. However, the African American understanding of a common humanity is not completely constructed out of their experience of dehumanization. Paris suggests that the concept of a common humanity predates the Atlantic slave trade in that it is a moral and religious concept indigenous to traditional African religions.[20] This view of humanity, therefore, is an inheritance that African Americans have retained from their foreparents on the African continent.

Paris provides an interesting anecdote that reflects the African-derived view of humanity and its capacity for promoting not only interdenominational cooperation and tolerance but also interfaith dialogue. Paris recalls that while teaching at a seminary in Ghana he learned the following story:

> Every three weeks the so-called fetish priest offers a sacrifice on behalf of all the people in the town and he prays for their safekeeping, prosperity, and general well-being. Most importantly, the priest prays for the well-being of everyone in town including the Christians because the priest is fully aware that either the good or bad fortune of any member of the community has a corresponding effect on the whole community. Thus, the priest regularly invites the prayers of his Christian friends for his own well-being. But, alas, Christians cannot oblige. They may pray for the conversion of the fetish priest but not for his well-being as a

fetish priest. Clearly, each has a different view of the other. In brief, the religion of the fetish priest is much more tolerant of other religions than Christianity has ever been.[21]

The posture of religious tolerance exhibited by the fetish priest issues from the African notion of a common humanity. Religious and doctrinal differences are not enough to discount the interdependent character of all human relationships. Rather, for African people their common humanity and quest for human survival and well-being is sufficient cause to overcome the dogma that divides them. Noted African American theologian and mystic, Howard Thurman illustrates this principle in a most eloquent fashion:

> My roots are deep in the throbbing reality of the Negro idiom, and from it I draw a full measure of inspiration and vitality. I know that a man must be at home somewhere before he can feel at home anywhere. . . . Nevertheless, a strange necessity has been laid upon me to devote my life to the central concern that transcends the walls that divide and would achieve in literal fact what is experienced as literal truth: Human life is one and all men are members of one another. And this insight is spiritual and it is the hard core of religious experience.[22]

No one, however, embodies and expresses the African and African American understanding of humanity better than the premier public theologian of the 20th century, Martin Luther King, Jr. Drawing on the traditions of the Black Church and the wider Judeo-Christian thought, King offers an articulation of the notion of a common humanity that is compelling and instructive for advancing the ecumenical agenda. Therefore, I wish to unpack this idea by explicating the theological anthropology of Dr. King.

King's View of Humanity

The biblical concept of the "image of God" functions as the theological basis for King's view of humanity. The image of God, with which all humanity is endowed, embodies the essence of what it

means to be human. Interestingly, although various interpretations of the image of God have been offered over the centuries by Christian thinkers, King is not preoccupied with attempting to achieve an exact characterization of the form that God's image takes in human identity. Rather, for him, the significance of the image lies primarily in its *function*. In King's thought the notion of the image of God establishes a special sense of relatedness between God and humans. He refers to this image as "the indelible stamp of the creator" that is "etched" in every person. The significance of the stamp is not as much in the attributes that it implies as in the relationship that it reflects. "Human worth," King argues, "lies in relatedness to God."[23] Hence the Divine/human relationship that is reflected by the image of God becomes a principal prism through which to view the nature of humanity. This theological foundation gives rise to the three themes that constitute the core concepts in King's view of humanity: worth of persons, the unity of humanity, and the concept of freedom.

Worth of Persons

King, in common with broader Christian tradition, views all humans as innately possessing an equally sacred status by virtue of the image of God implanted in every person. God's image in each human person functions as a declaration of the intrinsically equal dignity and value of each individual before God.[24] Because of this inherent equality before God, King does not separate human personality and human worth. The former implies the latter. Thus an essential aspect of what it means to be human is to possess this essential worth. Any denial of the *worth* of a person is a denial of the *humanity* of a person.

In King's thought, the link between the image of God and the Divine/human relationship provides the theological rationale for essentially equal human worth. The intrinsically equal and sacred worth of all persons, sometimes referred to as the "sacredness of human personality," is inscribed in the human personality by virtue of the Divine/human relationship that is reflected by the image of God in the human person.[25] God is the Divine parent of all humanity. By creating all humans in God's image, God makes all humans equally sons and daughters in the family of God, thereby affirming the equal sacredness of all persons. Thus King often

attributes the worth of a person to the claim that she or he "is a child of God."[26]

The sacredness of the human personality implies that humans should treat one another also in accordance with the essentially equal human value that their common relatedness to God implies. The Kantian ethical principle of treating humans always as ends rather than as means reinforces King's thinking on the essential worth of all persons.[27] Treating persons as ends involves respecting the equal dignity intrinsic to all persons by virtue of their equal status as images of God and resisting the practice of treating persons merely as pawns in service of the interests of others. Similarly, Martin Buber's concept of the "I-thou" relationship provides King with a paradigm illustrating respect for the equal worth of persons.[28] All human relationships should be characterized by the mutual human worth implied in the "I-thou" relational structure. This paradigm suggests that each subject treats and respects the other as a subject and never as an object. In King's view, systems of racial injustice promote what Buber described as an "I-it" relationship, in which oppressed persons are treated as objects whose worth is viewed only in terms of the benefits they render to those who are responsible for their oppression.[29] Both the person as means only and the "I-it" ideologies reflect an abuse of the "image of God" and a violation of the essentially equal worth with which all humanity is endowed.

In King's view the forced racial segregation of the pre-Civil Rights era reflected a view of humanity that can never be reconciled to the anthropology of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Segregation, like all racist structures, functions on the basis of a false understanding of humanity. It wrongly assumes that distinctions that are irrelevant to human worth, in this case racial identity, may justify the grossly unequal treatment of a part of humanity by another part of that same humanity. He argues, "This innate worth referred to in the phrase the image of God is universally shared in equal portions by all men. There is no graded scale of essential worth; there is no divine right of one race which differs from the divine right of another."[30] Because all persons are equally endowed with sacred worth by God, all persons should be respected equally by other human beings. Hence social, political and economic structures that promote unjustifiable inequality among persons violate the principle of equal essential

human worth. In a viable view of humanity the equal worth of all persons is respected in a way that allows all people to flourish. In King's thought the notion of the worth of persons functions as a standard by which to measure the adequacy and accuracy of a society's understanding of humanity.

The Unity of Humanity

The "unity of humanity," a second core concept in King's view of humanity, is integrally related to the first principle. God's image in human personality not only reflects the equal essential worth of persons, it also bears implications for the way that humans are related to one another. The image of God in humanity implies a parental relationship between God and humans. The logical extension of the parenthood of God is the idea of the sister/brotherhood of humankind. King also found biblical warrant to support this conviction in the Pauline assertion that all nations were created by God out of one blood. Such a claim, he contends, even has the support of scientific evidence. "The world's foremost anthropologists," he writes, "all agree that there is no basic difference in the racial groups of our world. . . . There are four major blood types and all four are found in every racial group."[31]

The unity of humanity is further affirmed by what King often refers to as the "sociality of human life."[32] This phrase expresses the idea that human beings are inherently social creatures whose well-being and identity formation rely upon cooperative interaction with others. This is what King means when he writes, "The self cannot be self without other selves. I cannot reach fulfillment without thou. Social psychologists tell us that we cannot truly be persons unless we interact with other persons."[33] King found concrete evidence for the principle of sociality in the countless instances of human interrelatedness in the world:

> Every nation is an heir of a vast treasury of ideas and labor to which both the living and the dead of all nations have contributed. . . . We are everlasting debtors to known and

unknown men and women. When we arise in the morning, we go into the bathroom where we reach for a sponge which is provided for us by a Pacific islander. We reach for soap that is created for us by a European. Then at the table we drink coffee which is provided for us by a South American, or tea by a Chinese or cocoa by a West African. Before we leave for our jobs we are already beholden to more than half of the world.[34]

The reality of human interdependence, in King's view, calls for mutual concern and responsibility among all humanity. The well-being of humanity is contingent upon humans acting cooperatively toward the realization of a community where the good of the whole is prioritized as a strategy for achieving the good of the individuals constituting the whole. For King, the very structure of the universe as created by God implies the need for such a cooperative vision of humans living in interdependent communities. He claims that "The universe is so structured that things do not quite work out rightly if men are not diligent in their concern for others."[35]

The Concept of Freedom

Finally, King's view of humanity stresses an inextricable link between human life and the concept of freedom. King asserts that "The very character of life demands freedom."[36] Like the worth of persons, the concept of human freedom emerges from King's understanding of the image of God. Freedom, according to King, constitutes "the highest expression of the image of God." In the sermon on the doctrine of humanity, King states, "Theologians have interpreted the image of God in many ways, and after studying all of them, I've come to the conclusion. The highest expression of the image of God in man is freedom. Man is man . . . because he's free."[37]

The language and thought of Paul Tillich provide King with the theological construct upon which to base the connection between freedom and the image of God. King's statement equating freedom with the image of God is clearly drawn from Tillich's

Denominational and doctrinal differences were set aside in order to mobilize a unified effort in the struggle for racial justice. Possibly nowhere is this principle portrayed more powerfully than in the ecumenical spirit of the Southern Christian Leadership Coalition (SCLC).

Systematic Theology.[38] Moreover, King defines freedom as the capacity for deliberation, decision, and responsibility—the same three terms that Tillich uses in defining freedom. The first of these human capacities, *deliberation*, involves the freedom to consider and weigh one's alternatives as to what one may become or do. Closely related to this idea is the capacity for *decision*, by which humans make choices based on the outcomes of their deliberations. Finally, the capacity for *responsibility* suggests that freedom renders humans ultimately responsible for the decisions they make.[39]

For King, the freedom inherent in human personality is not without limits. Human freedom is limited and shaped by human destiny. King writes, "We are both free and destined. Freedom is the chosen fulfillment of our destined nature."[40] In King's thought, however, destiny does not constitute determinism. The connection he makes between freedom and destiny is best understood in light of the Tillichian formulation upon which King draws. For Tillich freedom and destiny exist in an ontological polarity and thus are held together in a constructive tension.[41] In light of Tillich's insight, King declares: "Destiny points not to the opposite of freedom but rather to its conditions and limits."[42] Hence destiny does not contradict the freedom implied by the human capacity for deliberation, decision and responsibility. Rather in Tillich's words:

> Destiny is that out of which our decisions arise. . . . It includes the communities to which I belong, the past unremembered and remembered, the environment which has shaped me, the world which has made an impact on me. . . . Destiny is not a strange power which determines what shall happen to me. It is myself as given, formed by nature, history, and myself. My destiny is the basis of my freedom; my freedom participates in shaping my destiny.[43]

The connection between freedom and destiny, which King borrows from Tillich's thought, increases our understanding of the meaning of freedom for King's view of humanity. In King's understanding, freedom is a prerequisite for human destiny. In order for one to fulfill his or her destiny, one must be able to experience the freedom that is essential to the meaning of humanity. The extent to which human freedom is circumvented by the social, political, and economic structures of society represents the degree to which

human destiny, and consequently human dignity, also are limited. This is the insight that is behind King's claim that in the denial of a person's freedom, "The very nature of life is altered and his being cannot make the full circle of personhood because that which is basic to the character of life itself has been diminished."[44]

Though King's notion of human freedom is largely drawn from Tillich's thought, King extends this principle well beyond the theoretical realm where Tillich's treatment ends. King pushes Tillich's ideas on freedom toward their logical sociopolitical conclusions. He employs the idea of human freedom as a moral condemnation of racial segregation. Segregation, he argues, denies African Americans the freedom to deliberate, decide and take responsibility, because it severely and unjustly limits the options available to black people. These imposed limitations, from King's perspective, constitute not only a political injustice but also a violation of the freedom that human life inherently demands in order for each person to fulfill his or her human destiny. In a sermon delivered in 1957, King said, "To rob a man of his freedom is to take from him the essential basis of his manhood. To take his freedom is to rob him of something of God's image."[45]

Justice is the axiological principle upon which these three core themes turn. The content of King's understanding of justice is largely informed by his view of humanity. Justice is constituted by a respect for equal human dignity, a concern for others based on the unity of humanity, and a respect for the freedom that human life demands. In the connection between justice and human personality lies the pivotal point from which the sociopolitical implications of King's concept of humanity emerge. Justice demands that the core characteristics of humanity—equal worth, unity, and freedom—are not treated simply as abstract principles but are actualized in the real experiences of all human beings. Thus the structures of society must be ordered to promote these fundamental human conditions for all people. All structural realities that run counter to the core concepts in King's view of humanity are repressive and in need of deconstruction.

King's view of humanity, I contend, is drawn largely from his experience in the Black Christian Tradition. Though he often employs the ideas and language of white scholars and theologians, he merely does so as a way to articulate a doctrine that is a part of the cultural ethos of his community. This

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view of humanity, while not necessarily unique to King or to the Black Christian Tradition, is certainly a foundational moral concept in the African American experience. Jacquelyn Grant, borrowing a phrase from Martin Luther King, Jr., has referred to this view of humanity as a theology of "somebodyness."[46] That is the idea that everybody really is "somebody." It seems to me that there is something about having had one's humanity questioned and even denied, that predisposes one to develop a perspective that is inclusive and attempts to see the value in all humanity.

"Human worth," King argues, "lies in relatedness to God."

Concluding Statement

It appears that other groups who have had similar experiences of racial oppression exhibit similar ideas regarding human relatedness. Japanese theologian, Masao Takenaka, offers an example of this theme out of his particular cultural context. In his book, *God is Rice: Asian Culture and Christian Faith*, Takenaka makes use of rice as a metaphor for depicting the kinship and connectedness of all humans. Takenaka's imagery and interpretation of the meaning of rice in Asian culture mirrors the kind of human interdependence that surfaces in African Americans' views of a common humanity. Takenaka highlights the way that rice functions as a common denominator uniting the diverse Asian communities. Rice—a common Asian staple—symbolizes the "holy communion, which is the occasion to share our daily food together with all people as a symbol of eternal life." Takenaka goes on to say:

> This [ritual] has a social implication as well as a spiritual. The Chinese character for peace (wa) literally means harmony. It derives from two words: one is rice and the other is mouth. It means that unless we share rice together with all people, we will not have peace. When every mouth in the whole inhabited world is filled with daily food, then we can have peace on earth.[47]

Raymond Brady Williams provides a similar view of humanity from an Asian Indian immigrant perspective. His concern is that Asian Indian immigrants have little contact with the mainstream ecumenical movement. Challenging the major national and world ecumenical institutions, Williams proposes the Asian Indian idea of "adding rooms to the house." His point is that the Christian Church in North America needs to make room for the diverse cultures and perspectives that comprise the vast Christian community. The image of the house is significant in that it signals the space where families live together. Again, the idea is that we are a human family, all interconnected and interdependent. Williams writes, "Christians from Korea, China, the Philippines, and other Asian countries share with new immigrants from Africa, Eastern Europe, and other sending countries the task of building new rooms on the house of American Christianity."[48]

The empowering conception of common humanity reflected, in complementary ways, in the ideas of King, Takenaka and Williams speaks to the valuable contributions that people of color may make to the ecumenical movement. This fundamental principle grounds ecumenical unity in a deeply Christian ideal, namely actualizing the parenthood of God and the sisterhood/brotherhood of all humanity in the various ways and contexts that humans engage one another. Maybe such an idea will never achieve structural unity or doctrinal consensus among the diverse traditions of the Christian faith. However, the principle of a common humanity indeed has the power to bring Christian churches of all persuasions together around issues and causes related to relieving suffering and promoting well-being in the human family. This is the gift that people of color offer to the Church today. Let all ecumenically-minded Christians embrace and exhibit the gift.

[1] Here I am using the term "colored" with full knowledge of the troubling connotations that the term implies, especially for African Americans who have long distanced themselves from this externally imposed categorization. However, I use the term in the more positive sense that groups have construed to talk about people of "color" around the world. My concern is to avoid the label "racial ethnic" people to refer to non-white persons. To do so is to suggest that white people do not have a race or ethnicity, and that is just not the case. I also want to avoid the use of the term "minority" to classify people of color. Again that represents a falsehood. Most of the people in the world are people of color.

[2] Ian Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), 40.

[3] Taking my cue from Ian Torrance, I date the official beginning of the modern ecumenical movement at 1910 with the First World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh. See Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 40.

[4] Peter Paris describes the Black Christian Tradition as a normative tradition that is grounded in the principle of non-racism. "The fundamental principle of the Black Christian Tradition is depicted most adequately in the biblical doctrine of the parenthood of God and the kinship of all peoples." This tradition encompasses the basic values and theological convictions that are widely held among black Christian churches in North America. See Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1985), 10.

[5] Brian Blount, *Cultural Interpretation: Reorienting New Testament Criticism* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995), 13.

[6] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1990), 4.

[7] George Moses Horton, "On Liberty and Slavery," in *Blacks in Bondage: Letters of American Slaves*, Robert S. Starobin, ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974), 114.

[8] Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2003), 5.

[9] Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), xxii. Note that throughout this article, quotations are cited as published even when they do not use inclusive language.

[10] William D. Watley, *Singing The Lord's Song In a Strange Land: The African American Churches and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 35.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Mary R. Sawyer, *Black Ecumenism: Implementing the Demands of Justice* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1994), 8.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid, 15.

[15] Ibid., 15-16.

[16] Quoted in ibid., 18.

[17] Peter J. Paris, The *Spirituality of African and African American People: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995), 22.

[18] Peter J. Paris, "Conflicting Spiritualities in the Struggle for Racial Justice," in *Christianity and Culture in the Crossfire*, David A Hoekema and Bobby Fong, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 66.

[19] Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African and African American People*, 22.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Peter J. Paris, "The African American Understanding of our Common Humanity," unpublished paper presented at the Kuyper Conference, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1998.

[22] Howard Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), x.

[23] Martin Luther King, Jr. "The Ethical Demands of Integration," in A *Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, James Washington, ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986), 119.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 118.

[26] Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Trumpet of Conscience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 72.

[27] See for example, Emmanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Allen W. Wood, translator and editor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

[28] See for example, Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Ronald Gregor Smith, translator (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1952).

29   King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," 119.
30   Ibid.
31   Ibid., 122.
32   Martin Luther King, Jr*., Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 65-66.
33   King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," 122.
34   Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 181.
35   King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," 122.
36   Ibid, 119.
37   Quoted in Garth Baker-Fletcher, *Somebodyness: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Theory of Dignity* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993), 118.
38   Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, v. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 184.
39   King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," 120.
40   Ibid.
41   Tillich, 186.
42   King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 184.
43   Ibid., 184-185.
44   King, "The Ethical Demands of Integration," 122.
45   Cited in Baker-Fletcher, 120.
46   See Jacquelyn Grant, "A Theological Framework," in *Working with Black Youth: Opportunities for Christian Ministry,* Charles R. Foster and Grant S. Shockley, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).
47   Masao Tankenaka, *God is Rice: Asian Culture and Christian Faith* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 17-18.
48   Raymond Brady Williams, *Christian Pluralism in the United States: The Indian Immigrant Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 252.

Aggiornamento: Forty Years of Roman Catholic Dialogue

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The fortieth anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican II gives religious scholars and Rome's ecumenical partners an opportunity to assess the impact of the Council and its legacy of ecumenism over the intervening period. While the meaning of the Council is far from settled among Roman Catholic theologians, the lengthy pontificate of John Paul II enabled the Vatican to shape a coherent theological and institutional understanding of it.

In the pages that follow I have distilled three questions to guide our assessment of the Second Vatican Council's embrace of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue and the Vatican's subsequent official interpretation of that initiative. First: How did Vatican II make the shift from the claim that the Roman Catholic Church, and it alone—in all of its institutional structure and life—*is* the fullness of the one Church of Christ, to a stance of acknowledging both: a) the presence of sin in its institutional life and b) the presence of the Holy Spirit and truth outside of its own borders? Second: Given the shift of openness to truth outside its borders, how did Vatican II, as well as subsequent pontificates, articulate the self-understanding of the Roman Church's identity—both in continuity with its tradition and in the new paradigm? Third: Given the responses to the first two questions, what does the Roman Church mean by "dialogue"? Have there been any noticeable shifts in the Roman language of engagement, and if so how have those shifts affected the prospects of dialogue in the twenty-first century?

The Window of Opportunity

The Second Vatican Council was opened by the then 80-year-old Pope John XXIII in October of 1962. It was the largest council in history—nearly 3000 bishops were present, from 53 nations, and six continents. In his opening address, Pope John said, "This is a modern world, and the Church firmly intends to keep pace with it."[1] The watchword of the Council was *aggiornamento* ("engagement"), an appropriate term for a pope who, from his election to the office of the papacy in 1958, dedicated his pontificate to overcoming the acrimonious discourse between religions and within Christianity. Said the pope in his opening address of the Second Vatican Council, "She [the Roman Church] considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnation."

What did Pope John mean by these words? The First Vatican Council (1869-1870), as well as previous councils such as Trent (1545-1563), condemned or anathematized all religious and secular positions that veered away from Vatican teaching. Pope John, and Vatican II, shifted the Roman Catholic language of official disagreement from condemnation to dialogue, from arrogance to invitation. This incredibly basic yet powerful shift of both tone and substance set the theological agenda for the Vatican for the next 40 years. Indeed, John Paul II argued that Vatican II should continue to set the agenda for the Roman Church in the third millennium.

When Pope John died in 1963, he was succeeded by Pope Paul VI who guided the Council to its completion in December 1965.[2] The Council, under Paul's leadership, issued 16 documents that ushered in a host of reforms in liturgy, in re-affirmation of

the importance of biblical studies, in new emphases: upon the laity, upon religious freedom, upon the development of new charisms in the Church, and upon a new, official openness to Protestant and Orthodox Christians extending even to other religions. Without rejecting the traditions of the past, Vatican II demonstrated a capacity to re-think those traditions in ways more appropriate for engaging the modern world.

The Roman Church had been slow to participate in ecumenical dialogue. As Cardinal Walter Kaspar notes, papal encyclicals from Leo XIII (in 1896) and Pius XI (in 1923) actually condemned the practice of ecumenical dialogue. "It seemed to relativize the claim of the Catholic Church to be the true Church of Christ."[3] Moreover, the Roman Church did not participate in the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. In fact, it was in 1949 that Pope Pius XII, in an Instruction of the Holy Office, began to move cautiously to a more "open attitude."[4]

In the 1940s and 1950s the Roman Church began to move away from self-descriptions of the institutional Church as a "perfect society," and began to embrace the idea of sinfulness, even serious sinfulness, occurring within the Church, and even at the highest levels.[5] While all Christians, including Catholics, can lament the triumphalistic blindness of the Roman Church in maintaining its institutional claims of perfection for so long, it is a genuine mark of Vatican II's significance as a reforming and renewing council that it *began* to confront elements of defensiveness and hubris within its own ecclesial self understanding.

Question One: How did Vatican II make the shift from the claim that it, and it alone—in all of its institutional structure and life—*is* the fullness of the one Church of Christ, to a stance of acknowledging both: a) the presence of sin in its institutional life and b) the presence of the Holy Spirit and truth outside of its own borders?

Vatican II began to open itself to dialogue with its religious neighbors *not* by doing away with perfec-

tion language but by re-positioning it. According to Vatican II, the "fullness" of Christ's one Church has not resided in the historical and institutional life of the Roman Church or any other ecclesial body. Why? Due to human sinfulness which remains as a lingering effect of the Fall, and the vicissitudes of being in time, the Church is always in the process of pilgrimage towards the fullness to be possessed only in eternal life. Because the perfection of the Church was to be understood ultimately in eschatological terms, according to the Council, the Roman Church itself stood in continual need of reform and renewal.[6] The combined arguments of residual sinfulness and eschatological perfection opened up a space for meaningful ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

The brokenness of the Church, evident in the disunity and separation among the numerous Christian Churches and Communities, was *prima facie* evidence that the Church of Christ did not yet possess "the fullness of catholicity proper to her."[7] In fact, *Unitatis redintegratio* (The Decree on Ecumenism) acknowledged with respect to the painful split of the Reformation that "men[8] of both sides were to blame."[9] This awareness of sin, combined with the shift to an eschatological framework also enabled the Vatican to acknowledge that other Christian denominations, not only in the East but in the West, possessed at least degrees of legitimacy. Insofar as they "have been justified by faith in Baptism [they] are members of Christ's body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church."[10] The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* spoke of a "common sharing of gifts" among the ecumenical parts of the Church,[11] and *Unitatis redintegratio* called for practices of dialogue "where each [dialogue partner] can treat with the other on an equal footing."[12]

The shift from institutional to eschatological perfection entailed both a new stance of humility and a new vocational awareness for Rome. Instead of anathematizing all those separated from its authority, Vatican II enabled the Catholic Church to lament the separation of the Churches and acknowledge the

sinfulness of its own members, while re-positioning its own vocation as both a herald and sign of that future perfect unity. John Paul II, in particular, grasped the symbolic importance of Roman Catholic confession and penitence as a mark of vulnerability and openness that balanced Rome's continued emphasis on its own visible, corporate life as a sign of both the unity and fullness of the one Church of Christ.[13]

In its documents, Vatican II also embraced a more inclusive sense of truth, which ran parallel to the notion of eschatological fullness, or perfection. In *Nostra aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), the bishops, prior to addressing the other major monotheistic faiths, acknowledged the presence of some form of truth in both Hinduism and Buddhism. "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."[14] While Christ was clearly "that Truth which enlightens all men," other religious traditions possessed, at the very least, "rays" of that light, and so participated in the fullness of truth.

By avoiding the Tridentine and Vatican I rhetoric of institutional perfection and anathemas, Vatican II laid the foundation for a more engaged and open relationship with other faith traditions and with its own Christian family of traditions, based upon the idea of dialogue. One can see why many Protestant denominations, theologians and lay people found Vatican II so promising and important, to say nothing of Jews, Muslims, and members of other religious faiths.

Question Two: Given the shift of openness to truth beyond its borders, how did Vatican II, as well as the ensuing pontificates, articulate the self-understanding of the Roman Church's identity—both in continuity with its tradition and in the new eschatological paradigm?

If Vatican II opened the Church to engagement and dialogue, it also strengthened the institution of the papacy. No one understood this more clearly than John Paul II.

The shift to eschatological perfection, and to understanding the Church as an eschatological community, introduced a more inclusive approach to salvation than the old exclusivism dating to the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). Yet, the documents of Vatican II and the pontificates of Paul VI, and John Paul II also rejected any implication of relativism in the new stance that would undermine Roman Catholic claims to priority. How did they move to inclusion while resisting relativism? They did so in three ways.

First, the Council affirmed that the eschatological perfection of the Church had already been realized in an historical moment of fullness and perfection, namely in the Incarnation and in the work of salvation wrought by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, Christ provided the authentic beginning as well as the consummation toward which the Church is ever striving.[15] Between the *now* of the Incarnation, and the *not-yet* of the consummation of the world in the Kingdom of Christ, the one Church of Christ—even in its sin—is on pilgrimage guided by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. Other religious traditions, insofar as they also speak of the moral and spiritual transformation of human life, or of the "one God," can "reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men"[16] but they are not in any way equal to the truth of Christianity generally or of Catholicism in particular.

Secondly, *Unitatis redintegratio* had stated that those persons and communities separated from Rome, while authentically Christian, were not "blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow an all those who through Him were born again into one body, and with Him quickened to newness of life . . . . For it is only through Christ's Catholic Church, which is 'the all-embracing means of salvation,' that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation."[17] More particularly, continued the document: "We believe that Our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, in order to establish the one Body of Christ on earth to which

all should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God."[18]

While Paul VI and the Council were ready to acknowledge that the Roman Church is a human institution, comprised of fallible and flawed persons, they were prepared to go no further. Instead, they argued that when viewed in its totality the Church is the sacrament, or gift, of God in which the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Church is, in the words of *Lumen gentium*, analogous to "the mystery of the Incarnate Word."[19]

Insofar as the Holy Spirit is the animating principle and force of the Church, and works principally through the instrumentality of the Apostolic succession and Chair of St. Peter, it is the Holy Spirit, acting through this instrumentality, which ensures that when speaking *ex cathedra* in matters of faith and morals the Bishop of Rome speaks infallibly. Far from being a personal charism, Paul VI and the Council Fathers understood infallibility as a necessary link in the chain of being that connects the one Church of Christ to the divine life of the Triune God.[20] As Paul wrote in *Ecclesiam suam,*

> Take away the sovereign Pontiff and the Catholic Church would no longer be catholic. Moreover, without the supreme, effective, and authoritative pastoral office of Peter the unity of Christ's Church would collapse. It would be vain to look for other principles of unity in place of the true one established by Christ Himself. As St. Jerome rightly observed: "There would be as many schisms in the Church as there are priests."[21]

If Vatican II opened the Church to engagement and dialogue, it also strengthened the institution of the papacy. No one understood this more clearly than John Paul II, who, in his lengthy pontificate significantly consolidated power into the machinery of the papal offices, and who consistently resisted what he saw as the evils of relativism not only in the morals of secular and atheistic cultures, but in the Roman Catholic theologians he disciplined or silenced.

Rome resisted the move to relativism in a third way,

By softening the language of identification of the Holy Spirit with the Roman Church, the phrase "subsists in" allows for the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth—in other ecclesiastical communities, and even in other Faiths.

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by its preference for the language of "renewal." In *Ecclesiam suam*, Paul VI spoke about the Church's need to reform.

> First we are convinced that the Church must look with penetrating eyes within itself, ponder the mystery of its own being, and draw enlightenment and inspiration from a deeper scrutiny of the doctrine of its own origin, nature, mission, and destiny. . . . A vivid and lively self-awareness on the part of the Church inevitably leads to a comparison between the ideal image of the Church as Christ envisaged it, His holy and spotless bride, and the actual image which the Church presents to the world today. . . . Hence the Church's heroic and impatient struggle for renewal; the struggle to correct those flaws introduced by its members which its own self-examination, mirroring its exemplar, Christ, points out to it and condemns.[22]

Pope Paul was clear that in order to understand both the truth of Christian faith and the sins of the Roman Catholic community, ecumenical dialogue was not necessary. The Church need not, indeed must not, in his view, go beyond its own teachings in seeking renewal, but must reflect on those teachings more fully in order to uncover what they have to teach us today.

> In this context, therefore, when we speak about reform we are not concerned to change things, but to preserve all the more resolutely the characteristic features which Christ has impressed on His Church. Or rather, we are concerned to restore to the Church that ideal of perfection and beauty that corresponds to its original image, and that is at the same time consistent with its necessary, normal and legitimate growth from its original, embryonic form into its present structure.[23]

The genuine reform or renewal of the Church would come, insisted Paul VI, not by capitulating to secular culture, nor by "whittling away" at the truth

of the Church,[24] but by seeking that eschatological perfection which was already present in the Christ and, therefore, already "impressed on His Church." Not content to make his point once, he added:

> But let us repeat once again for our common admonition and profit: the Church will rediscover its youthful vitality not so much by changing its external legislation, as by submitting to the obedience of Christ and observing the laws which the Church lays upon itself in following Christ's footsteps. Herein lies the secret of the Church's renewal, its *metanoia*, to use the Greek term, its practice of perfection.[25]

If analogies of the Church to the Incarnation, renewed insistence on the decisive importance of the papacy, and admonitions that authentic renewal and reform would come about primarily through internal reflection rather than external engagement, appear to reiterate the claim of institutional perfection, the Council Fathers sidestepped that position. Instead, in *Lumen gentium* they said that the "one Church of Christ . . . subsists in [*subsistit in*] the Catholic Church, . . . although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure."[26]

Much ink has been spilled on interpreting what the phrase "subsists in" means; it may be more profitable to ask what the phrase is trying to accomplish. By softening the language of identification of the Holy Spirit with the Roman Church, the phrase "subsists in" allows for the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth—in other ecclesiastical communities, and even in other Faiths. At the same time the phrase maintains that the Holy Spirit is fundamentally at home in the Catholic Church, so that *whatever* is found to be genuinely true in other ecclesial bodies and faiths cannot contradict but only deepen and renew the truth that is already known and proclaimed (but not fully lived due to members' sinfulness) by the Roman Catholic Church. The phrase "subsists in" makes possible paragraphs like the following one from *Unitatis redintegratio*:

> Moreover, some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too. All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ.[27]

And later in the same text:

> Nor should we forget that anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can be a help to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian is never contrary to what genuinely belongs to the faith; indeed, it can always bring a deeper realization of the mystery of Christ and the Church.[28]

While opening up its language to enable a genuine engagement with Christian Communities separated from the Roman Church as well as with other faith traditions, Vatican II and the pontificates of Paul VI and John Paul II have maintained a sure sense that the Roman Church is both home to and guardian of the Mystical Body of Christ. To summarize the point rather bluntly—the insights into truth of other Christian bodies are neither *necessary*, insofar as they can be found more fully and profitably expressed in the traditions of the Roman Church, nor are they *sufficient* for expressing the full and authentic unity of the one Church of Christ. As a passage from *Unitatis redintegratio* puts it, such insights are edifying, helping the one Church of Christ to remember and re-discover aspects of the truth that had been overlooked, avoided, or forgotten.[29]

Question Three: Given the responses to the first two questions, what does the Roman Church mean by "dialogue"? Have there been any noticeable shifts in the Roman language of engagement, and if so how have those shifts affected the prospects of dialogue?

The most startling and significant finding in my

While Christ was clearly "that Truth which enlightens all men," other religious traditions possessed, at the very least, "rays" of that light, and so participated in the fullness of truth.

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research is that the Roman Church, already from Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, linked "dialogue" to preaching and evangelization.

> It [the Church] will have a clear awareness of a mission received from God, of a message to be spread far and wide. Here lies the source of our evangelical duty, our mandate to teach all nations, and our apostolic endeavor to strive for the eternal salvation of all men. . . . The very nature of the gifts which Christ has given the Church demands that they be extended and shared with others. . . . To this internal drive of charity which seeks expression in the external gift of charity, We will apply the word 'dialogue.'[30]

While Pope Paul cautioned that in the process of dialogue "conversion to the true faith is not the immediate object of our dialogue" with those outside the Catholic Church,[31] he did not foreclose the possibility that conversion may be a longer range objective. In any event, he reiterated "dialogue" as "a recognized method of the apostolate," and that "the apostolate and sacred preaching are more or less synonymous terms."[32]

Paul VI made the connection between dialogue and preaching by situating the notion of dialogue "in the mind of God Himself."[33] Noting that "religion is of its very nature a certain relationship between God and man," Paul claimed that revelation "can be looked upon as a dialogue" that extends from "the mind of God," through the Word that became incarnate in Christ's "conversation" with us. [34] This "dialogue of salvation," wrote Paul, was "established with us through Christ and the Holy Spirit," and continues as the Church engages the world in dialogue, which "presupposes that there exists in us a state of mind which we wish to communicate and to foster in those around us."[35] Thus, Paul VI understood dialogue as a sharing of divine revelation with the world.

Writing about Christ and His ministry, Paul VI commented, "[n]o physical pressure was brought on anyone to accept the dialogue of salvation; far from it. It was an appeal of love. . . . Hence although the truth we have to proclaim is certain and the salvation necessary, we . . . will use the legitimate means of human friendliness, interior persuasion, and ordinary conversation."[36]

Paul VI identified four characteristics of dialogue.[37] Of particular interest is the fourth element: pru-

dence. The pope viewed prudence not as a virtue enacted between equals but as a virtue belonging to a teacher speaking either to a child or inferior, on the one hand, or to an audience on the other.

> Finally, the prudence of a teacher who is most careful to make allowances for the psychological and moral circumstances of his hearer, particularly if he is a child, unprepared, suspicious or hostile. The person who speaks is always at pains to learn the sensitivities of his audience, and if reason demands it, he adapts himself and the manner of his presentation to the susceptibilities and the degree of intelligence of his hearers.[38]

Dialogue, for Paul VI, was, thus, the name for that comprehensive process of evangelization by which the Roman Church engages the modern world, other religions, other Christians, and even lay Catholics about the mission of the Church in the modern world.[39] While open to the insights and wisdom of its differing partners in dialogue, Paul VI cautions that the "desire to come together as brothers must not lead to a watering down or whittling away of truth. . . . Our apostolate must not make vague compromises concerning the principles which regulate and govern the profession of the Christian faith both in theory and practice."[40]

If one had thought that by the word "dialogue" one meant a process of mutual discovery, whereby it was assumed that the partners in the dialogue shared equal footing, and that each would be required to re-think basic claims in light of the other's critique, it is important to realize that such a definition of dialogue is not what the Vatican meant—not the Council Fathers at Vatican II, not Paul VI, and not John Paul II. To be sure, many moderate-to-liberal Catholics, as well as many Protestants, and other interested parties had hoped that Rome's commitment to dialogue would involve a strategic gradualism in which the Roman Church would, over time, negotiate a more balanced relationship with the natural and biological sciences, adopt freedom of expression inside the Church, and re-imagine the hierarchical relationships between clergy and laity, men and women, and develop deeper ties of kinship with its Protestant brothers and sisters and interfaith partners.[41] None of those breakthroughs has happened, in large part because, as we have seen, dialogue, from the Roman Catholic perspective, was never genuinely open to serious critique. On the one hand, it had nothing essential

to learn from the process of dialogue, and, on the other hand, it viewed dialogue within the framework of evangelization.

While the Roman Catholic linkage between dialogue and evangelization was largely muted, especially in ecumenical and interfaith circles, in favor of a more conversational tone, one could detect in Vatican documents from the mid-1990s forward a shift in both attitude and thematic emphasis. With respect to thematic focus, one finds "dialogue" increasingly subordinated to the language of "communion," and also, interestingly enough, "evangelization." To be sure, John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint*,[42] along with other documents, reiterated Rome's "commitment to ecumenism." Nonetheless, the term *communio* becomes the wider theological umbrella within which the "dialogue of salvation" occurs.

Recalling, from what was said above, how Paul VI described a chain of revelation around the theme of God's dialogue with humanity, in the mid-to-late '90s one finds that chain of revelation from God, to Christ, to the Spirit, to the Church, increasingly framed by the theme of communion.[43]

> It has been a constant concern of my Pontificate to remind the faithful of the communion of life of the Blessed Trinity and the unity of the three Persons in the plan of creation and redemption. . . . We cannot . . . isolate or separate one Person from the others, since each is revealed only within the communion of life and action of the Trinity. The saving action of Jesus has its origin in the communion of the Godhead, and opens the way for all who believe in him to enter into intimate communion with the Trinity and with one another in the Trinity.[44]

In his 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de eucharistia* (On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church), John Paul noted this shift in Vatican thinking: "The Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 saw in the concept of an 'ecclesiology of communion' the central and fundamental idea of the documents of the Second Vatican Council."[45] Yet,

What resulted from this rhetorical shift to "communion" was a difference in tone, a noticeably more confident assessment of the Roman Church as the authentic platform for "full communion."

earlier documents had already undertaken this shift, including *Communionis notio* (28 May 1992), a "Letter," from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion" and a papal Apostolic Letter dated 10 November 1994, *Tertio millennio adveniente* (On Preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000). Especially in the latter document one sees John Paul fusing the millennium as an event of kairotic fullness in human history with the Churches moving from dialogue to fullness of communion.

John Paul opened the November 1994 Apostolic Letter by connecting the celebration of the millennium with the celebration of the birth of Christ[46], and thus with a sense of kairos, of the fullness of time. "In fact," writes John Paul, "preparing for the Year 2000 has become as it were a hermeneutical key of my Pontificate . . . aimed at an increased sensitivity to all that the Spirit is saying to the Church and to the Churches."[47] The Jubilee celebration of the millennium, "deeply charged with Christological significance,"[48] brings a special urgency to bear upon ecumenical discussions:

> Among the most fervent petitions which the Church makes to the Lord during this important time, as the eve of the millennium approaches, is that unity among all Christians of various *confessions* will increase until they reach full communion. It would thus be quite helpful if, with due respect for the programmes of the individual Churches and Communities, ecumenical agreements could be reached with regard to the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee.[49]

For John Paul, therefore, the approaching millennium functioned rhetorically as that kairotic moment of human history which doubled as the kairotic moment of decision for all those engaged in ecumenical dialogue with Rome. As mentioned above, *Ut unum sint* reiterated the Vatican's "commitment to ecumenism." Yet, as John Paul revisited the Vatican II documents, especially *Unitatis redintegratio*, it seemed a new impatience had taken hold. Summarizing that

early document's openness to religious differences, *Ut unum sint* suggested rather strongly that dialogue should now move toward union.

> It is not a matter of adding together all the riches scattered throughout the various Christian Communities in order to arrive at a Church which God has in mind for the future. . . . This reality is something already given. Consequently we are even now in the last times. The elements of this already-given Church exist, found in their fullness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other Communities, where certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasized. Ecumenism is directed precisely to making the partial communion existing between Christians grow towards full communion in truth and charity.[50]

What resulted from this rhetorical shift to "communion" was a difference in tone, a noticeably more confident assessment of the Roman Church as the authentic platform for "full communion." Section ten of the document, for example, spoke of "the confident quest for full communion," while section eleven put the Church's acknowledgment of the sinfulness of "some of her children" within the context of the "strength" supplied to the Roman Church by the Holy Spirit. "The Catholic Church knows that, by virtue of the strength which comes to her from the Spirit, the weaknesses, mediocrity, sins and at times the betrayal of some of her children cannot destroy what God has bestowed on her as part of the plan of grace."[51]

Near the conclusion of *Ut unum sint,* John Paul named Vatican II as the "great beginning—the Advent as it were—of the journey leading us to the threshold of the Third Millennium."[52] By framing Vatican II as the "great beginning" and the Third Millennium as the end toward which the journey of ecumenism had been moving, John Paul may have also suggested with his rhetoric of the "last times" that the time of dialogue might itself be coming to an end, subsumed as a moment within the discourses of communion and evangelization.

> *Near the conclusion of Ut unum sint, John Paul named Vatican II as the "great beginning—the Advent as it were—of the journey leading us to the threshold of the Third Millennium."*

Lest one think I am exaggerating the point, it is helpful to recall that from the mid-to-late 1990s John Paul convened a series of five continental synods—involving the bishops of Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Oceania—in preparation for the millennium celebration. About these Synods, he wrote in 1999, "the theme underlying them all is evangelization, or rather *the new* evangelization, the foundations of which were laid down in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI."[53] It is as if John Paul had rediscovered Paul VI's linkage between dialogue and evangelization, but had now reversed the emphasis.

Conclusion:
The Triumph of Evangelization?

It is surely possible to draw a straight line between the increasingly bullish language of communion and evangelization in the Vatican discourse of the 1990s and the blunt language of religious priority found in the Declaration *Dominus Jesus*, authored by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. John Garvey, writing from an Orthodox perspective in *Commonweal*, is helpful in naming this connection.

> The problem with *Dominus Jesus* is its tone, and its timing. The tone is one of absolute assurance—the Catholic church has nothing to learn, and everything to teach. The timing is so near the September 3 beatification of Pius IX that it is impossible to miss the sense that the Vatican is trying to assert something about dogma and papal power that does move away from a spirit to be found in Vatican II, ...[54]

In an earlier piece, *Commonweal* editors wrote: "In judging other Christian churches inadequate and other religions 'gravely deficient,' the declaration seemed to revert to a triumphalistic language not used by Rome since before Vatican II."[55] And Richard McBrien noted that "[m]any concluded . . . the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had . . . reverted to the pre-conciliar claim that the Catholic Church is the 'one, true church,' outside of which there is no salvation."[56]

While many expressed concern that *Dominus Jesus* was rolling back the "spirit of Vatican II" in one fell swoop, in reality there was no need to rescind Vatican II. An institutionally conservative reading of the Council was underway virtually from the beginning—at least ambiguously so by Paul VI and more definitively by John Paul II. Moreover, the Vatican had changed its interpretive tone about dialogue much earlier, at least from the mid-1990s. If anything, the tone of the document may suggest that the Vatican itself was tiring of its own creative ambiguity.

Dominus Jesus clearly reflects the Vatican's rhetorical shift to the language of communion and evangelization, especially the latter theme. The document opens with Christ's call to evangelize the world and goes on to situate dialogue within the broader context of that overarching responsibility to preach the gospel.[57] The document approaches its conclusion by first calling all peoples to "participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," and then adding that "the certainty of the universal salvific will of God does not diminish, but rather increases the duty and urgency of the proclamation of salvation and of conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ."[58]

Whatever else one might predict for the pontificate of Benedict XVI, one should expect the continued re-positioning of dialogue as a necessary but secondary aspect of a more aggressive Vatican agenda calling for communion, evangelization, and conversion.

Rome's ecumenical and interfaith partners might do well to ponder the biblical imagery of forty years as they consider their options at this critical juncture.

[1] Pope John XXIII, Address upon the opening of the Second Vatican Council, October 11, 1962.

[2] An article written at the time of his death noted that Pope John, unlike his predecessors, actually left the Vatican "some 150 times both for short visits to the city of Rome itself and to others far away, including a 400 mile round trip he took to the shrine of Loreto and Assisi to pray for the success of the Ecumenical Council less than a month before it opened." (United Press International, "Pope John XXIII is Dead," *Cincinnati Post and Times Star* [June 3, 1963]: 1.) Paul VI traveled far more, taking the theme of engaging the world more seriously, while John Paul II logged over 700,000 miles, making 104 trips to 129 countries outside of Italy.

[3] Waltar Kaspar, "Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue," 1, at: *http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20030227_ ecumenical-dialogue_en.html*, accessed 29 April 2005.

[4] Kaspar, "Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue," 1. See also Pope Pius XII, *Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston*, 8 August, 1949.

[5] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1978), 56-57.

[6] In the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* 5, the Council Fathers use the eschatological image of the Kingdom of God, preached by Jesus and poured out on the disciples following the resurrection as "initial budding forth of that kingdom." Then follows the language of eschatological completion. "While it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom . . . to be united in glory with its King." See also *Unitatis redintegratio*, 4: "For 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, so that the radiance of the Church's image is less clear in the eyes of our separated brethren and of the world at large, and the growth of God's kingdom is delayed."

[7] The Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 4.

[8] I have decided throughout this article to quote texts as given, even when they do not use inclusive language.

[9] The Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redinegratio*, 3.

[10] The Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3. "Moreover," continues the text, "some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible structures of the Catholic Church: . . . ." For a similar list, see *Lumen gentium,* 13.

[11] The Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 13.

[12] The Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 9.

[13] John Leo, "A Penitent Pope," *U.S. News and World Report*, March 27, 2000 writes: "By one count, Pope John Paul II alone has made over a hundred confessions of Christian failure." See: *http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1218/is_12_128/ai_n12444275* accessed 9 May 2005.

[14] The Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 2.

[15] The Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 5. See also Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam* (6 August 1964), 41.

[16] The Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 2.

[17] The Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3.

[18] The Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3.

[19] The Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 8. The argument, in section 8, leading up to the analogy is instructive: "But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element."

[20] Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 37.

[21] Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 110.

[22] Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, sections 9-11. See also section 41, which picks up the theme of renewal: "Our intense desire is to see the Church become what Christ intended it to be: one, holy, and entirely dedicated to the pursuit of that perfection to which Christ called it and for which he qualified it. In its pilgrimage through the

world the Church must really strive to manifest that ideal of perfection envisaged for it by the divine Redeemer."

23   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 47.
24   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 88.
25   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 51.
26   The Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 8.
27   The Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 2.
28   The Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 4. In *Redemptoris missio* (December 7, 1990) John Paul II reiterated the possibility of other traditions participating, albeit in less than complete ways, in the fullness of truth revealed in Christ and made known by the Spirit.
(See also *Dominus Jesus*, 16.)
29   The Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 4.
30   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 64.
31   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 79.
32   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 81 and 90 respectively.
33   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 70.
34   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 70.
35   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesiam suam*, 72, 80.
36   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 75. For Vatican II's concern with religious liberty and freedom from coercion see *Dignitatis humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom).
37   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 81. The four characteristics are clarity, humility, confidence, and prudence.
38   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 81. While Paul VI insists that the positions of the Roman Church are not informed by arrogance (section 46), the above quotation and the following one, taken from an earlier portion of the text seem at least condescending: "When the Church distinguishes itself from humanity, it does so not in order to oppose it, but to come closer to it. A physician who realizes the danger of disease, protects himself and others from it, but at the same time he strives to cure those who have contracted it. The Church does the same thing" (section 63). Also, in his Closing Address to the Council on December 7, 1965, one finds the following: "But one thing must be noted here, namely, that the teaching authority of the Church, even though not wishing to issue extraordinary dogmatic pronouncements, has made thoroughly known its authoritative teaching on a number of questions which today weigh upon man's conscience and activity, *descending, so to speak, into a dialogue with him*, but ever preserving its own authority and force; it has spoken with the accommodating friendly voice of pastoral charity; its desire has been to be heard and understood by everyone; it has not merely concentrated on intellectual understanding but has also sought to express itself in simple, up-to-date, conversational style, derived from actual experience and a cordial approach which make it more vital, attractive and persuasive; it has spoken to modern man as he is." (emphasis added)

39   For a discussion of these "concentric circles" of dialogue, see *Ecclesiam suam*, 96-116.
40   Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 88.
41   Vincent J. Donovan's *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004; 1ˢᵗ ed. published Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides/Claretian, 1978) is a helpful example of a Roman Catholic scholar engaging issues of evangelization, inculturation, and dialogue within a more open-ended understanding of dialogue and evangelization. In his preface, Donovan wrote: "A young person in an American university, reflecting on the line of thought presented in this book, offered some advice: 'In working with young people in America, do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.' Good missionary advice, and a beautiful description of the unpredictable process of evangelization, a process leading to that new place where none of us has ever been before" (xiii).
42   John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995).
43   See, for example, John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (6 November 1999), 13.
44   John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, 12.
45   John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 34. In his classic *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 1978), 40, Avery Dulles argued that the "primary notions of the Church, the in Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, are those of mystery, sacrament, Body of Christ, and People of God." Still, one finds a number of explicit references to communion as a way of naming the primary activity of God

in the world, e.g., *Lumen gentium*, 13 and *Ad gentes* (Declaration On the Mission Activity of the Church), 3.

46 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 15 and 31.

47 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 23.

48 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 31.

49 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 16

50 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, 14.

51 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, 10 and 11 respectively.

52 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, 100.

53 *Ecclesia in America* (Post-Synodal Exhortation, Given at Mexico City, January 22, 1999), 6. While critics of John Paul II frequently suggest that he undermined "the spirit of Vatican II," it is important to note that he was not ignoring Vatican II, nor the pontificate of Paul VI. He was actively involved in shaping the institutional interpretation of those documents and Paul VI's pontificate.

54 John Garvey, "Ecumenically Challenged: An Orthodox View of Dominus Jesus," *Commonweal* (December 15, 2000), at: *http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1252/is_22_127/ai_68647962*, accessed, 1 May 2005.

55 "Rome and Relativism: 'Dominus Jesus' & the CDF," *Commonweal* (October 20, 2000), at: *http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1252/is_18_127/ai_66965697*, accessed, 1 May 2005.

56 Richard McBrien, "'Finding' Christ in Other Religions," *National Catholic Reporter* (December 22, 2000), at: *http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1141/is_9_37/ai_68761227*, accessed, 1 May 2005.

57 Section 22 of the Declaration reads in part: "Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary. Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission *ad gentes*."

58 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Jesus* (August 6, 2000), 22.