

ON THE ROAD TOWARD UNITY: THE PRESENT DIALOGUE AMONG THE CHURCHES

I first began thinking about ecumenical questions in earnest when I was twenty-two and found myself one of the few Roman Catholics among a very large number of Protestants in divinity school. I was the only Roman Catholic in the course on the Reformation. When it came time to study Martin Luther, the visiting Lutheran professor turned to me politely and asked if I would like to say a word in support of indulgences.

The Roman Catholic Church in his mind was still that of the sixteenth century, not the Roman Catholic Church that I knew, that had nurtured my love of liturgy and social justice, that had just four years earlier, in 1965, concluded its great council of reform and renewal. I determined to work to bridge the gap between his understanding and my own.

I have been asked in this talk to give a theological analysis of ecumenical dialogue today, gained in the years since I first made that determination in my Reformation class. I propose to discuss this dauntingly large topic in three steps: (1) a change of heart; (2) a change of mind; (3) cultivating new habits of the heart and the mind. I will not pretend to survey all of the literature relevant to ecumenical dialogue—that would be too large a task to accomplish in the time allotted me for this topic. Instead, as requested, I will give a theological analysis of dialogue today, sometimes using different official dialogues more familiar to many of you as examples to illustrate my analysis.

1. A CHANGE OF HEART

The question asked by my professor of Reformation studies began a deep restlessness in me, a restlessness that set me off on the journey toward the full union of the Church of Christ through a serious commitment to ecumenical dialogue. I know now that Christians who begin this journey are changed permanently; they face a long road ahead of them; but they know there is no going back any more.

Restlessness that changes us: the Second Vatican Council also shared this restlessness that leads to change. It called this change "a change of heart." "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart," the Council taught.¹ I share with that Council the conviction that the discord and

¹Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism [Unitatis Redintegratio]*, *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966) 351, #7.

disunity among Christians "openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage" on the proclamation of the Gospel.² After seventeen years as a member of the ecumenical consortium that constitutes the Toronto School of Theology, and of bilateral and multilateral dialogues and consultations, it is easy for me to affirm the teaching of the 1964 *Decree on Ecumenism [Unitatis Redintegratio]* that the divisions among Christians make it "more difficult" for the Church "to express" its catholicity,³ and that "a change of heart" is required for these divisions to be overcome.

I was struck with the change in mood toward other Christian communions a few years ago when I was in England for an ecumenical dialogue meeting and I made a visit to the tombs of two half-sisters, famous ones, buried in Westminster Abbey. They were, of course, the tombs of the two half-sister queens, children of Henry VIII, Mary and Elizabeth, whose lives were so enmeshed with the divisions in the Church in England. The inscription at the graves of Mary and Elizabeth encourages sober reflection: "Remember before God all those who divided at the Reformation by different convictions laid down their lives for Christ and conscience's sake."

We do remember them. And we do remember that their acts, on both sides, were done for Christ and conscience's sake. And Christians still have bonds of love and loyalty, on many sides, to those before us and the convictions that moved them, on many sides, so many centuries ago.

But today in the Roman Catholic Church, there is also a desire to be able to live as those sisters could not live, to live in full eucharistic communion with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to share fully together with them in the mission of the Church for a world that deeply needs the united proclamation of the Good News of Christ. And with this movement toward fuller unity, the Roman Catholic Church has joined other churches in a spirit of repentance and of a new hope that we can share our gifts with others and in turn be enriched by receiving gifts that they offer to us. And, as John Paul II says frequently, this commitment to ecumenism is irreversible.

These two spirits are linked together: repentance and the hope for reception of gifts. Since Vatican II we have focused on the reality of reception as a way to understand what ecumenism means. But before throwing ourselves into each other's arms in a shared eucharist, Jean-Marie Tillard cautions, we must first be converted by each other.⁴ Reception involves a process of exchanging gifts among the churches, and to this gift exchange, the Roman Catholic Church brings many rich offerings. But it needs as well the readiness to receive from other churches what it lacks in its poverty, for a full and fruitful proclamation of

²Ibid., 341, #1.

³Ibid., 349, #4.

⁴Jean-Marie Tillard, "One Church of God: The Church Broken in Pieces," *One in Christ* 17 (1981) 9.

the Gospel. Part of the change of heart means a willingness to be self-critical: to criticize first not the mote in the other's eye, but the beam in our own.

Again and again in moments of ecumenical dialogue, I have shared with my dialogue partners the experience of this kind of self-critical repentance that opens the way for the reception of new gifts. Frequently the strengths that one partner has to offer, the other partner lacks and needs. Where my Anglican partners have a rich understanding and practice of the conciliarity of the Church, they need and are seeking the leadership in teaching that can be provided in the Roman Catholic communion by the Bishop of Rome. Where my own Roman Catholic communion has emphasized the communal character of faith and decision making, we need to receive from my partners in the Disciples of Christ their effective emphasis on the personal appropriation of faith within the community of baptized believers. Experiencing the link between repentance and reception is widespread in the ecumenical movement, reported also again and again in other dialogues of which I am not a member. Where one communion is clear about the priority of grace, another is clear about the implications of the Gospel for the social order. Where one communion is open to the opportunities provided by modern culture for proclaiming the Gospel, another is clear about the centrality of our trinitarian foundations for any effective proclamation in any culture. After many years of dialogue with other communions, one of my dialogue team members put it this way: "The very process of the dialogue is an opening up, one to the other, of an agreement to help each other to be ready for the grace and unifying power of Jesus Christ. . . . We have to show ourselves, our churches to each other as we are—our gifts, for growth in understanding and mutual upbuilding in grace and love; our limitations and failures, for pardon and healing. It is a process in which the participants are called to a new faithfulness to the truth of Jesus Christ."⁵

"Called to a new faithfulness": understood in this way, we can easily see how the ecumenical movement is a reform movement in the Church which the Council recognized as a work of the Holy Spirit in our time.⁶

2. A CHANGE OF MIND

With the change of heart toward other Christians comes a change of mind. This change of mind clarifies the theoretical grounding for ecumenical dialogue. The *Decree on Ecumenism* called for a dialogue between churches conducted "on an equal footing."⁷ How could it make such a request? Beneath this simple phrase stands the major ecclesiological shift in *The Dogmatic Constitution on the*

⁵Basil Meeking, "Review of the Dynamics and Issues in the Previous Five-Year Dialogue," *Mid-Stream* 23 (1984) 339.

⁶*Decree on Ecumenism*, 342, #1.

⁷*Decree on Ecumenism*, 353, #9; cf. George Tavard, "For a Theology of Dialogue," *One in Christ* 15 (1979) 14-15.

Church [*Lumen Gentium*],” when, in the word “*subsistit*,”⁸ the bishops of the Council recognized that the one Church of Christ extends “beyond the visible limits” of the Roman Catholic Church.⁹ In the *Decree on Ecumenism*, we see the implications of this shift in the recognition of the real, though imperfect, communion¹⁰ that Roman Catholics already share with other baptized Christians.

What does this mean for the understanding of ecumenical dialogue? Long ago, Edward Pusey answered this question quite simply: “I love the evangelicals because they love Our Lord,” he wrote. Karl Rahner said it more precisely when he noted that ecumenical dialogue presupposes that Christians already share the reality of the common apostolic faith. But just as a reality may be only partially or even mistakenly expressed and takes time to be made explicit with accuracy, so also with the reality of Christian faith. Ecumenical dialogue, he explains, “is the attempt to render comprehensible to one’s partner in the dialogue that which is put to him in terms of concepts is merely a more correct, a fuller, and a more precisely defined expression of something which that partner has already grasped as his own faith through the power of the Spirit at the ultimate depths of his own human existence as justified, and which he has laid hold of as his own truth.”¹¹ Hence ecumenical dialogue is founded on the presupposition that dialogue partners are already in real though imperfect communion. Our task is to seek full communion for the sake of the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel. Thus the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order meeting this summer in Santiago de Compostela, Spain has as its theme a statement of what in fact is also its goal: “Towards *Koinonia* in Faith, Life and Witness.”

In exploring a change of mind, I notice that many Christians, both lay and ordained, have a rather hazy idea about what questions and issues did divide the churches in the past. Rahner notes the theological significance of this odd

⁸*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium]*, in Second Vatican Council, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Abbott, ed., 23, #8.

⁹Johannes Willebrands, “Vatican II’s Ecclesiology of Communion,” *Origins* 17 (1987-88): 32.

¹⁰The line from article 3 in the *Decree on Ecumenism* is the following: “Hi enim qui in Christum credunt et baptismum rite receperunt, in quadam cum Ecclesia catholica communione, etsi non perfecta, constituuntur” (Second Vatican Council, *Decretum de Oecumenismo* [Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1964] 6, #3). Harry McSorley has drawn my attention to the responses of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity to proposed modifications of the text of article 3 from the *Decree on Ecumenism* during the Second Vatican Council. In these responses, the Secretariat made it clear that the communion they intend to affirm is not only juridical but a real communion containing various elements of the spiritual and sacramental order; the Secretariat stresses that this is a “vera communio, etsi non perfecta” (*Schema Decreti de Oecumenismo MODI . . . Examinati: [Fascicle] I, Prooemium et Caput I* [Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1964], 20, 23, Responses to proposed amendments #5 and #8).

¹¹Karl Rahner, “Some Problems in Contemporary Ecumenism,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 14, David Bourke, trans. (New York: Seabury, 1976) 251.

disjunction between the theological discussion and the perception of most people in the Church about Christian divisions. "What are the implications," he asks, "for a theological . . . sense of creed and Church with regard to their differences, if it is quite impossible to say that the majority of Christians formed in a particular church tradition know of the doctrinal differences dividing the churches or have made them their own?"¹²

I suspect many Christians have a reaction somewhat like that of the Canadian Anglican parishioner who was asked to give her response to a statement of agreement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. She wrote, "I don't really know much about those old debates. But I am suspicious of ecumenism. Whatever those people were debating about in the sixteenth century, I'm sure they must have had a good point."

Love and loyalty to those in our churches who have gone before us—the certitude that they must have had a good point, whatever it was—is a persistent and not inappropriate reaction from many Christians when asked about ecumenism. Even if they have the nagging feeling that emerged in the 1983 *Faith and Ferment* study by the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research in Collegeville, Minnesota—the feeling that there is something wrong about the division between the churches—they still don't want to lose the good points of their forebears, whatever they were.¹³

Theologians are in a different position, because we know what those old debates were about. But these reactions highlight our responsibility, as part of the change of mind, to explore those past debates and their present implications.

Sometimes when we return to an argument after the dust has settled, we are able to see it with new eyes, to notice the good points of others overlooked at the time of the argument, or to notice a few weaknesses that even we ourselves might have slipped into. Some people think that this kind of ecumenical discussion is a sort of spiritual horse trading, a kind of holy bargain table where one church gives up part of its identity in return for the same from another. You know, a popular picture: we'll cut down the incense if they cut down the length of their sermons. Or, the theological version: we'll mention the necessity of the papacy less often if they'll let up on the semipelagianism of late medieval Catholicism. No: ecumenism, I have found, is not that kind of horse trading, not a bargain table exchange. The search for deeper understanding tries to dig beneath debates and positions that once seemed irreconcilable and achieve a new level of understanding, where the insights of both positions are included and corrected in a larger vision.

¹²Ibid., 265-66.

¹³Joan D. Chittister and Martin E. Marty, *Faith and Ferment: An Interdisciplinary Study of Christian Beliefs and Practices*, Robert S. Bilheimer, ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1983).

Or again, some people think that ecumenical discussion is a kind of melting pot that seeks the elimination of the distinctive gifts of the many churches. Many Roman Catholics would rightly fear ecumenism if it meant reduction of Christian beliefs to the least common denominator, losing those distinctive characteristics of Catholicism that manifest the intellectual richness and sense of mystery in our tradition. But I think ecumenical work is more aptly illustrated with the image of the mosaic, where the picture can be beautiful and whole only if the distinctive contribution of each piece is included. And notice that the mosaic is really a damaged picture if any piece is missing, and that the distorted emphasis presented by just one part of the picture is corrected when that part is set within its proper place in the whole. Instead of a melting pot, the emerging mosaic of a communion of communions presents us with a first glimpse of what the one Church of Christ will look like when its divisions are overcome.

The theoretical work undergirding ecumenism, then, is not horse trading; it is not a melting pot. But then what does make up the change of mind that characterizes ecumenical convergence? I note three characteristics of ecumenism.

First, if we examine some agreed statements as examples of ecumenical dialogue, we see that they seek to recover the biblical and patristic understanding of issues that have caused division among Christians. Pope Paul VI and Michael Ramsey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, explicitly urged the newly formed Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission to take this approach in 1966, when they inaugurated "a serious dialogue" between the two communions which is "founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions."¹⁴ Explaining their procedure in the Preface to *The Final Report*, the members of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) say that they "emphasized . . . avoidance of the emotive language of past polemics."¹⁵ They hoped "to discover each other's faith as it is today and to appeal to history only for enlightenment, not as a way of perpetuating past controversy."¹⁶ Pursuing together "that restatement of doctrine which new times and conditions are . . . regularly calling for," the Commission was able to claim substantial agreement on eucharist, ministry, and ordination, as well as a consensus or convergence on questions of authority.¹⁷

Ecumenical discussion on sacrificial interpretations of the eucharist serve as a good example of the recovery of biblical and patristic understandings. In the sixteenth century, many continental and English Reformers were offended at the notion of the sacrifice of Christ repeated daily on church altars. Or, as one of my

¹⁴Paul VI and Michael Ramsey, "The Common Declaration by Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury [24 March 1966]," in Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission [ARCIC], *The Final Report* (London: SPCK; London: Catholic Truth Society, 1982) 118.

¹⁵ARCIC, "Preface," *The Final Report*, 2.

¹⁶Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁷Ibid., 2.

Protestant students wrote in an exam a few years ago, "Noncatholics felt that the sacrifice of Christ had been given once and that it was improper to have this occurring on a weekly basis."

Protestants popularly understood remembering as mental recall, and this allowed them to safeguard the once-for-all character of Christ's sacrifice; but it led them toward a static understanding of the Eucharist as only remembering a past event, and made it difficult for them to speak about the presence of Christ.

Roman Catholics, on the other hand, were scandalized at the suggestion that the Church is unable to enter into Christ's self-offering. But with their emphasis on the daily celebration of Christ's sacrifice in an unbloody way, they risked the suggestion that the priest controlled Christ and somehow contributed to that gift of salvation which Paul had taught was God's alone to give. Furthermore, by their often exclusive emphasis on the elements of bread and wine in discussion of the presence of Christ, Roman Catholics left themselves open to a materialist misunderstanding of the presence of Christ in the eucharistic celebration.

But ecumenical discussion has allowed us to penetrate more deeply than these two meanings and to recapture a richer biblical meaning of memorial. The biblical sense of remembering is a dynamic one, in which an event of the past is recalled so that its benefits may be made effective in the present. As at Passover the Jewish community celebrates both God's mighty deliverance in the past and God's continuing deliverance in the present, so in a similar way at the eucharist we celebrate this dynamic sense of God's work. Ecumenical statements on the eucharist have recovered this biblical sense of remembering and have therefore broken past older disagreements based on more partial emphases. The *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* statement of the World Council of Churches, for example, explains, "The Eucharist is the memorial of the crucified and risen Christ, i.e., the living and effective sign of his sacrifice, accomplished once and for all on the cross and still operative on behalf of all humankind."¹⁸ Accomplished once for all *and* still operative: with these two emphases, the statement holds together both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic concerns but has gone beyond them because it has recovered an original biblical sense of remembering. *The Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission does the same kind of biblical recovering when it emphasizes both that there is "no repetition or addition" to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ,¹⁹ but adds, "[t]he eucharistic memorial is no mere calling to mind of a past event or of its significance, but the Church's effectual proclamation of God's mighty acts." In the eucharistic prayer, it continues, "the Church continues to make a perpetual memorial of Christ's death, and his members, united with God and one another, give thanks for all his mercies, entreat the benefits of his passion on behalf of

¹⁸Commission on Faith and Order, "Eucharist," *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 11, #5.

¹⁹ARCIC, "Eucharistic Doctrine," *The Final Report*, 13, #5.

the whole Church, participate in these benefits and enter into the movement of his self-offering."²⁰ By recovering the dynamism of the biblical meaning of *anamnesis*, then, the statement has shown that all sides of the sixteenth-century debates were somewhat myopic in their vision of the eucharist, and our understanding has been deepened. Since these agreements were written, other developments in biblical studies show further promise as resources for ecumenical convergence on the eucharist: reflections on how *anamnesis* may also make today's celebrants present to a past event, the centrality of the prayer of praise (*todah*) and its link to the peace-offering sacrifice, and the biblical importance of "prophetic remembrance" for the fresh recasting of the eucharistic narrative of praise.²¹

I have given just one example to illustrate the recovery of the biblical and patristic heritage in ecumenical work, but I could give others. The recovery of the biblical and patristic ecclesiology of communion stands behind the achievement of the entire work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, as they make clear in their "Introduction" to *The Final Report*²² and expand in *The Church as Communion*.²³ This ecclesiology of communion also undergirds the work of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. For example, their statement on *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity* explains, "because the one and only God is the communion of three persons, the one and only Church is a communion of many communities and the local church a communion of persons. The one and unique Church finds her identity in the *koinonia* of the churches. Unity and multiplicity appear so linked that one could not exist without the other."²⁴ Even two traditions as different as the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church have found in the recovery of biblical and patristic ideas on Church a common way forward, as is clear in their forthcoming statement, *The Church as Communion in Christ*.²⁵ It is not surprising that this work of recovering a common understanding of the Church as communion stands at the heart of both the statement by the 1991

²⁰Ibid., 14, #5.

²¹See David Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 42-65; cf. Gerard Austin, "Is an Ecumenical Understanding of Eucharist Possible Today?" *The Jurist* 48 (1988): 668-91.

²²ARCIC, "Introduction," *The Final Report*, 5-8, #1-9.

²³Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Church as Communion* (London: Church House Publishing; London: Catholic Truth Society, 1991).

²⁴Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity* [1982], *One in Christ* 19 (1983) 195.

²⁵Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue, *The Church as Communion in Christ, One in Christ*, forthcoming; and also in *Information Service [of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity]* (1993), forthcoming.

Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra²⁶ and the discussion paper for the upcoming Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order this August, 1993.²⁷

A second aspect of the change of mind that characterizes ecumenical work is the recognition of the complementarity of traditions. In the past, our traditions were often understood as intractably contradictory, especially when they had developed separately from each other or in criticism of each other. But the fruit of ecumenical work is the repeated discovery that each tradition actually is enriched by another with a different emphasis.

The classical discovery of this complementarity is in the work on justification. The U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, for example, notes the different concerns of Lutherans and Roman Catholics which stand behind their different emphases on the character of justification, sinfulness and the justified, and the sufficiency of faith. Where Roman Catholic concerns focus on the process by which human beings are brought to new life and are "most easily expressed in . . . transformationist language," Lutheran concerns emphasize the situation of sinners standing before God hearing "at one and the same time" God's words of judgment and forgiveness, and so Lutherans have focused on "this discontinuous, paradoxical, and simultaneous double relation of God to the justified. . . ."²⁸ The recognition of complementarity in concerns allows the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue to reread the scriptural witness with fresh eyes, so that they conclude, "While righteousness/justification is the primary way the apostle [Paul] describes what God has done for us in Christ, it is complemented by other images which express aspects of God's activity in a nonforensic terminology that refers to personal and corporate transformation."²⁹ Their discovery of the complementarity and legitimacy of their different concerns on this topic at the heart of sixteenth century divisions allows them today to agree together in affirming that "our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and on the gospel. . . ."³⁰ In a similar discussion on *Salvation and the Church*, Anglicans and Roman Catholics also describe salvation as both imputation and transformation, so that dialogue members can say together,

²⁶Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling [Canberra, 1991]*, in *Signs of the Spirit (Official Report. Seventh Assembly)*, Michael Kinnamon, ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches; Grand Rapids: William E. Eerdmans, 1991).

²⁷"Towards *Koinonia* in Faith, Life and Witness [Discussion Paper]," *Ecumenical Trends* 22 (1993) 81-104.

²⁸[U.S.] Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, *Justification by Faith (Common Statement)*, *Justification by Faith*, H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue* vol. 7 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985) 49-50, #96.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 61, #132.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 16, #4.

"God's grace effects what he declares: his creative word imparts what it imputes. By pronouncing us righteous, God also makes us righteous. He imparts a righteousness which is his and becomes ours."³¹

I am especially struck with the complementarity that emerges in the discussions on authority. Frank discussion among dialogue partners often reveals a sense of appreciation for two great emphases among the churches. Some have a great sense of magisterium, of authority in teaching; others have a great appreciation for shared decision making and the participation of the laity. Again and again, I have been in conversations where partners realized that the strength of one church was exactly the need of the other, and vice versa.

We see these recognitions reflected in agreed statements repeatedly. *The Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission discusses oversight in teaching using this complementary approach. On the one hand, it sees a role for oversight through conciliarity, the bishops speaking together, collaborating together and representing the local churches. On the other hand, it sees the importance of primacy, for leadership by one bishop who speaks in the name of all the bishops and "may . . . express their mind."³² It seeks to restore the Anglican communion to full communion with the bishop of Rome, asserting that "a universal primacy will be needed in a reunited Church"³³ and is part of "God's design."³⁴ At the same time, it notes, though primacy and conciliarity are complementary, "it has often happened that one has been emphasized at the expense of the other, even to the point of serious imbalance."³⁵ It seeks the balance of the two, "with the responsible participation of the whole people of God."³⁶

I think it was the recognition of alternative but legitimate complementary traditions that allowed *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* to make important breakthroughs in thought in areas which continue to be a source of division between churches. For example, the statement sees the forms of believer's baptism and infant baptism as alternative practices. "The differences between infant and believers' baptism become less sharp when it is recognized that both forms of baptism embody God's own initiative in Christ and express a response of faith made within the believing community."³⁷ If infant baptism emphasizes more God's own initiative and the community's faith, believer's baptism

³¹Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Salvation and the Church* (London: Church House Publishing; London: Catholic Truth Society, 1987) 17, #15.

³²ARCIC, "Authority in the Church I," *The Final Report*, 63, #20.

³³ARCIC, "Authority in the Church II," *The Final Report*, 85, #9.

³⁴Ibid., 88, #15; cf. ARCIC, "Authority in the Church I," *The Final Report*, 65, #24b.

³⁵ARCIC, "Authority in the Church I," *The Final Report*, 63, #22.

³⁶Ibid., 64, #22.

³⁷Faith and Order, "Baptism," *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 5, Commentary on #12.

emphasizes more the explicit confession of the transformed person responding to God's grace. This statement invites the churches to regard these two practices as "equivalent alternatives" in their relationships with other churches.³⁸ In addition, it is able to see the weaknesses of each as well, and so help both kinds of churches see where they need reform through enrichment from the insights of the other.

I think that *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* also uses this recognition of the complementarity of traditions in a way that has sometimes been overlooked when it discusses bishops. This multilateral statement stresses the importance of *episcopate* and challenges nonepiscopal churches to consider whether the threefold pattern of ordained ministry as developed "does not have a powerful claim to be accepted by them."³⁹ It praises "the orderly transmission of the ordained ministry" as "a powerful expression of the continuity of the Church throughout history."⁴⁰ At the same time, the statement has some exhortations for churches that already have bishops. It notes that episcopal succession can be appreciated "as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church."⁴¹ The succession of bishops, it argues, is just "one of the ways . . . in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed;" other ways are, for example, "the transmission of the gospel and the life of the community."⁴² And "churches which practice the succession through the episcopate," it notes, are recognizing "that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission has been preserved in churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate," though some may have preserved "the reality and function of the episcopal ministry" without the title "bishop."⁴³ But finally, in a challenge often overlooked by those of us congratulating ourselves on our episcopal succession or threefold division of ministry, the statement suggests flatly that the actual exercise of these traditions is in need of "reform."⁴⁴

The third aspect to the change of mind involved in ecumenical dialogue is the recognition of a new context for such dialogue. Ecumenism means more than a deepened understanding and resolution of issues from the past. It means also a sense of mission in facing the new issues and the new world in which Christianity finds itself today. Let me say something about this new context.

First, briefly but obviously, placing old debates in the broader context of the whole Church of Christ allows us a new perspective on those older debates. For example, it is easier for Protestants and Roman Catholics to overcome their debates about the presence of Christ in the eucharist when those debates are set in

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Faith and Order, "Ministry," *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 25, #25.

⁴⁰Ibid., 29, #35.

⁴¹Ibid., 29, #38.

⁴²Ibid., 29, #36.

⁴³Ibid., 29, #37.

⁴⁴Ibid., 25, #24; 29, #35.

the broader context of the recovery of an adequate pneumatology from the Orthodox churches, so that all can agree together, in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, "The Spirit makes the crucified and risen Christ really present to us in the eucharistic meal. . . ." ⁴⁵ It is easier to defuse some historic debates about the ordained ministry when these debates are set in the broader context of the "calling of the whole people of God" with its "diverse and complementary gifts." ⁴⁶

But there are other ways that the context has changed, and these ways also play a role in the ecumenical change of mind. A second aspect of the new context is a new collaboration in educational, liturgical, and justice ministries. In many places, seminarians from many churches and others preparing for pastoral ministry are being educated in the same classrooms. Two years ago at the Faculty of Theology at the University of St. Michael's College, for example, I taught a course on creation, sin, grace, and glory, a topic rife with issues that have caused Christian divisions; in the course were students from all seven of the church colleges of the Toronto School of Theology, representing a total of ten church traditions among the students. Roman Catholics and Lutherans, Presbyterians and Mennonites, United Church of Canada students and Anglicans, together studied the theology of creation, of original sin, of justification; their shared experience and friendships made it easier for them to appreciate and value the variety of emphases represented in the class. Multiply this one course by all of the shared courses in systematic and moral theology, in the study of Scripture and history, in pastoral care, religious education, and traditions of worship, and it is easy to understand why some students have a fresh perception of each other as they enter their future ministries.

While collaboration in theological education affects the studies of future ministers, collaboration in liturgical renewal has affected the entire congregations of many Western churches. When my students visit each other's churches, they often find the deep influence that their own liturgical tradition has had on the other, and vice versa. They may even find their host congregation drawing from a common lectionary for the readings, with the presider—who may be an ordained woman—joining a local discussion group weekly for prayer and collaborative homily preparation. They may also recognize some of the parishioners who are among the many interchurch families attending both my students' parish and this one as well. Though my students may not feel at home in this congregation, they may at least find its prayer-forms familiar—though in Toronto they may be hearing these prayers in any one of some twenty-plus languages. In the church bulletin of their host parish, they may read the same announcement they found in their own, inviting them to join one of the many interchurch coalitions working for justice. These Canadian task forces on refugee assistance, human rights in Latin America, hunger in Africa, peace in the Middle East,

⁴⁵Faith and Order, "Eucharist," *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 13, #14.

⁴⁶Faith and Order, "Ministry," *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 20, chap. 1, #5.

illegal alien sanctuary, food banks, the ecumenical decade in solidarity with women, racism and multiculturalism, and many other important questions of justice are cosponsored by a broad spectrum of Canadian churches. Their work is often assisted by the Canadian Council of Churches, in which the Roman Catholic Church is an associate member. In short, this atmosphere of collaboration in theological education, liturgical renewal, and justice work contributes to a context that places ecumenical divisions in quite a new light.

My example is dramatized when we consider the third and fourth changes in context with deep importance for ecumenism. As to the third change, the twentieth century marks the emergence of what Karl Rahner calls the "World Church," a Church now genuinely multicultural and no longer simply the product of Semitic and Graeco-Roman conceptual traditions and European missionary outreach.⁴⁷ After two millennia of Christianity, one together and one divided, we move into the third millennium as a genuine World Church for perhaps really the first time.

In this new World Church, some of the older issues which caused Christians to divide look different. I do not mean that they look insignificant, but that they do not always seem a convincing basis for continuing the division among the churches when weighed in the balance against the urgency of unified Christian witness. The emergence of the World Church dramatizes the link between the unity of the Church and its catholicity, and so challenges us anew not to confuse differences among theological schools with doctrinal differences. As one of my students from the Philippines pointed out in the course on ecumenism a few years ago, debates about transubstantiation or consubstantiation and the disciplines governing eucharistic hospitality for noncatholics call more urgently for resolution in a place where Christians from many churches risked their lives together in the struggle for justice but could not share together the bread of life. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* puts it concisely: "Insofar as Christians cannot unite in full fellowship around the same table to eat the same loaf and drink from the same cup, their missionary witness is weakened at both the individual and the corporate levels."⁴⁸

In this new World Church, new issues emerge that overshadow those issues which initially caused divisions among Christians. For my Maryknoll missionary friend whose Christian commitment has taken him to announce the Gospel in Tanzania for the last twenty-five years, the questions are more basic: Which Christian theological understandings of evil and of the Triune God are actually in conflict with native African religion, and which in fact are limited, inadequate conceptualizations which could be enriched by interaction with another thought

⁴⁷Karl Rahner, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 20, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 78.

⁴⁸Faith and Order, "Eucharist," *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 15, #26.

pattern?⁴⁹ This question about the inculturation of the Gospel in Africa is not easy for Christians to answer. My students from China struggle with the distinction between Christianity and its Western forms, especially those imported to China from sixteenth-century European divisions. And one visiting Chinese colleague, newly converted to Christianity in the despair that followed Tianamen Square, probed the question: is Christian faith compatible with ancient Chinese religious practices toward nature, or opposed to them? What about the African practice of levirate marriage, where a man takes as a second wife the widow of his brother at his brother's death? The Roman Catholic Church and other churches have taught against this; but in African society, with its sense of marriage into a family system that endures through death, Africans hear the Christian prohibition as recommendation of divorce.⁵⁰ How should Christians view this question?

On the other hand, many sexual and family practices urged by some North American Christians in the name of the Gospel look evil and inhuman to African Christians, my friend reports—practices such as abortion, or the isolation of the elderly in nursing homes. So for my friend working in Africa, my students and colleague returning to China, ecumenism's change of mind means facing the demands of evangelization today, in the World Church that is no longer identified with one culture but takes form in all cultures.

Ecumenists once saw doctrines, not morals, as the battle ground between the churches. Today they wonder if selective moral outrage contributes as well to the divisions between the churches—where some churches are outraged at abortion, for example, others are outraged at the refusal to ordain women: each sees the other as unjust. But to doctrines and morals they add the third ingredient, culture, and they wonder: are we really divided by our faith and our morals, or is it rather our cultures that keep the churches apart? The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops took note of different legal traditions affecting Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue: one that of English Common law, another the Roman jurisprudence tradition behind Western Rite Catholic Canon Law;⁵¹ these differences in cultural, legal style can make Anglicans and Roman Catholics suspicious of each other's structures of authority and treatment of dissenters, even when teaching precisely the same content on a doctrinal or moral question. Is the sometimes violent controversy today between the Russian Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholics in the Ukraine based on their differing doctrinal assessments of the papacy? Or are these conflicts more linked to conflicting evaluations of each others' recent adaptation to a Marxist culture as Christians there emerge from a period of persecution and martyrdom? I wonder if a similar question

⁴⁹Michael C. Kirwen, *The Missionary and the Diviner: Competing Theologies of Christian and African Religions* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1988).

⁵⁰See Michael C. Kirwen, *African Widows* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1979).

⁵¹Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Response of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to the ARCIC-I *Final Report*," *Ecumenism* (Dec 1987) 8.

should be asked about the turf guarding and sheep stealing between Roman Catholics and Pentecostals in Latin America today?

And women within Third World countries present us with a further question: when have earlier readings of the Bible by all of the churches been too colonial, when have they been too androcentric, and what would a correction of earlier misreadings mean today for all of the churches in their treatment of women? These questions bring us a long way from the debates my Reformation professor so politely posed for me twenty-four years ago: but they too are part of the new context of ecumenism.

In the fourth and final change in this new context, the Church also faces the challenge of reevangelizing the West. In Toronto these days, Christians of different communions often feel more in common with each other than they once did when Orangemen parades drew big crowds onto city streets. Today they are driven to make common cause by the secular ideologies and secular presuppositions in politics, education, business, and the media used to attack or belittle a Christian faith vision. In facing such a world, Christians must reevaluate those divisions that leave us weakened before the task of evangelization. I think the churches are beginning to realize that they must make common cause together for the sake of the Gospel, and this can motivate them to complete work on the remaining problems that divide us.

I have been discussing the new context for ecumenism, in which I have included four points: new perspectives on old debates possible in the broadened setting of the whole Church of Christ; new collaborations in educational, liturgical, and justice ministries; new questions of faith and culture; and new challenges in reevangelization. Ecumenism means more than understanding the past; it also means facing new problems, for the present and future of evangelization, and shaping a Church that is equipped to carry out its mission.

3. CULTIVATING NEW HABITS OF THE HEART AND THE MIND

Ultimately, the ecumenical mandate calls for more than simply a change of heart and a change of mind. The goal of ecumenical dialogue is the restoration of full, visible communion of the one Church of Christ for the sake of its mission. This will call for new decisions, changes in practice, reconciliation of communities and their ministries, the reform of structures of authority and accountability. Some of this has occurred already; some still lies ahead on the road. How will the Roman Catholic Church be prepared for the remainder of its journey toward this goal?

The Benedictine traditions of prayer and work which I have shared this sabbatical year at the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research in Collegeville, Minnesota give us a clue to spiritual preparation for the future. They teach us that we must cultivate new habits of the heart, and of the mind, so that the changes so far achieved in dialogue can be deepened, tested, and finally brought to fruition. *The Rule of St. Benedict* knows that changes achieved in breakthrough

moments need to be practiced regularly in order to become habits, take root, and flourish.⁵² The Roman Catholic Church, too, needs to cultivate its new habits of the heart and of the mind in order to continue walking the road to the full unity of the Church.

Where these new habits are lacking, we can slide back into older, bad habits, older ways of doing things that fail to incorporate the important advances dialogue has so far achieved. Bad habits cause slowdowns, detours, or total roadblocks on the journey. I would like to draw attention to a few examples where old bad habits still sometimes hold sway in the Roman Catholic Church, and note the difficulty they cause for the dialogue with other churches. The *Decree on Ecumenism* itself exhorts me to this task when it teaches that "the primary duty" of Roman Catholics doing ecumenical work "is to make an honest and careful appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and achieved in the Catholic household itself, in order that its life may bear witness more loyally and luminously to the teachings and ordinances which have been handed down from Christ through the apostles."⁵³

I'd like to say something, first, about the puzzling reception of recent ecumenical statements being offered by Vatican curial offices. An obvious example is the recent response of the Vatican to *The Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. By coincidence, I was actually in Rome for an international bilateral meeting when this document was released there in December 1991, and I read my copy perched on the ledge of a pillar in St. Peter's Square in the warm December sunshine, sitting quite literally between the offices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It turned out that this location was symbolically revealing of the document itself, which we know resulted from a collaboration between these two offices.

The "Vatican Response" calls *The Final Report* "a significant milestone" in the "ecumenical movement as a whole"⁵⁴ and recognizes in it a significant number of agreements on the eucharist, ministry, and authority. The "Vatican Response" emphasizes that such progress is an occasion for rejoicing and consolation, and it offers its reflection in the hope that its "reply will contribute to the continued dialogue."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, this "Vatican Response" is filled with negative evaluations and calls for further clarifications, some of them based on a misreading of *The Final Report* itself. Many of its criticisms, especially on questions related to authority, come from an unflattering comparison of *The Final*

⁵²RB 1980: *The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, Timothy Fry, ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981).

⁵³*Decree on Ecumenism*, 348, #4.

⁵⁴"Vatican Response to *The Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission," *Origins* 21 (1991) 441.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 447.

Report with the traditions particular to the language and conceptual framework of Roman Catholic theology since the sixteenth century divisions.

Such evaluations are somewhat puzzling to appointed members of this Commission, whose predecessors were instructed to pursue dialogue "founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions."⁵⁶ Such theologians can become disheartened if they perceive a growing gap between their best theological efforts and the Vatican's understanding. In addition, if theological traditions distinctive to Roman Catholicism are to play a new role in the evaluation of ecumenical work, can these traditions be used in the spirit reported by the authors of the *The Final Report*, who wished "to appeal to history only for enlightenment, not as a way of perpetuating past controversy?"⁵⁷ Commenting on this "Vatican Response," Francis Sullivan notes that "what the Vatican would require of an agreed dialogue statement is that it fully correspond to the language of official Catholic doctrine." The document, he points out, "seems to know no way to exclude . . . ambiguity except to use the precise formulas by which the Catholic Church is accustomed to express its faith."⁵⁸

While this Vatican approach overlooks what some call "ecumenical methodology," it overlooks as well the commitment of the Roman Catholic tradition itself to reformulation of dogmatic teachings. Pope John XXIII distinguished between "the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith" and "the way in which it is presented" at the opening of Vatican II,⁵⁹ and that Council followed his lead when it sought fresh statements on Church and revelation, fresh perspectives on liturgy and the Church's relationship to the world. The Council acknowledged the "growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down,"⁶⁰ an insight developed further by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its teaching on the reformulation of dogmatic statements in *Mysterium ecclesiae*.⁶¹ Ecumenical dialogue confronts the Roman Catholic Church with the opportunity—in fact, the mandate—to examine seriously and to contribute to a fresh, common formulation of the apostolic faith. While it surely must judge the adequacy of all new formulations, it should recognize them as new wine for the testing; this means that the old wineskins may no longer be adequate to hold them.

⁵⁶See n. #14.

⁵⁷See n. #16.

⁵⁸Francis A. Sullivan, "The Vatican Response to ARCIC I," *Gregorianum* 73 (1992) 494.

⁵⁹John XXIII, "Opening Speech to the [Second Vatican] Council," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Abbott, 715.

⁶⁰Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation [Dei Verbum]*, *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Abbott, 116, #8.

⁶¹Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Mysterium ecclesiae*, *The Tablet* 227 (14 July 1973) 668.

Secondly, Roman Catholics are still tempted to the intellectual marginalization⁶² of ecumenism, treating ecumenism as a special interest and those involved in the dialogue as a group with a peculiar bias. Sometimes interreligious dialogue is even used as an alternative to serious ecumenical dialogue among Christians; this fails to recognize the integrity and distinct contribution of each of these areas. Besides finding this marginalization a bit tiring, I also find it puzzling. While ecumenism demands expertise, it should not belong only to a small group of experts. Commitment to ecumenical dialogue is part of the identity of Roman Catholicism today: it is the birth right, or baptismal right, of my ministry students, of the many interchurch families, of all those directing RCIA classes or studying in them, of all who seek justice with other Christians in Christ's name, of all who celebrate eucharist weekly in my multiracial, multilingual Toronto parish—it is for the whole Roman Catholic Church today. Further, commitment to ecumenical dialogue is implicated in every area of theology today and I would think should be drawn on in teaching them all, divided any way you want—as tracts: sacraments, ecclesiology, Christian anthropology, also Christology and trinitarian theology; or by fields: biblical studies, liturgy, systematic, pastoral care, history, canon law; or by functional specialties: research, dialectics, doctrines, systematics, communications. These are just examples, not a complete list, but consider how each area is impoverished without careful attention to theological views from other traditions and the insights drawn from ecumenical work in these areas. If theologians omit attention to ecumenism in our teaching and research, we will perpetuate old habits of thinking and fail to replace them with new habits of mind and heart.

A third area where old habits persist in the Roman Catholic Church is in the treatment of dissent. By "dissent" I mean disagreement from those teachings of the magisterium which are not exercises of infallibility. While dissent within the Roman Catholic Church may seem an internal housekeeping matter and of no concern to our ecumenical partners, I think that is quite wrong. Dissent and its treatment functions as a kind of litmus test of our beliefs, our priorities, and our practice in the area of authority. How we treat dissent and dissenters says a lot to other Christians about what full communion with the Roman Catholic Church would be like.

Ecumenical dialogue is full of discussion of the papacy, full of the hopes of Protestants, Anglicans, and Orthodox that, if renewed in accord with an ecclesiology of communion, the bishop of Rome might serve once again with a ministry of unity for the whole Church. *The Final Report* urges that he serve again with a primacy for the whole Church, explaining, "the primacy, rightly understood, implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his oversight in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the churches to Christ and one another."⁶³ It

⁶²I heard this term used first by Jeffrey Gros to describe this problem.

⁶³ARCIC, "Authority in the Church I," *The Final Report*, 58, #12.

explains that primacy should help the churches "to listen to one another, to grow in love and unity, to strive together towards the fullness of Christian life and witness;" primacy should not "seek uniformity where diversity is legitimate, or centralize administration to the detriment of local churches."⁶⁴ One with primacy "exercises his ministry not in isolation but in collegial association with his brother bishops. His intervention in the affairs of a local church should not be made in such a way as to usurp the responsibility of its bishop."⁶⁵ It is heartrending to read these words of hope and then ponder the treatment of Raymond Hunthausen, former archbishop of Seattle, or more recently that of Bishop Isidore Borecky, Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Toronto. Lutherans report that they are open to receiving a Petrine ministry for the Church if it were to be renewed on the principles of legitimate diversity, collegiality, and subsidiarity.⁶⁶ But these principles read like a checklist of what has been ignored in many recent cases of the treatment of dissent in the Roman Catholic Church. It is difficult to explain that Roman Catholics are committed to legitimate diversity, collegiality, and subsidiarity in the face of the treatment of an Agnes Mary Monsour, a Charles Curran, a Leonardo Boff. The Russian Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov expressed his readiness to accept a universal primacy that would exercise a "solicitude," a care for the "unity of faith, mission and life," but he warned that it must be based on an ecclesiology of communion in which the authority of each bishop in his local church is not undermined.⁶⁷ Is it not a time for Roman Catholics to be working hard for the reform of the papacy according to the very principles we accepted in Vatican II so that it would again manifest such a "solicitude?" It seems to me that our treatment of dissent is one area where the Roman Catholic Church in its practice has not entirely made the shift to Vatican II's ecclesiology of communion or its recognition of the historicity of our understanding. While committed to these shifts in theory, sometimes in its practice towards dissent the Church slips back into old ways of doing things.

Of course, not all dissent from magisterial teaching has proved an advance in truth; but to neglect to leave space, on matters that are open to error, for the normal give-and-take, trial-and-error process that learning—even learning in the Church—must take, means that learning will be stunted and the learners exhausted, sick, or losing heart. While many other Christians report that they would welcome the nonrelativizing leadership in truth that the bishop of Rome should

⁶⁴Ibid., 63, #21.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶(U.S.) Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, *Differing Attitudes toward Papal Primacy: Common Statement, Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*, Paul Empie and T. Austin Murphy, eds., *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue* vol. 5 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 19-20, #22-25.

⁶⁷Paul Evdokimov, "Can a Petrine Office Be Meaningful in the Church? A Russian Orthodox Reply," in Hans Küng, ed., *Papal Ministry in the Church*, *Concilium* vol. 64 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) 126.

provide, they are repeatedly scandalized by our tendency to regress to old habits in treating dissent. As one Anglican faculty expressed it after Curran's treatment, "the question as we perceive it now is whether or not the Anglican Communion should envision closer ecumenical relations with a church that seems officially determined to suppress public discussion, debate, dialogue, and even disagreement. . . ." ⁶⁸ Breaking our bad habits here means a change of mind that takes hold in a change of practice by the Bishop of Rome.

A fourth area where the Roman Catholic Church continues to use some bad habits of mind and heart is in our theological reflections on women. In particular, I want to highlight one argument being used more frequently lately against the ordination of women. The 1976 "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood [*Inter Insigniores*]" of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith uses as its primary argument the practice of Jesus and the apostolic community in not including women among the twelve apostles or investing them with "the apostolic charge;" ⁶⁹ hence, it concludes, "the Church does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination."⁷⁰ But in an argument it considers secondary, one from "fittingness," the Declaration argues from the maleness of Christ. Jesus Christ is a man, it argues, and since he is a man then women cannot represent Jesus at the eucharist because they cannot have the "natural resemblance" required for the presider of the eucharist.⁷¹ The supreme expression of the representation of Christ, the Declaration explains, is found in the "special form it assumes in the celebration of the eucharist," where the priest acts *in persona Christi* to the "point of being" the "very image" of Christ, bridegroom and head of the Church.⁷² Hence only a man can take the role of Christ as a priest in presiding at the eucharist.

Though this argument against the ordination of women based on the maleness of Christ is secondary in the Declaration, it has been playing an increasingly central role in several official Roman Catholic documents since the Declaration was written, notably in the 1986 letter of Cardinal Johannes Willebrands to the Archbishop of Canterbury explaining why Roman Catholics opposed the decision of some Anglican provinces to ordain women;⁷³ in the 1988 meditation of Pope John Paul II "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women [*Mulieris Dignitatem*];"⁷⁴ and in the 1992 proposed pastoral letter on women of

⁶⁸General Theological Seminary Faculty to the Members of the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, New York, 23 May 1986.

⁶⁹Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood [*Inter Insigniores*]," *Origins* 6 (1977) 520.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 519.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 522.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³Johannes Willebrands to Robert Runcie, 17 June 1986, *Origins* 16 (1986-87) 160.

⁷⁴John Paul II, "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women [*Mulieris Dignitatem*],"

the U.S. Roman Catholic bishops which they, prudently, failed to pass as a pastoral letter.⁷⁵ Hence the argument from the maleness of Christ, secondary in the 1976 Declaration, is now becoming a primary vehicle to explain to Roman Catholics and to their ecumenical dialogue partners the reasons that we do not presently ordain women.

I regard the use of this argument as an unfortunate mistake in Roman Catholic theology. Its proponents often use it to uphold the distinction between the ordained and the laity, the distinction between men and women, or the fact that the presider of the eucharist acts *in persona Christi*, all of which concerns I would share with them. But other means to uphold these points in Roman Catholic teaching would be more accurate than the argument from the maleness of Christ. In fact, arguing from Christ's maleness tends to call into question whether Roman Catholics accept the full implications of a central dogma of the faith we share with other Christians: that Christ, the Word of God, took on human nature, and hence, as redeemer of the world and head of the Church, represents all humanity, male and female, offering salvation to all by drawing them with him through his life, death, and resurrection. To suggest that women cannot represent Christ, who represented them, at precisely the high point of the celebration of his saving work, the eucharist, is seen to undermine—though albeit unintentionally—our soteriological teaching on Christ's saving work. It was precisely this dogma of Christian faith that the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, used in explaining to Pope John Paul II the reason some Anglican provinces felt themselves required, not merely permitted, to ordain women.⁷⁶ To counter that explanation with an argument from Christ's maleness is to enter the ecumenical dialogue with one of our worst arguments, rather than our best. The continuing use of this argument is, in my judgment, a bad theological habit we should break very soon. That will leave us free to consider whether, and under what conditions, the Church could ever "consider" itself "authorized" to change its practice in not ordaining women. The Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada has proposed that "the issue of women's ordination be approached as a disputed question about the enculturation of the Gospel. . . ."⁷⁷

Fifth and finally, I want to say a word about reception, which Yves Congar recognized as an often-overlooked reality in the Church⁷⁸ and which *The Final*

Origins 18 (1988-89) 279.

⁷⁵Ad Hoc Committee for a Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "One in Christ Jesus" [fourth draft of proposed pastoral letter], *Origins* 22 (1992-93) 234; "One in Christ Jesus" [final form, released as Committee report], *Origins* 22 (1992-93) 502.

⁷⁶Robert Runcie to Johannes Willebrands, 18 Dec. 1985, *Origins* 16 (1986-87) 157.

⁷⁷Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada, *Agreed Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada on the Experience of the Ministries of Women in Canada*, *Origins* 21 (1991-1992) 616.

⁷⁸Yves Congar, "La 'réception' comme réalité ecclésiologique," *Revue des sciences*

Report understands as "the final indication" that a teaching "has fulfilled the conditions for it to be a true expression of the faith,"⁷⁹ the "ultimate indication that the Church's authoritative decision in a matter of faith has been truly preserved from error by the Holy Spirit."⁸⁰ Jean-Marie Tillard understands tradition as reception of the Gospel,⁸¹ and indeed we could understand the whole history of the Church—including the present ecumenical discussion among Christians—as an ongoing reception in every age of the faith once delivered to the apostles. While the "Vatican Response" to *The Final Report* continues to misunderstand *The Final Report* on this topic and to distrust the idea of reception, I think recognition of reception in contemporary Roman Catholic theology gives us a fresh new opportunity for rethinking some major issues central to Christian faith. Roman Catholic theology today is struggling to reconceptualize its understanding of the gift that Vatican I names "infallibility," and that Vatican II describes in a *relatio* as the assistance of the Holy Spirit by which "the Church . . . cannot completely fall away from the way of salvation."⁸² Recognizing that reception is linked to what Vatican I names "infallibility," we can reconceptualize the delicate balance that is needed between teaching authority in the Church and the assent of the whole Church which is the final sign that such teaching is true. Overlooking reception is part of the old habit of thinking of the Church as "pyramidal," to use Congar's term,⁸³ rather than a communion of communions where the response of each local church is an indication important for discernment of the truth. In addition, if we include reception in our understanding of infallibility, we will be less worried about who first expresses a teaching; we will also be less uneasy with the diversity of cultural expressions of the Gospel, since inculturation is really the reception of the Gospel in every age in the variety of forms and expressions appropriate to the World Church. And we will recognize that reception also includes a new listening to those churches which Vatican II recognized are in real but imperfect communion with the Roman Catholic Church, in whom we recognize "the riches of Christ and virtuous works" with their "truly

philosophiques et théologiques 56 (1972) 369-403.

⁷⁹ARCIC, "Elucidation: Authority in the Church I," *The Final Report*, 72, #3.

⁸⁰ARCIC, "Authority in the Church II," *The Final Report*, 92, #25.

⁸¹Jean-Marie Tillard, "Tradition as Reception," in Kenneth Hagen, ed., *The Quadrilog: Tradition and the Future of Ecumenism, Essays in Honor of George H. Tavard* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994) forthcoming.

⁸²*Schema Constitutionis de Ecclesia* (Vatican, 1964), *relatio* de n. 12(C), 45-46; cited by Harry McSorley, "Some Forgotten Truths about the Petrine Ministry," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11 (1974) 225. The full text is the following: "The Church, in which Christ lives, having completed the work of salvation, and which is led by the Holy Spirit to the truth, cannot completely fall away from the day of salvation, and is therefore infallible in this sense."

⁸³Congar, "La 'réception'," 392.

Christian endowments from our common heritage."⁸⁴ For the sake of our witness to the Gospel in the third millennium, we can no longer ignore their insights.

In this last section, I have been speaking of the need to cultivate new habits of mind and heart, so that the changes achieved so far through dialogue will take root and bear fruit in the achievement of the full, visible unity of the whole Church of Christ. I have given five examples where Roman Catholics should replace bad habits with good habits: responses to ecumenical statements, the marginalization of ecumenism, the reform of the papacy and its treatment of dissent, one theological argument used against women's ordination, and the nature of reception as the manifestation of infallibility's exercise. But you notice that this list includes some of the most important areas needing reform in Roman Catholic theology and practice today. This illustrates again my conviction that the ecumenical movement is actually a reform movement within the Church, calling it to a purified announcement of the Gospel for the sake of the world. Making its own contributions, Roman Catholic theology and practice is also being reformed by the ecumenical movement. You can see again why I find it easy to agree with the Second Vatican Council in concluding that the ecumenical movement is a work of the Holy Spirit in our day.

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⁸⁴*Decree on Ecumenism*, 349, #4.