

Presidential Address

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE: THE NEXT GENERATION

INTRODUCTION

In my title, *Star Trek* fans among us will recognize the name of the second series that followed the first famous group of space travellers in *Star Trek* who set out to explore new worlds. The next generation faced both old and new challenges: “to explore new worlds . . . , to boldly go where no one has gone before.” In some ways, ecumenical dialogue does boldly explore new worlds, and it presents Catholic theologians today with a number of important challenges.

This convention on the theme “Generations” has given us many exciting opportunities to explore theological shifts from one generation to another. For our closing reflection, I have decided to talk about what a new generation of ecumenists will face as they explore this new world.

To begin, I want to note my personal obligations to the generation in my own family that helped prepare the Roman Catholic Church for entrance into the ecumenical movement. Long before the Second Vatican Council passed its *Decree on Ecumenism*, I had learned about ecumenism from my parents, James and Joan O’Gara, both fervent Chicago Catholics who met in a discussion group at the Chicago Catholic Worker and became committed to the renewal of the Catholic Church. During the 1930s and 1940s, my mother helped direct the huge Chicago Interstudent Catholic Action and my father ran the Chicago Catholic Worker House; for both, the dialogue with other Christians was part of what the renewal of Catholicism meant. When I was four years old, my father became managing editor of *Commonweal* magazine; when I was twelve years old, I decided to become a theologian. By the time my father headed to Rome during my high school years to report on the Second Vatican Council for *Commonweal*, I had already written my first essay about ecumenism—based on what I had learned, not from my school, but from my parents. The potent mix of ideas from Catholic Worker and from *Commonweal* really became my intellectual heritage, and in gratitude to my parents for this precious gift I dedicate my remarks this morning to their memory.

We all know that a good meeting contains business arising from the minutes, as well as new business. This is not a bad image for the challenge facing a new generation of ecumenists as they enter into the joys and challenges of dialogue with other Christians. I will structure my remarks, then, in two main sections: business arising and new business.

BUSINESS ARISING

In this section, I want to talk about three areas of old business that the next generation of ecumenists must still address in ecumenical work: historic sources of division, reforming the exercise of authority, and remembering the past.

Historic Sources of Division

Catholic scholars entering dialogue with Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox churches face a large corpus of scholarly agreement on the topics that led to earlier divisions among the churches. Since the start of the modern ecumenical movement and then more intensively since the Roman Catholic Church officially entered these discussions, theologians have reached consensus on a large number of divisive topics. We all know the list of these topics: baptism, eucharist, ordained ministry, Mary the Mother of God, the nature of the ministry of *episcopate* [oversight], the person of Jesus Christ, justification, the nature and mission of the Church, the papacy, teaching authority. When I consider agreements reached just during the thirty-two years of my own involvement in ecumenical work, I am amazed at how deep a consensus has been achieved through ecumenical discussion. Today it is a commonplace among ecumenists to speak easily of the mutual recognition of our baptism, of the real and unique presence of Christ in the eucharist, of justification by faith through grace, of the Church as a communion, of a universal ministry by the bishop of Rome as something desirable for all of the churches to recover, and of different forms of devotion to Mary as an authentic inculturation of the Gospel of grace. This is an impressive growth in mutual understanding, developed patiently through hour after hour of discussion and study among ecumenical partners.

How should we understand this growth in consensus? I have compared ecumenical dialogue on these divisive questions to a gift exchange.¹ I married into a large family, and at Christmas each member of my husband Michael's family brings one gift to the family exchange and receives one in return. Ecumenism is, in part, like a gift exchange, where each Christian communion brings one or many gifts to the dialogue table and receives riches from their dialogue partners as well. But in the ecumenical gift exchange, the gift-giving enriches all, since we do not lose our gifts by sharing them with others. The gift exchange of ecumenical dialogue means a mutual reception of gifts received in fact from God and given for the good of the whole Church, now offered for sharing by all.

In *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council taught that the catholicity of the Church results in a gift exchange: "In virtue of this catholicity each individual part of the Church contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other

¹Margaret O'Gara. *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998).

parts and of the whole Church.”² Pope John Paul II referred to this insight in his encyclical on commitment to ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*: “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas,” he said. “In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts.’”³

But ecumenical partners exchange gifts in different ways.

A first kind of gift exchange is exemplified by the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” of 1999 in which Lutherans and Catholics at the world level saw each other, they said, “in a new light.”⁴ In this new light, they could see that the differing emphases of Lutheran and Catholic teachings on justification today are complementary not contradictory, and to conclude as well that the teachings of the partner church today on the topic of justification do not fall under the doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century.⁵ In this gift exchange, the distinctive emphases and language of each tradition are maintained and recognized as valid, alternative formulations for confessing the commonly held faith. This first way of exchanging gifts that recognizes different formulations of the same faith are reflected as well in the even more historic agreements about Christ between the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox churches. The agreement between Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (patriarch of Antioch and All the East and head of the Syrian Orthodox Church), for example, recognizes that the two churches profess a common faith about Christ with different formulae that were “adopted by different theological schools to express the same matter.”⁶ Here again, agreement on a common faith permits varied emphases and formulations.

Discussions on the eucharist often show a second kind of gift exchange, as ecumenical partners combine several insights, each representing a focus by one partner that needs to be balanced by another focus. Therefore, in the 1971 agreement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) on “Eucharistic Doctrine,” the members recognized that the eucharist does not repeat the once-for-all character of Christ’s death on the cross, sufficient for removing sins of the world. But this classically Anglican focus is immediately balanced by a Catholic understanding of the eucharist as “no mere calling to mind of a past event or of its significance, but the Church’s effectual proclama-

²Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966) #13.

³John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, *Origins* 25 (1995-96) 49, 51-72, #28.

⁴Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999) #7.

⁵*Ibid.*, #41.

⁶John Paul II and Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, “Common Declaration [23 June 1984],” *Growth in Agreement II: Report and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998*, ed. Jeffrey Gros et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 691, #3.

tion of God's mighty acts," such that the Church even "enters into the self-movement" of Christ's self-offering.⁷ By holding these two points together, the statement corrects distortions in the approach to the sacrificial aspect of the eucharist that have resulted when either of the partner's positions is considered in isolation.

A third kind of gift exchange can be found in the popular movement for dialogue between Mennonites and Catholics called "Bridgefolk."⁸ In this gathering, each tradition wants to receive a very different kind of gift from the other. Mennonites ask to recover a richer liturgical and sacramental heritage, one they feel they lost at the time of the Reformation, and Roman Catholics seek a deeper set of practices to sustain long-term peacemaking. While Mennonites explore more frequent and liturgically richer eucharistic celebrations at St. John's Abbey during our meetings, the Catholics inch closer to a pacifist position in their strict reinterpretation of the just war theory. In such recent Catholic developments on peace and war, Mennonites feel right at home.

The ecumenical exchange of gifts can take many forms, then, and I have used examples to illustrate three kinds of exchange. However, what is the meaning of such a gift exchange? Is it really possible to say the same things in other words or to discover parts of the Gospel that have been neglected or overlooked?

To such a question, Catholic theology of course can easily answer "yes." Catholic theologians are very clear that, as Vatican II taught, there is a "growth in the understanding" of the apostolic faith that occurs within the Church over the centuries through conversation with the Lord under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁹ Describing such growth that comes about through ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, Walter Kasper explains, "No concrete historic form or formula of Christianity will ever be able adequately to exhaust its richness. . . . Dialogue helps us to know all the depth and dimensions of Jesus Christ."¹⁰

My colleagues in ecumenism can take heart from the perspective of Pope John Paul II, who thought that ecumenical dialogue makes "surprising discoveries possible." Sometimes, he said, "intolerant polemics and controversies have made incompatible assertions out of what was really the result of two different ways of looking at the same reality." Therefore, he explained, "one of the advantages of ecumenism is that it helps Christian communities to discover the unfathomable riches of the truth."¹¹ This is very different from the relativism against which John Paul II warned. Because East and West became progressively

⁷Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Eucharistic Doctrine," *The Final Report* (London: SPCK and Catholic Truth Society, 1982) #5.

⁸See <<http://bridgefolk.net>>.

⁹*Dei Verbum*, in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Abbott, #8.

¹⁰Walter Kasper, "The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue," *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity* (London and New York: Burns & Oates, 2004), p. 40.

¹¹John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, *Origins* 25 (1995) 49, 51-72, #38.

estranged, John Paul II maintained, “the other’s diversity was no longer perceived as a common treasure, but as incompatibility.”¹² I think this is a very interesting idea: that “the other’s diversity was no longer perceived as a common treasure, but as incompatibility.” Instead, John Paul II wanted us to recognize that some kinds of diversity are a richness, a common treasure, rather than a sign of incompatibility. They provide us with an opportunity for, not relativism, but an exchange of gifts.

For the last fifty years, ecumenical dialogue groups have explored such a gift exchange, and their intellectual breakthroughs are an important part of the heritage that my future colleagues must appropriate. Nevertheless, the implications of this heritage wait as unfinished business on the ecumenical agenda. Despite the widespread consensus on many issues that once divided the churches, only two areas of agreement have received official formal reception: the agreements on justification and on the Incarnation. All of the others, a large body of fresh innovative theological reflections that were even vetted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Joseph Ratzinger: these remain stacked up on the sidelines, even gathering dust, as our churches procrastinate in their next steps to ratify these agreements and to act upon their implications. Harvesting these theological breakthroughs will be an important step in completing unfinished business for the ecumenical movement.

Reforming the Exercise of Authority

One distinctive and emotionally sensitive piece of unfinished business on the ecumenical agenda is the reform of the papacy. This is at the same time one of the most complicated because it involves not only changes in understanding but also changes in practice.

Recognition of the need of the papacy’s reform is widespread. On the one hand, such reform was a theme at the Second Vatican Council, with its emphasis on the local church, the collegiality of the bishops, and the infallibility of the whole people of God. Hermann Pottmeyer echoes many Catholic theologians when he discusses the changes necessary for the papacy to turn away from what Yves Congar called a “pyramidal ecclesiology”¹³ and to appropriate instead the ecclesiology of communion recovered from the biblical and patristic texts by Vatican II.¹⁴ The exercise of the primacy of the bishop of Rome within an ecclesiology of communion should be less centralized, more collegial, and more respectful of the diversity of the local churches. Pope John Paul II echoed this theme in Roman Catholic theology when, in his encyclical on ecumenism, he

¹²John Paul II, *Oriente Lumen*, *Origins* 25 (1995) 1, 3-13, #18.

¹³Yves Congar, “La ‘réception’ comme réalité ecclésiologique,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 56 (1972) 392-93.

¹⁴Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I & II*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

himself recognized that the papacy needed renewal—"open to a new situation" is how he puts it¹⁵—and asked for the help of pastors and theologians from the other churches in reenvisioning and reforming this ancient ministry.

From ecumenical partners, the invitation to rethink the papacy has received many positive responses. Many other Christian communions have looked with some longing, even jealousy, at the ministry of unity for the whole Church. Today the pope provides leadership as a global spokesperson for the Gospel in facing new moral questions at a time of cultural change, a uniquely credible witness to the Church's tradition. The papal teaching on social justice and peace since *Rerum Novarum* has shaped a whole vision of the social implications of sin and grace; many Christian churches desire this ministry of unity for their churches as well and they seek to regain full communion with the bishop of Rome. Ecumenical dialogues have gone even further in their agreements on the need for a universal ministry. The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission calls such a ministry "part of God's design" for the Church¹⁶ and the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue seeks again a "petrine ministry" to function as a global spokesperson for the Gospel at the world level¹⁷—a ministry which Lutherans acknowledge they lost at the time of the Reformation.¹⁸ At the same time, these other churches refuse to be reconciled to the present form of papal authority, which they find sometimes too centralized and too authoritarian.

If we Catholics look at the last pontificate through the eyes of our ecumenical partners, we can see the mixed message that the modern papacy is sending to other churches. On the one hand, Pope John Paul II presented an engaging figure for Protestants, Anglicans, and Orthodox. Many welcomed his strong criticism of both capitalism and communism, his commitment to mission and to a new evangelization, his outreach to nonchristians, as well as his opposition to abortion, war, capital punishment, and euthanasia. Under his pontificate, the global possibilities for a world-level spokesperson were demonstrated in new ways. John Paul II revived a modern form of pilgrimage that celebrated the variety of local churches by becoming a pilgrim himself, an itinerant preacher of the Gospel to the nations, and then inviting the young to become pilgrims as well for World Youth Days. During his pontificate, ecumenical dialogue at the world and local levels was systematically well supported. Perhaps even more intriguing to Prot-

¹⁵John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, #95.

¹⁶Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Authority in the Church II," *The Final Report*, #15.

¹⁷U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, "Differing Attitudes toward Papal Primacy: Common Statement," *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*, eds. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974) #28.

¹⁸U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, "Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church: Common Statement," *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, eds. Paul Empie, Austin Murphy and Joseph Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980) #39.

estants, Anglicans, and Orthodox was John Paul II's call for repentance for the sins of earlier Christians, including "the use of violence in the service of truth"¹⁹ and the sins by which "ecclesial communion has been painfully wounded."²⁰ Hearing a pope apologize was a new experience for most Christians, and it changed the tone of many ecumenical discussions.

It would be inattentive, however, for Roman Catholics not to recognize the large problems posed for our ecumenical partners by the last pontificate. Protestants, Anglicans, and Orthodox Christians had welcomed Vatican II's emphasis on collegiality and the local church, and so they are disappointed when they see signs that Rome is unable or unwilling to put this emphasis into practice. John Garvey complains that "collegiality was a principle, but not really a practice" in the Roman Catholic Church.²¹ During the last pontificate, Protestants, Anglicans, and Orthodox watched uneasily as the synod of bishops remained merely advisory to the pope, and the authority of episcopal conferences was restricted. In "Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion," our ecumenical partners read that the petrine ministry is "interior to every fully local church"²² and in *Dominus Iesus* that Protestant and Anglican communities are not "churches in the proper sense" at all.²³ They looked hopefully for a more collegial exercise of the papacy with attention to local diversity, but instead they heard the complex debate between Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper about whether the local or the universal Church had priority. Our ecumenical partners heard that "subsistit" as used at Vatican II meant that the Church of Christ "continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church"²⁴ and that the teaching against the ordination of women was now one "to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful."²⁵

Finally, the volume of papal teaching from the last pontificate was enormous, much larger than previous pontificates. While Roman Catholics themselves puzzled together over the authority of these many encyclicals, apostolic letters, apostolic exhortations and declarations, our ecumenical partners looked on with concern. What role would such teachings play in the life of sister churches in the future, if our divisions could be overcome? Often Roman Catholics themselves could not answer this question.

¹⁹John Paul II, "As the Third Millennium Draws Near," *Origins* 24 (1994) 401, 403-416, #35.

²⁰*Ibid.*, #34.

²¹John Garvey, "The New Pope: An Orthodox View," *Commonweal* 132 (20 May 2005) 7.

²²Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion," *Origins* 22 (1992) 110.

²³Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "*Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*," *Origins* 30 (2000) 209, 211-19, #17.

²⁴*Dominus Iesus*, #16.

²⁵John Paul II, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, *Origins* 24 (1994) 49, 51-52, #4.

The pontificate of John Paul II thus leaves a mixed heritage on ecumenical dialogue. Many of the same questions have arisen again in the present pontificate. They indicate the unfinished business involved in the discussion about the renewal of the papacy for the sake of the unity of the Church.

Let me be clear: I believe that the papacy is one of the gifts that we Catholics bring to the table of dialogue. The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission calls the papacy a gift "to be shared" which, they say, Anglicans should prepare themselves to receive, a gift that "could be offered and received even before our churches are in full communion."²⁶ But the statement also says something else, which I think is very interesting: it says that Roman Catholics should desire, not only that such a gift be received, but that they should want to offer this ministry as a gift to the whole Church of God.²⁷ This text suggests that receiving gifts is not the only difficult part of the ecumenical gift exchange: even offering them suitably can be a challenge.

This reminds me of something that used to happen in my husband's large family. For many years at Christmas, my mother-in-law Kathleen used to offer my father-in-law Joe a gift. It was the same gift, offered over and over again: a sundial. Kathleen had painted it and wrapped it up nicely, and the first time Joe opened this gift he said he liked it. However, he did not really want this gift, he never used it, and then he forgot about it; and so the next year she wrapped up the sundial again and offered it to him again, and of course, everybody laughed. After that, every year for a few years, Kathleen would wrap up the sundial, Joe would take off the wrappings, and everyone would clap.

Of course, by that time it had become a joke. However, it is an interesting story, I think, because it shows that sometimes a gift needs to be repaired or changed before it is offered. This is what Roman Catholics know about the papacy: it is a gift for the whole of Christ's Church, but it needs repair. Could the bishop of Rome once more in the future exercise a ministry of unity for the whole Church of Christ throughout the world? Could he serve again as shepherd and teacher for the whole Church? Yes, I believe that he could, but to do so his ministry needs repair. The papacy needs to exercise the ministry of unity in the whole Church in a more pastoral way, in a less centralized way, in a way that defends the diversity of the local churches. This was what Pope John Paul II acknowledged in his request to other churches for their help in repairing this ancient and precious gift. "This is an immense task," he wrote, "which we cannot refuse and which I cannot carry out by myself."²⁸

Of course, some Roman Catholics do not want to reform the papacy so that

²⁶Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III* (London: Church House Publishing and Catholic Truth Society, 1999) #60.

²⁷*Ibid.*, #62.

²⁸John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, #96.

it can be shared with others: they want it all for themselves, as a sign of their “identity.” Therefore, we Roman Catholics have to learn to want to share the gift of the papacy with others. Other churches have to want to receive this gift; but we have to be willing to offer it suitably. We have to be willing, not just to keep wrapping it up and offering it, but to do the hard work of reforming it first. Nevertheless, reforming—repairing—a gift is hard work: it takes imagination, faithfulness, and perseverance. These are virtues that will be needed for the next generation of ecumenists.

Remembering the Past

When churches enter into dialogue with each other about controversies from the past, they invite a new look at our history. It is a new look because it is done with new partners, who offer us new eyes to see with, new perspectives to understand many points about our history that we have distorted or neglected. Karl Rahner comments that the history of theology is a history of forgetting as well as remembering,²⁹ and in this sense ecumenical dialogue makes a direct contribution to the work of theology. It becomes a work of reception, or re-reception, of the past. Mennonites and Catholics in their international commission for dialogue reported that rereading certain periods of church history together in an atmosphere of openness was “invaluable”³⁰ It can lead to “a shared new memory and understanding”; and “in turn, a shared new memory can free us from the prison of the past.”³¹ Such a newly shared interpretation of both early Christian history and the Reformation period allowed the commission to reach important breakthroughs in appreciation of both Catholic and Mennonite developments on the topic of war and peace.³²

Of course, we know that Pope John Paul II was also strongly aware of the power of memory; he believed that part of the ecumenical journey includes what he called “the necessary purification of past memories.”³³ He thought that Christians of different churches have not known each other well, and they have inherited misunderstandings and prejudices about each other from the past. Sometimes these past memories are true, sometimes they are distorted—a kind of false-memory syndrome. But none of these memories, John Paul II taught, should be ignored: they should all be faced and purified.

For him, a first step toward this purification is repentance and conversion.

²⁹Karl Rahner, “Current Problems in Christology,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961) 151.

³⁰International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference, “Called Together To Be Peacemakers,” <<http://bridgefolk.net/calledtogether.html>, #26>.

³¹Ibid., #27.

³²Ibid., #145-89.

³³John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, #2.

"The sin of our separation is very serious," he writes.³⁴ We need to change our "way of looking at things," he says.³⁵ In a sense, the entire ecumenical movement rests on the recognition of the need for repentance, a willingness to ask whether we have a beam in our own eye before we concern ourselves with the mote in the eye of the other. The Second Vatican Council had taught that there is no true ecumenism without a change of heart,³⁶ and John Paul II returned repeatedly to this theme of repentance and conversion, linking it to a new perspective on the past. Catholics, he explains, are called by the Holy Spirit to make a "serious examination of conscience" that will lead the churches into a "dialogue of conversion."³⁷ In addition, of course he put theory into practice on the Day of Pardon at the time of the millennium, when he asked forgiveness from God for earlier offenses committed by Christians who went before us.

When we have repented of our sins toward each other, then Christians are ready for a new look at the past, acknowledging with "sincere and total objectivity the mistakes made and the contingent factors at work at the origins of their deplorable divisions. What is needed," he explained, "is a calm, clear-sighted and truthful vision of things, a vision enlivened by divine mercy and capable of freeing people's minds and of inspiring in everyone a renewed willingness, precisely with a view to proclaiming the Gospel to the men and women of every people and nation."³⁸

"A calm, clear-sighted and truthful vision of things": this is what re-reception of history means. Note that re-reception is not just a new spin. Bernard Lonergan makes clear the difference between a relativist notion of truth that thinks truth is constructed and a historical-minded view of the truth that sees it is recognized.³⁹ This distinction between construction and recognition is carefully noted in ecumenical work on reception. The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission explains that reception does not create truth,⁴⁰ and the same is true of our re-reception of history together.

Nor is re-reception the elimination of history. Sometimes our students wonder why a new generation must bother with debates from the past, when the Church of the present and the future is beckoning us forward. However, I think that if we ignore the past, we are like a person who has been abused or hurt in childhood and tries to ignore and stifle the problems of that history, rather than facing it with loving help from others. The "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of

³⁴John Paul II, *Oriente Lumen*, #17.

³⁵John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, #15.

³⁶Vatican II, *Unitatis redintegratio*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Abbott, #4.

³⁷John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, #82.

³⁸John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, #2.

³⁹Bernard Lonergan, "The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical-Mindedness," in *Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 5-6.

⁴⁰Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Authority in the Church I: Elucidation," in *The Final Report*, #3.

Justification,” for example, notes that the condemnations of the sixteenth century “were not simply pointless.” They “remain for us ‘salutary warnings’ to which we must attend in our teaching and practice.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, like our *anamnesis* at the eucharist, our remembering of history is not locked in the past; rather, as the Mennonite-Catholic international dialogue argued, remembering together can “free us from the prison of the past”⁴² to enable peacemaking for the future. In that sense, we will never be completely done with old business in ecumenical work, even though we make it no longer our business arising, but new business because it is seen in a “new light.”⁴³

NEW BUSINESS

In this section, I will again discuss three areas: new sources of division; rethinking the understanding of authority; and anticipating the future.

New Sources of Division

While the generation of theologians entering ecumenical dialogue today cannot neglect old sources of division, they also are faced with a bewildering cluster of arguments that cause new divisions between and within the churches.

Of course, it is possible to exaggerate the importance of these new arguments. Karl Rahner spoke of the neurotic fear shown by those who, when faced with an ecumenical agreement, suspect that it is not “really” an agreement “in depth.” He observes, “Such fears then give rise to those strange efforts . . . to find new sets of ever more subtle formulae and nuances so as to prove the existence of mutual dissent.”⁴⁴ When I hear of yet another new reason for slowing down our ecumenical work, I do sometimes suspect the presence of this neurotic fear that we may be in disagreement—or worse, the neurotic fear that we may be in agreement. Nevertheless, today it does seem that a new set of arguments has arisen that frequently function to divide.

Some of these arguments are about moral questions. Positions taken on homosexual behavior, same-sex marriage, abortion, and the justification of war are often cited by Christians from many churches as a cause for hesitation about ecumenical work. But these issues are also sources of new, unexpected alliances: evangelicals and Catholics band together to oppose abortion while mainline Protestants join Mennonites and Catholic religious orders in sending Christian peacemaker teams to Iraq. Churches of many kinds find new alliances in developing sanctuary movements for immigrants.

Other matters hover at the edge of these moral issues. The matter of wom-

⁴¹ *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, #42.

⁴² “Called Together To Be Peacemakers,” #27.

⁴³ *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, #7.

⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, “Questions of Controversial Theology on Justification,” *Theological Investigations*, vol 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 196.

en's ordination, though many see it as a moral issue, also raises questions about doctrine and the exercise of authority. Moreover, interreligious dialogue also raises questions for ecumenists. Discussion of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the salvation of nonchristians, and the relationship of the Church to non-christian religions have become new issues facing ecumenical dialogue today. Finally, the voices of the young churches in countries where the Gospel was recently planted by missionary outreach raise new questions for the ecumenical dialogue.

How should we think about these many questions? One way to understand them is as fruits of our separation. Because the churches have been separated from each other for centuries, we have emphasized different parts of the Gospel, valued different cultural insights, and developed different areas of moral outrage. Different parts of the Gospel: Mennonites have held to a pacifist identity while Anglicans have loved the liturgy. Different cultural insights: Lutherans have modeled their decision-making structures more on modern democracies than have Catholics. Different areas of moral outrage: evangelicals are outraged by abortion while Disciples of Christ are outraged when women cannot be ordained. In our separation from each other, we have learned to value and to oppose different things. The fruit of these centuries of separation is now bitter in our mouth.

A second way to understand these conflicts is as an encounter between Gospel and culture. In discussing the issue of women's ordination, the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue of Canada pointed out that each church must answer this question: is the ordination of women a sign of the times—a positive inculturation of the gospel in our day—or is it a capitulation to secular culture that waters down our witness?⁴⁵ The present painful debate within the Anglican Communion itself about same-sex marriage must answer the same kind of question. This is surely an issue of generations as well, since many young Catholics are attracted to the faith precisely because they yearn for a countercultural witness: they reject what Charles Péguy named the bourgeois Catholicism of his time.⁴⁶ These Catholics share my admiration for John Paul II's fully pro-life teaching, a teaching that opposes abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, and war, and they enter ecumenical work ready to defend such a countercultural vision.

But of course, we must also ask: countercultural to which culture? My African students are totally opposed to abortion, but they also are scandalized by nursing homes for the elderly. "Why do you isolate your old people from their children and grandchildren and leave them so lonely?" they kept asking me. Within the Anglican Communion right now, this kind of intercultural discussion

⁴⁵Anglican-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 (1992) 605, 607-17, #4.2-4.3.

⁴⁶Cited by Gilles Routhier during the Peter and Paul Seminar, Québec City, 2 March 2008.

is a painful one. The African Anglicans say to North American Anglicans: Our cultures and the Bible you brought us teach that homosexuality is wrong. These African Anglicans preach the need of reevangelizing the mother church. In addition, some North American Anglicans reply: But you are misinterpreting those precious biblical texts that we entrusted to you.

Again: which culture? My students from South America and from Hispanic or Latino/a cultures in the United States had hesitations about ecumenism that had nothing to do with the *Decree on Ecumenism*. For them, the experience of Protestants was of fundamentalist Protestants, often involving not dialogue but proselytism. Moreover, I still remember clearly the first Protestant student from mainland China in my course on ecumenical dialogue twenty years ago. After puzzling at length over my explanation of the teachings of late medieval Catholicism and of Luther on the eucharist, she finally said hesitantly, "But in our church in China we hold both of those positions." How necessary today in Asia is it to teach the history of the European Reformation?

All of these new questions raise the issue of discernment of gifts: how do we distinguish the offer of bread from a stone? Churches engaged in serious dialogue experience not only the mutuality of gift exchange, but also the refusal of a gift out of fear that what is being offered as a gift is really a poison.

Commenting on this dynamic, the "Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity" criticizes the ecumenical movement for sometimes giving in to a kind of "liberal indifference," a sort of relativism. It observes that some churches, trying to avoid such relativism, focus instead on older formulations to define their identity over against other churches in a "divisive sectarianism."⁴⁷ They fear the gifts of others. But in fact, the "Princeton Proposal" argues, both a liberal relativism and a divisive sectarianism are often marked by a shift away from the question of truth and toward the question of identity: rather than "is it true?" some Christians ask, "'Is it authentically Catholic?', 'Is it Evangelical?', . . . 'Is it congruent with the dynamics of the Reformation?'"⁴⁸ The "Princeton Proposal" calls this shift from truth to identity a kind of "tribalization" (in the bad sense) of Christian communities that can play into the hands of secular nationalism, ethnic conflict, or consumerist dynamics.⁴⁹

Such reflections raise the need for repentance before any exchange of gifts is possible. The "Princeton Proposal" speaks of the "wound" of disunity affecting all Christians,⁵⁰ a language also used by Walter Kasper;⁵¹ and it calls for disci-

⁴⁷Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *In One Body through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), #24.

⁴⁸Ibid., #41.

⁴⁹Ibid., #42.

⁵⁰Ibid., #10.

⁵¹Kasper, 42.

plines of unity that are “penitential” and “ascetical.”⁵² Christians need a spirit of repentance to help them learn whether it is relativism or love for gospel truth which leads them to reject a position offered to them as a gift by a partner church. Such discernment is not easy, and it presents ecumenical dialogue with a new agenda.

Refusing gifts from others is a complicated matter. What seems in one communion like a gift of God for the Church’s up-building may strike another communion as a deeply unfaithful betrayal of the Gospel. Two examples reveal the complexity here.

Many evangelicals are deeply troubled by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that nonchristians and even atheists may be saved.⁵³ While mainline Protestants and some Catholics cringed at the line from *Dominus Iesus* that said nonchristians were objectively in a “gravely deficient situation,” these evangelicals were pleased.⁵⁴ While I repeatedly explain to my evangelical colleagues that the teaching of Vatican II shows an increasing testimony to the wideness of God’s mercy, some evangelicals find this teaching a capitulation to secular culture and a diminishment of Christ’s saving work. For them, official Catholic teaching on this point is not a gift offered but a stone. The discussion with evangelicals about this topic is not finished.

In the discussion on the ordination of women, we have a topic where again the churches disagree about which teaching and practice really is the gift. In 1976, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith argued that “the Church does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination” because of the practice of Jesus and the apostolic community that did not include women among the twelve apostles or invest them with “the apostolic charge.”⁵⁵ In 1994, Pope John Paul II argued from the will and practice of Christ “that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women” and that this judgment is to be held “definitively.”⁵⁶ But in explaining the decision of some Anglicans to ordain women, Robert Runcie, then Archbishop of Canterbury, also appealed to a christological basis. In a letter to Cardinal Jan Willebrands, he noted that, since in Jesus Christ the eternal Word of God assumed a human nature inclusive of both men and women, some Anglicans believe that ordaining women as well as men would “more perfectly . . . represent Christ’s inclusive high priesthood.” Hence, he explained, for some Anglican provinces

⁵²*In One Body through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity*, #71.

⁵³Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Abbott, #16.

⁵⁴*Dominus Iesus*, #22.

⁵⁵Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Inter Insigniores*: Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood [15 Oct. 1976],” *Origins* 6 (1977) 519-20.

⁵⁶John Paul II, “*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*: Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone [22 May 1994],” #4.

this doctrinal reason “is seen not only to justify the ordination of women . . . but actually to require it.”⁵⁷

Since the area of women’s ordination remains in dispute among the churches, it is especially heartening that Archbishop Runcie and Pope John Paul II commented directly on the question of women’s ordination a few years before the publication of *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*. Explaining that the ordination of women prevents Anglican-Roman Catholic reconciliation even while other progress has been made, they then added, “No pilgrim knows in advance all the steps along the path.” Recommitting themselves to the full visible unity of their two communions, they continued, “While we ourselves do not see a solution to this obstacle, we are confident that through our engagement with this matter our conversations will in fact help to deepen and enlarge our understanding because of the Holy Spirit promised to the Church.”⁵⁸

By drawing a parallel between teachings on the salvation of nonchristians and the ordination of women, I do not mean to suggest that they are the same kind of issue or that they have the same importance. However, I do underline that neither issue was considered a source of division among the churches in the sixteenth century. The Reformation churches did not call women to ordained ministry in the sixteenth century, and Luther taught that native peoples in North America would go to hell because they had never heard of Christ. Nevertheless, each issue also does show how a shift in teaching by one community causes dispute and hesitation by another community about how the dialogue should proceed.

What is the way that such disagreements on these new sources of division can be overcome? While of course we should keep talking, we need a guide for our talks, one who will open up for us the meaning of the Scriptures as we walk along the road together. Here I think the warnings against relativism are vital: they remind us of the importance of the christological and trinitarian core of our confession. The basis of ecumenical dialogue is a common confession of the Triune God and the Incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. These core teachings provide the norm by which we can discern whether the offerings of other churches are truly gifts or stones. Without a firm foundation in christological and trinitarian faith, we not only lose the norm for such discernment, we also lose the reason for seeking visible unity with other Christians in the first place: proclaiming the Gospel to the whole world together.⁵⁹

In fact, it is striking to me that a great number of the new issues causing division are questions related to trinitarian and christological questions. I already

⁵⁷“Archbishop Robert Runcie to Cardinal Jan Willebrands [18 Dec. 1985], *Origins* 16 (1985) 156. Willebrands was president of what was then called the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

⁵⁸John Paul II and Robert Runcie, “Common Declaration [2 Oct. 1989],” *Origins* 19 (1989) 317.

⁵⁹*Unitatis redintegratio*, #1.

showed how discussions on women's ordination and on nonchristian religions draw directly on our teachings about Christ and the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, debates about morals and voices from cultures where the Church is young also raise questions about what it means to follow Christ. Therefore, while earlier sources of division among Christians demanded a deepening of our ecclesiology and sacramental theology, I think that new sources of division will be an occasion to explore more fully our core doctrines on Christ and the Trinity.

Rethinking the Understanding of Authority

While the next generation of ecumenists faces new questions that divide the churches, it continues to face as well the challenge of authority. Here, however, there is also a different question: not only the reform of authority's actual exercise, but also the reconceptualization of authority itself, particularly teaching authority.

Here I want to suggest a rethinking of that central teaching that Catholics offer to the Church about teaching authority: its claims about infallibility. The Catholic teaching on infallibility continues to pose grave challenges to our ecumenical partners, but this teaching is also in some disarray within Catholic theology itself, in need of rethinking.

Some wonder whether infallibility is worth rethinking. They fear that infallibility is too authoritarian, too patriarchal, or too historically naive to be worth our theological time. Let infallibility be quietly neglected and then forgotten, they suggest, like limbo or St. Christopher.

But I would argue that infallibility, suitably rethought and reunderstood, gives an important teaching about God's assistance to the Church in preserving the core of the Gospel. Understood at its deepest level, I think infallibility is a doxological teaching about God's faithfulness. I think it also contradicts those forms of relativism—so often a concern of Pope Benedict XVI—that question whether the Church can know and teach the truth. Understood in this way, infallibility raises an important issue for all Christians and signals something important that Catholics can contribute to the ecumenical exchange of gifts: "the faithful transmission of the gospel and its authoritative interpretation," about which all Christians are concerned.⁶⁰ Hence, I believe that rethinking infallibility is worth our time and theological effort.

Of course, I will not review Vatican I's teaching on infallibility, but I will note two reasons why I think Catholics must spend so much time explaining again and again the meaning of this teaching. The bishops at the First Vatican Council spent a long time discussing papal infallibility and hedging it round with conditions, but in fact, they spent relatively little time on papal primacy. The Council confirms that the pope has universal, ordinary, and immediate jurisdic-

⁶⁰U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, "Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church: Common Statement," #23.

tion over the local churches, but it specifies almost no conditions to limit this jurisdiction. The members of the council spent months clarifying the conditions for the exercise of papal infallibility, but only one week directly discussing the conditions for the exercise of papal primacy.

In fact, the papacy in 1870 reflected the post-Reformation pattern of an increasingly centralized, pyramidal exercise of papal primacy. Vatican I's failure to specify conditions for papal governance can be seen as part of this pattern that only began to be countered with Vatican II's emphasis on the collegiality of the bishops and the dignity of all of the laity. I think that misunderstandings about infallibility are really linked to this pattern of a centralized, pyramidal exercise of the pope's primacy in his everyday governing decisions, his encyclicals, and his ordinary theological opinions. In his book on papal primacy, Klaus Schatz argues that papal infallibility was strenuously surrounded with conditions, but that papal primacy was left so vague both before and after Vatican I that the pope's ordinary governing and everyday teaching came to replace infallibility—in effect becoming a kind of ersatz infallibility.⁶¹ Even in the ordinary exercise of authority, recent popes sometimes act as though they speak infallibly, even when they do not. Papal style can seem infallible even when papal teaching is not. Thus, this ersatz infallibility of the pope's primacy reinforces the misunderstandings of Catholic teaching about infallibility and becomes a serious problem in ecumenical work.

A second source of misunderstanding comes from the epistemology used by Vatican I, a static epistemology that Lonergan labels "classicist," in which the unchanging and permanent character of the truth is emphasized. Lonergan contrasts such a classicist epistemology with what he calls an historical-mindedness that is aware of both permanence in truth and historical development of understanding.⁶² Without denying the permanence of meaning present in dogmatic formulations, Vatican II also appropriated such historical-mindedness when it taught that we change—we grow—in our understanding of the truth. *Dei Verbum* presented this growth as an uninterrupted conversation which Christ has with his bride, the Church, as it is led into all truth by the Holy Spirit.⁶³

Now, what would happen to infallibility if we could reinterpret it freed from these two problems: its confusion with papal primacy and its formulation in a classicist epistemology? What if infallibility were to be rethought with historical-mindedness and as a gift given to the whole Church? Rather than appearing as an unchanging grasp of the truth, infallibility could be reinterpreted as the process through which, over time, the Church discerns core teachings of the Gospel for its age and culture. Roman Catholic theology claims that God assists the Church

⁶¹Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present*, trans. John A. Otto and Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996) 167-68.

⁶²Lonergan, 5-6.

⁶³*Dei Verbum*, #8.

in this process so that the core of the Gospel is not utterly lost, so that we may hear the message of salvation. Even when a formulation of a central teaching is incomplete or misleading, the Holy Spirit helps the Church in a self-correcting process eventually to recognize and teach the Gospel. This interplay of authoritative teaching and reception or discernment by the whole Church is what Catholics mean by infallibility, and we believe that this process is guided by the Holy Spirit.

Rethinking infallibility in this way might allow us to translate it into something like inculturation: the Church assisted to reformulate the Gospel in new times and cultures. Of course, this rethinking includes the collegiality of the bishops together with the bishop of Rome in the exercise of teaching authority, but it also allows us to include the reality of reception by the whole Church as part of the process that is infallibility. Remember that Vatican II taught that the whole Church cannot err in believing because all of its members are anointed by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁴ The whole Church eventually recognizes whether or not a core teaching proposed by pope or bishops or council is really an announcement of the Gospel. Of course, this takes time; and infallibility is that process over time through which the whole Church, with God's assistance, discerns the Gospel in the face of a challenge.

I have offered here just one way that we might rethink Catholic teaching about infallibility. However, I am convinced that such rethinking is a task that has not yet really been faced in Catholic theology. In fact, locating infallibility more firmly within history in this way may actually underline Catholic convictions that merge Catholic identity with a defense of the truth, a concern mentioned again by Pope Benedict XVI in his comments about ecumenism on his recent U.S. visit.⁶⁵

Anticipating the Future

In this section, I will be very brief, in part because I am talking about the unseen future. Nevertheless, talk about the future is appropriate for discussion of ecumenical dialogue. Ecumenism has an eschatological character, because it anticipates the fulfillment of a promise from God to heal the divisions of the Church. Christ prayed that all would be one, and Christians believe that his prayer is effective. Dialogue between Christians, then, has a kind of built-in restlessness, a cognitive dissonance that yearns for and anticipates the healing of the Church. Yves Congar wrote that ecumenists of every generation have a desire for unity that gives their present belief a dynamic future-oriented dimension "in which their intention of plenitude is fulfilled."⁶⁶

⁶⁴*Lumen gentium*, #12.

⁶⁵Benedict XVI, "Ecumenical Prayer Service [18 April 2008]," *Origins* 37 (2008).

⁶⁶Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1984) 133.

One place where I recognize this sense of restless anticipation is in the experience of dialogue with long-term ecumenical partners. I think such dialogue has more than a sentimental or anecdotal significance: I think it provides a means and foretaste of reception among the churches. It literally anticipates the future. Because dialogue partners can listen to each other sympathetically over long periods of time without the presupposition of hostility or competition, they can often discover aspects of the other's position that previously they have distorted or neglected. In this way, relationships between colleagues in the ecumenical movement parallel the relationships that have developed between churches once ignorant or hostile toward each other. These personal recognitions are a foretaste of the reconciliation between the many Christian communions. After the purification of memories, ecumenical partners can sometimes discover that "calm, clear-sighted and truthful vision of things" of which John Paul II spoke.⁶⁷ Such reevaluation of each other's positions allows the shock of recognition that I sometimes feel when I realize that my colleague from another church tradition truly shares the same faith that I am laboring to explain. Sometimes, of course, this includes the gift of criticism that I offer to the other church tradition or am offered in return. But such criticism seems a part of the ascetical disciplines that nurture ecumenical work.

I think that ecumenism will continue to demand ascetical disciplines from Catholic theologians. Even now, ecumenism is an ascetical practice. Ecumenists must regularly fast from the eucharist when not in full communion with the presider celebrating; they must spend their time and talents on lengthy study of positions they only gradually understand; they must endure the embarrassment and frustration that flow from the sins of both their own and now also their dialogue partner's church communion; and frequently their efforts are feared or suspected by members of their own church.

What has continued to nurture the foretaste of the Church's healing has been prayer in common, and I am sure that such prayer will remain at the heart of the ecumenical movement. This insight by Paul Couturier, founder of the Groupe des Dombes, seems even more clear today to the next generation of young ecumenists. Their taste in Taizé-style common prayer, their exploration of earlier spiritualities, their widespread use of icons, and their insistent hunger for a common eucharist point to the continuing importance that such prayer will have in future ecumenical work. As the next generation of Catholic theologians walks along the road together in dialogue with other Christians, all will find their hearts burning within them as their guide opens for them the meaning of the Scriptures, bringing them closer to the table fellowship of Emmaus. If we understand that *anamnesis* includes a kind of remembering that also points towards the future, perhaps we will not be surprised when the spiritual ecumenism of which the Second Vatican

⁶⁷John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, #2.

Council speaks becomes an even more central instrument for dialogue among Christians in the coming century.

CONCLUSION

I began my reflections with a focus on the business arising for ecumenical work, and then I considered the new business that ecumenical dialogue will face in this century. Let me conclude with my conviction that this agenda, old and new, will increasingly be an agenda for the whole of Catholic theology. While I have referred to my colleagues who will enter ecumenical dialogue more intensively in the future, in reality, all of us must enter such dialogue if we are to retain our Catholic identity. The commitment of the Catholic Church to ecumenism is irreversible, and that means that its effects on Catholic theology will be irreversible as well. Fellow Catholic theologians, all of us will be responsible for ecumenical dialogue in the future. Fortunately, for this task—unlike the space travelers in *Star Trek*—we are assured of God's help.

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