

THE DECREE ON ECUMENISM:
ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY—INVITED SESSION

Topic: A Fresh Look at *Unitatis Redintegratio*
Convener: Mary Ann Hinsdale, I.H.M., Boston College
Moderator: Mary Ann Hinsdale, I.H.M., Boston College
Presenters: Massimo Faggioli, University of St. Thomas
Michael Root, Catholic University of America

From the perspective of a church historian, Massimo Faggioli began by giving a brief history of *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR). He then focused on two recent scholarly contributions that have recovered significant information concerning the preparatory history of the document: the diaries of Cardinal Johannes Willebrands published by Peeters in 2009 and the papers of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) edited by Bologna-based Mauro Velati in 2011. Of particular interest for an historical understanding of UR is the more in-depth understanding we now have of the contribution the SPCU made to liturgical reform. The attention the SPCU gave to the ecumenical relevance of the liturgy was something that the preparatory commission on the liturgy did not do. Moreover, the SPCU's contribution benefitted greatly from the insights of the ecumenical observers at the council and created an ecumenical consciousness in liturgical renewal.

Faggioli encouraged younger scholars, especially those who did not live during Vatican II, to view the council as both a "corpus" of documents *and* an "event," especially to respect the intra-textuality and inter-textuality of the conciliar texts. The eventful history of UR justifies the understanding Vatican II as an event, a moment of change in both the church's relations *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Like *Gaudium et spes*, UR had no precedent in the preparation for the Council. Unfortunately, for the last fifteen years, the lack of such an historical approach, sometimes even dismissive toward the historical nature of the documents, led to the emergence of a "reactionary Vatican II revisionism." In approaching UR fifty years later, Faggioli recommended an historical-theological approach: an integral interpretation that treats both the individual sentences and words in a document, as well the single document in its entirety, and Vatican II as a whole, in light of the conciliar tradition and the teaching of the church.

Michael Root's presentation centered on the theology of UR. Placing the document in the context of the development of Catholic ecumenical thought from Leo XIII through John Paul II, he noted that no reader of Pius XI's 1928 *Mortalium animos* (MA) could have predicted the opening of the Catholic church of the 1960s to the ecumenical movement. Root's contention, in opposition to Otto Hermann Pesch and Edmund Schlink (who regarded UR's "additive compromises" and attempts to combine an exclusive, Roman view of church with the ecumenical vision of the ecumenical movement as "theologically incoherent" or "inherently unstable") was that UR presents a coherent and integrative theology. What both Pesch and Schlink failed to recognize is that two sets of categories are necessary for understanding Catholic ecumenical theology.

After considering some of the significant differences between MA and UR, Root introduced the notions of "scalar" and "non-scalar" as an interpretative lens through

which to view UR as an example of “deep reform,” a creative approach in which earlier teaching was reaffirmed but significantly re-contextualized by relating it to other truths which have deep roots in Catholic tradition.

Root explained that “non-scalar” elements are all-or-nothing categories; they do not allow for more or less (the classic example is pregnancy). “Scalar” categories do allow for more or less (such as tall, fat, mature, holy, etc.). In certain contexts, scalar and non-scalar categories interrelate and can be viewed as “thresholds.” An example would be someone in college approaching graduation with only 12 credits to go. A non-scalar category also can become more intense or full (i.e., in marriage—one is either married or not—but a couple’s relationship may become more or less rich or intense). According to Root, UR contains non-scalar, threshold/fullness categories as well as scalar categories.

In UR, in order to be a “church,” a community must have valid ministry, valid sacraments, a true confession of the faith, etc. If some characteristics are lacking, the predicate “church” is not rightly applied. Thus, “church” is a non-scalar category. However UR (no. 3) also stated that significant elements can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic church. These elements constitute a genuinely “ecclesial” community and as such mediate salvation, not as isolated fragments, but as the effective presence of the church. Thus, in UR (as in MA) “church” remains a non-scalar category, while “ecclesial” is scalar. At the same time, “church” tends to operate as a threshold concept. The complex interweaving of scalar and non-scalar, threshold and fullness concepts in UR imply a double dynamism that should drive ecumenical efforts.

In the lively discussion that followed, questions pressed for more detail on how scalar related to non-scalar categories in UR, which of them might have a logical priority, and what relationship Faggioli’s historical reconstruction of the Council fathers’ intention has to the theological analysis presented by Root.

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