

ON THE NEW ECCLESIOLOGY

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This chapter presents the changes made by Vatican II in the doctrine on the nature of the Church. This was accomplished by the introduction of an ecumenist theology of communion.

1. The development of ecclesiology in the authentic teaching of the Church.

One of the main points of focus, if not the principle one, of the Second Vatican Council, was *ecclesiology*, that is, the doctrine about the nature and properties of the Church herself. Throughout her history, the Church has solemnly defined, particularly in ecumenical councils, numerous points of doctrine concerning the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, concerning Christ, concerning Our Blessed Lady, concerning original sin, justification, the sacraments, and many other mysteries of our Catholic Faith.

But the Church itself is a supernatural mystery, not in the sense that we cannot find her, or cannot know which Church is the true Church, but in the sense that it is a divine institution, established by Christ. Her very constitution, consequently, has been revealed by God, and as such is an object of our faith. This object of faith, just like any other, has been explained and defined by the Church, over time. Until the 1870 Vatican Council, however, the Church had not yet, however, described entirely her divine constitution in a complete and systematic fashion. Here and there, on different occasions, nonetheless, the Church has defined her divine origin, the fact that she is absolutely necessary for salvation,

and many aspects of her constitution. Fathers and theologians themselves would not, ordinarily, discuss ecclesiology as a treatise of its own, but would rather attach it to the theology of the Incarnate Word, or some other part of theology. Cardinal Torquemada (1388-1468) is considered to be the father of ecclesiology as we know it today, by writing, perhaps for the first time, an entire theological treatise whose purpose is to describe and discuss the nature and properties of the Church founded by Christ. Similarly, as the teaching of the Church about her own nature became more and more explicit, the desire for a dedicated dogmatic constitution, which would be solemnly promulgated by an ecumenical council was keenly felt at the time of the First Vatican Council. The Council began its work in this regard by the definition of the primacy and infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, by the promulgation of the dogmatic constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, of July 18th, 1870. Work was underway to complete this with another dogmatic constitution which would describe other aspects of her nature, constitution, and properties. Sadly, the Italian Revolution caused the interruption of this Sacred Council, which was not able to ever be continued. The second constitution on the

Church was still the object of debates and discussions, and will forever remain the draft of an unfinished work. This document is very valuable, nonetheless, as it does reflect the mind of the Church concerning ecclesiology.

The Roman Pontiffs, in the decades following the 1870 Vatican Council, have contributed very much to the development of ecclesiology by making great use of a mode of teaching privileged in modern history: that of the encyclical letters. By this means, the Roman Pontiffs were able to teach Catholic doctrine to the universal Church about a great variety of subjects of the Faith, including doctrine on the Church itself. A number of encyclicals (such as *Satis cognitum*, by Leo XIII in 1896, and *Mystici corporis* by Pius XII in 1943) have given to the Catholic world a depth of teaching about the Church perhaps never attained before. We will make great use of this doctrine in this study.

2. Vatican II was meant to develop the doctrine on the Church.

During the reign of Pope Pius XII (1939-1958), the theology on the Church, ecclesiology, certainly remains one of the most discussed topics among theologians and ecclesiastics. Many great contributions of Pope Pius XII have had a greatly beneficial influence during that time. However, very pernicious errors were also being spread by bad theologians and unsuspecting clergy, and everyday gaining more popularity, until these errors were adopted by Vatican II.

One of goals assigned to the Second Vatican Council was indeed to “complete” the work of the previous ecumenical council, particularly by defining precisely the place of the episcopacy in the constitution of the

Church. In the years leading to the Council, a tremendous amount of discussions and writings about the episcopacy took place. Many were hoping that the council would give some balance to what they perceived as an excess in the definition of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff in 1870. They felt that the importance of the papacy had been exaggerated, to the detriment of the bishops, and to the detriment of ecumenism, which was becoming more and more fashionable among progressive theologians and prelates.

The *Nouvelle Theologie*, which was a thinly veiled resurgence of the modernism condemned by Pope St. Pius X, was blooming, despite some attempts made by Pope Pius XII to repress it, and was infecting the seminaries, the priests and the bishops themselves. All was ripe for a disaster. The draft which had been prepared by “Roman theologians”, and which reflected the traditional doctrine of the Church, was rejected by the bishops at Vatican II, and a new text was composed to conform to their novel ideas.

On November 21st, 1964, the dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, was promulgated.

3. *Lumen gentium* gives an unorthodox portrait of the Church.

Instead of being the constitution which should have been expected, namely a solemn teaching presenting systematically the traditional doctrine of the Church concerning her own nature, *Lumen gentium* ended up contradicting this traditional doctrine of the Church on many points. Indeed, this document teaches that salvation is possible by means of non-Catholic sects. It teaches a denial of the Church’s perfect unity, by

extending the presence of the “Church of Christ” beyond the visible confines of the “Catholic Church”. It teaches the heretical notion of “partial communion” between the Catholic Church and the schismatic and heretical sects. It teaches the doctrine of collegiality, which is a new doctrine concerning the episcopacy, and is alien to the Catholic Faith.

We have already dedicated a chapter on the question of collegiality. We shall now discuss the other aspects in which *Lumen gentium* offends the Catholic Faith.¹ Before discussing these changes, however, we deem it necessary to present the reader with a presentation of the traditional teaching of the Church on the necessity of the Catholic

Church for salvation,² as well as on the notion of Catholic communion.³

¹ For that purpose, we will greatly avail ourselves with the works already published on these questions by Bishop Donald J. Sanborn, particularly in the following articles: *Communion: Ratzinger’s New Ecclesiology* (published in *Sacerdotium V*, autumn 1992); *Ratzinger’s Subsistent Error* (published in *Most Holy Trinity Seminary Newsletter*, august 2007); *The New Ecclesiology, a double-column comparison* (2005). These articles can be found at *traditionalmass.org* (in December of 2022).

² This section is, incidentally, a comprehensive answer to the error commonly referred to as “feeneyism,” which error spreads even among traditional Catholics.

³ In addition to the texts themselves of the magisterium, we have extracted much of the content of this section from various writings of Msgr. Joseph Clifford Fenton, an American theologian who has spent decades studying and commenting on these issues. We would particularly recommend a number of articles published in the *American Ecclesiastical Review* (hereafter referred to as AER): *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* (AER 110, Jan.-June 1944, pp. 300-306); *The Holy Office Letter on the necessity of the Catholic Church* (AER 127, July-Dec. 1952, pp. 450-461); *The use of the terms body and soul with reference to the Catholic Church* (AER 110, Jan.-June 1944, pp. 48-57).

FIRST ARTICLE

ON THE CATHOLIC DOGMA “OUTSIDE THE CHURCH THERE IS NO SALVATION”

4. Teaching of the Church.

That there is *no salvation outside the Church* is one of the most fundamental dogmas of our Faith. It has been taught and repeated on numerous occasions. Let us have a look at a few pronouncements of the Church’s magisterium on this issue.

Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) in the bull *Unam sanctam* (of November 18th, 1302) teaches among other things about the Catholic Church:

We firmly believe and sincerely confess that outside of her there is no salvation nor remission of sin, as the spouse proclaims in the Canticle proclaiming: *One is my dove, my perfect one is but one, she is the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her.* [Canticle of canticles VI, 8]; which represents the one mystical body whose head is Christ, and the head of Christ is God. In her then is *one Lord, one faith, one baptism* [Eph. 4:5]. There had been at the time of the deluge only one ark of Noah, prefiguring the one Church, which ark, having been finished to a single cubit, had only one pilot and guide, i.e., Noah, and we read that, outside of this ark, all that subsisted on the earth was destroyed.⁴

Pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447), during the Council of Florence (1438-1445), promulgated the decree *Cantate Domino* (of February 4th, 1441), which contains the following:

⁴ D. 468.

The Holy Roman Church... firmly believes, professes, and proclaims that those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants of eternal life, but will depart *into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels.* [Matt. 25:41], unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock; and that the unity of the ecclesiastical body is so strong that only to those remaining in it are the sacraments of the Church of benefit for salvation, and do fastings, almsgiving, and other functions of piety and exercises of Christian service produce eternal reward, and that no one, whatever almsgiving he has practiced, even if he has shed blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless he has remained in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.⁵

Pope Pius IX, in the encyclical *Quanto conficiamur moerore* (of August 10th, 1863), intervenes against an error of his time, repeating the same dogma:

And here, beloved Sons and Venerable Brothers, We should mention again and reprove **a very grave error** in which some Catholics are unhappily engaged, who believe **that men living in error, and separated from the true faith and from Catholic unity, can attain eternal life.** Indeed, **this is absolutely contrary to Catholic doctrine.** It is known to Us and

⁵ D. 714.

to you that they who labor in invincible ignorance of our most holy religion and who, zealously keeping the natural law and its precepts engraved in the hearts of all by God, and being ready to obey God, live an honest and upright life, **can, by the operating power of divine light and grace, attain eternal life**, since God who clearly beholds, searches, and knows the minds, souls, thoughts, and habits of all men, because of His great goodness and mercy, will by no means suffer anyone to be punished with eternal torment who has not the guilt of deliberate sin. But, also well-known is **the Catholic dogma that no one can be saved outside the Catholic Church**; and also that those who are obstinate toward the authority and definitions of the same Church, and who pertinaciously separate themselves from the unity of the Church, and from the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, to whom *the guardianship of the vine has been entrusted by the Savior* [Council of Chalcedon], cannot obtain eternal salvation.⁶

Pope Pius IX had already explained this doctrine in the allocution *Singulari quadam* (of December 9th, 1854).⁷ From this allocution was taken the 17th condemned proposition of the syllabus of errors.⁸

Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical *Humani generis* (of August 12th, 1950), manifests himself well aware of the many errors creeping into the mentality of Catholic faithful and clergy, on these issues:

Some say they are not bound by the doctrine, explained in Our Encyclical

⁶ D. 1677. Emphasis added.

⁷ D. 1646-1647.

⁸ “We must have at least good hope concerning the eternal salvation of all those who in no wise are in the true Church of Christ.” D. 1717.

Letter of a few years ago, and based on the sources of Revelation, which teaches that the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing. Some reduce to a meaningless formula the necessity of belonging to the true Church in order to gain eternal salvation.⁹

5. In 1949, the Holy Office gave clarifications on the necessity of the Catholic Church for salvation.

During the pontificate of Pope Pius XII, in addition to the teachings contained in the encyclicals *Mystici corporis* (1943) and *Humani generis* (1950), a very important document was published by the Holy See, with Pius XII’s approval. It is a letter from the Holy Office, addressed to Archbishop Cushing, of Boston. The letter, entitled *Suprema haec sacra*, bears the date of August 8th, 1949, but was made public only in 1952.

In the introduction, the letter asserts that it is dealing with a grave controversy which has been stirred up by people connected with St. Benedict Center and Boston College. It further states that the Holy Office believes that the controversy arose in the first place because of a failure to properly grasp and to appreciate the axiom “*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” (“outside the Church there is no salvation”).

Anyone familiar with the literature of the time is well aware that this failure to properly understand this dogma was everywhere rampant. If the intervention of the Holy Office was occasioned by the apparition of what we now commonly

⁹ Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani generis* (1950), n. 27. D. 3019.

referred to as “feneeyism”, it is clear that the Sacred Congregation is quite conscious that this same dogma is misunderstood, and seriously so, by many Catholics who fell in the opposite extreme of a laxist opinion “reducing to a meaningless formula the necessity of belonging to the true Church in order to gain eternal salvation.”¹⁰

As a consequence, it was resolved to present an extensive interpretation of this dogma, in the body of the letter, which interpretation was approved by Pope Pius XII, in an audience of July 28th, 1949. This official interpretation is the most complete exposition ever proposed by the Church on this question:

Thus what makes this letter from the Holy Office so outstandingly important is the fact that it sets out, not only to correct the basic misinterpretation of the dogma made by the St. Benedict Center group, but to show the doctrinal quality of the teaching itself and to offer an accurate, full, and authoritative outline of its explanation. In accomplishing its purpose, the Holy Office letter has given to Catholic theologians by far the most complete and detailed exposition of the dogma that the Catholic Church is necessary for salvation which has yet come from the ecclesiastical *magisterium*.¹¹

We shall reproduce the specifically doctrinal part of this letter and we shall then comment on it.

¹⁰ Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani generis* (1950), n. 27. D. 3019.

¹¹ Fenton, *The Holy Office Letter on the necessity of the Catholic Church*, AER 127, July-Dec. 1952, p. 451.

6. The authentic doctrinal interpretation of the dogma “*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” published by the Holy Office, with the approval of Pope Pius XII.¹²

We are bound by divine and Catholic faith to believe all those things which are contained in the word of God, whether it be Scripture or Tradition, and are proposed by the Church to be believed as divinely revealed, not only through solemn judgment but also through the ordinary and universal teaching office (Denzinger, n. 1792).

Now, among those things which the Church has always preached and will never cease to preach is contained also that infallible statement by which we are taught that there is no salvation outside the Church.

However, this dogma must be understood in that sense in which the Church herself understands it. For, it was not to private judgment that Our Saviour gave for explanation those things that are contained in the deposit of faith, but to the teaching authority of the Church.

Now, in the first place, the Church teaches that in this matter there is question of a most strict command of Jesus Christ. For He explicitly enjoined on His apostles to teach all nations to observe all things whatsoever He Himself had commanded (Matth., 28:19-20).

Now, among the commandments of Christ, that one holds not the least place, by which we are commanded to be incorporated by Baptism into the

¹² We present here the doctrinal part of this letter, in the official English translation published in the *American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. 127, July-Dec. 1952, pp. 311-315.

Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, and to remain united to Christ and to His Vicar, through whom, He Himself governs in a visible manner the Church on earth.

Therefore, no one will be saved who, knowing the Church to have been divinely established by Christ, nevertheless refuses to submit to the Church or withholds obedience from the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth.

Not only did the Saviour command that all nations should enter the Church, but He also decreed the Church to be a means of salvation, without which no one can enter the kingdom of eternal glory.

In His infinite mercy God has willed that the effects, necessary for one to be saved, of those helps to salvation which are directed toward man's final end, not by intrinsic necessity, but only by divine institution, can also be obtained in certain circumstances when those helps are used only in *desire* and *longing*. This we see clearly stated in the Sacred Council of Trent, both in reference to the Sacrament of Regeneration and in reference to the Sacrament of Penance (Denzinger, nn. 797, 807).¹³

The same in its own degree must be asserted of the Church, in as far as she is

¹³ Let it be noted that the Council of Trent did indeed solemnly teach the doctrine that the desire for the sacrament of baptism can effect the justification of the sinner: "And this translation [i.e., of justification from original sin], since the promulgation of the Gospel, cannot be effected, without the laver of regeneration, **or the desire thereof**, as it is written: *unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*" (Session VI, in the *Decree on justification*, chapter 4, D. 796, Emphasis added).

the general help to salvation.¹⁴ Therefore, that one may obtain eternal salvation, it is not always required that he be incorporated into the Church *actually* as a member, but it is necessary that at least he be united to her by *desire* and *longing*.

However, this desire need not always be explicit, as it is in the case of catechumens; but when a person is involved in invincible ignorance, God accepts also an *implicit desire*, so called because it is included in that good disposition of soul whereby a person wishes his will to be conformed to the will of God.

These things are clearly taught in that dogmatic letter which was issued by the Sovereign Pontiff, Pope Pius XII, on June 29, 1943 "On the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ." (AAS, Vol. 35, an. 1943, p. 193 ff.). For in this letter the Sovereign Pontiff clearly distinguishes between those who are *actually* incorporated into the Church as members, and those who are united to the Church only *by desire*.

Discussing the members of which the Mystical Body is composed here on earth, the same August Pontiff says: "Actually only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed."

¹⁴ This English translation should not be understood to mean that the Church *generally helps* people to get to heaven, as if it were sometimes excluded. The meaning of the Latin is rather that the Church is the *universal means* of salvation: *generale auxilium*.

Toward the end of this same Encyclical Letter, when most affectionately inviting to unity those who do not belong to the body of the Catholic Church, he mentions those who “are related to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer by a certain unconscious *yearning* and *desire*,” and these he by no means excludes from eternal salvation, but on the other hand states that they are in a condition “in which they cannot be sure of their salvation” since “they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church” (AAS, loc. Cit., 243).

With these wise words he reproves both those who exclude from eternal salvation men all united to the Church *only by implicit desire*, and those who falsely assert that men can be saved equally well in every religion (cf. Pope Pius IX, Allocution “*Singulari quadam*,” in Denzinger, nn. 1641, ff. — also Pope Pius XI in the Encyclical Letter “*Quanto conficiamur moerore*” in Denzinger, n. 1677).

But it must not be thought that any kind of desire of entering the Church suffices that one may be saved. It is necessary that the desire by which one is related to the Church be animated by perfect charity. Nor can an implicit desire produce its effect, unless a person has supernatural faith: “For he who comes to God must believe that God exists and is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews, 11:6). The Council of Trent declares (Session VI, chap. 8): “Faith is the beginning of man’s salvation, the foundation and root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God and attain the fellowship of His children” (Denzinger, n. 801).

From what has been said it is evident that those things which are proposed in the periodical “From the Housetops,” fascicle 3, as the genuine teaching of the Catholic Church are far from being such and are very harmful both to those within the Church and those without.

Let us draw a few lessons from this authentic doctrinal clarification.

7. “*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” is a dogma of faith.

We had already seen in other documents emanating from the supreme magisterium of the Church that this doctrine is a dogma of faith. This is noteworthy, for the Church is also infallible in defining truths which are not dogmas, truths which are not themselves revealed, but which are so intimately connected with the deposit of revelation that the Church could not act as a living and infallible teacher in presenting the revealed message were it not also competent to set forth these connected truths infallibly. Truths of this kind are usually classified by theologians as belonging to the secondary object of the infallible magisterium of the Church. It includes philosophical truths, theological conclusions, canonisations of saints, dogmatic facts, universal disciplinary and liturgical laws (in their substantial doctrinal element), and the definitive approval of religious orders.

The doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church, therefore, is not merely a conclusion, or a doctrine in some other way indirectly connected to divine revelation. Rather it is itself a dogma of faith, it was directly revealed by God, and to deny it would be a heresy, in the strictest sense of the word.

In stating that this doctrine is a dogma of faith, this document teaches nothing new. What is interesting, however, is the assertion that this dogma is to be counted “among those things which the Church has always preached and will never cease to preach.”

This assertion contains two very precious statements of our faith:

(1) The Church will never cease to preach the truths of the faith. This indeed is part of her indefectibility.

(2) In particular, **the Church will never (and could not ever) cease to preach this dogma of faith, that there is no salvation outside the Church.** This also is required by her indefectibility.

These two assertions are crucial to our discussion, since:

(1) It is clear that many dogmas of the faith, even though they are not directly denied, are effectively no longer preached in the Vatican II religion.

(2) **The dogma “*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” not only is no longer preached, but it is positively contradicted by the Vatican II doctrines,** as we shall see.

Hence, the only solution compatible with the indefectibility of the Church is to conclude that the heretical denial of this dogma contained in the Vatican II documents cannot proceed from the Church. We must deny their authority, and the authority of those who promulgated these heretical doctrines, lest we openly fall into contradiction with this principle of faith presented at the beginning of this doctrinal clarification:

Now, among those things which the Church has always preached and will never cease to preach is contained also that infallible statement by which we are

taught that there is no salvation outside the Church.

8. The Church cannot ever keep silence over doctrine which heretics do not like to hear about.

Another significant implication of this principle is that the Church cannot purposely keep silence about the truths revealed by God, and entrusted to her by her divine founder. Modernists such as Congar, Roncalli, and many others, deeply regretted, for example, the dogmatic definition of the Assumption of Our Lady, because they saw it as an obstacle to ecumenism and dialogue with heretics. In a similar way, as we shall see in another chapter, the official Vatican II directories positively ask clergy and faithful to not stress too much doctrines that make heretics and schismatics uncomfortable, but to focus “on what unites” rather than “what divides.” This principle is absolutely abhorrent to the Catholic Faith, and is clearly contrary to the principle laid out in this letter.

Already in 1952, Msgr. Fenton remarked how this was timely, in an era in which liberal theologians and prelates make the best efforts to turn the Church away from her duty to preach the faith in its integrity:

Now there has long been a tendency on the part of some Catholic writers to imagine that certain dogmas of the Church tend to grow obsolete, and that, in the interests of its own progress, the Church does not insist too rigorously upon those of its teachings which are represented as out of touch with modern conditions. Pope Leo XIII reproved one aspect of this tendency in his letter *Testem benevolentiae*. It is perfectly manifest that the one dogma of the

Church which its enemies would consider as least in line with the currents of modern thought is the teaching that there is no salvation outside of the true Church. Similarly a mentality like that of the St. Benedict Center group would tend to hold that, at least in our own time, the Church universal has not been teaching the dogma of its own necessity for man's eternal salvation effectively.

Moreover, this statement of the Holy Office comes as a rebuke to the more extreme forms of the much discredited "state of siege" theory,¹⁵ according to which the Church has in some way modified its doctrinal life since the days of the Council of Trent by adopting an artificially defensive position.¹⁶

It is clear that the clarification issued by the Holy Office comes as a condemnation of both excesses of "feeneyism" and of the neo-modernism of the *Nouvelle Théologie*.

¹⁵ The "state of siege" theory is a claim that the new theologians make, according to which the Church adopted a stricter approach to theological progress, particularly in the field of ecclesiology, as a consequence of the Protestant revolt. Thus, they claim, the Church adopted a rigid notion of herself as a perfect society, and a narrow notion of membership in the Church, to exclude all non-Catholics from the Church of Christ. This, the new theologians reject as "bellarminian" or "medieval", and they pretend that it has no foundation in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. They classify it as the "institutional model", that is, one way to describe the Church, with many limits. To this model they oppose the "theology of communion", and the concept of the "Church as sacrament of salvation", which models they consider much richer. More on this in the seventh article of this chapter.

¹⁶ Fenton, *The Holy Office Letter on the necessity of the Catholic Church*, AER 127, July-Dec. 1952, pp. 453-454. Emphasis added.

Sadly, these excesses are both still existing today, and are widely spread.

9. Three important theological distinctions are endorsed by the Holy Office.

In the explanation given of the way in which the Church understands and teaches the dogma of her own necessity for salvation, three distinctions, long used by traditional theologians, are here, for the first time, presented clearly and decisively in an authentic statement of the Church.

They are (1) the distinction between a necessity of precept and the necessity of means; (2) the distinction between belonging to the Church *in re*, actually and in reality, and belonging to her *in voto*, by desire; and (3) the distinction between an explicit and an implicit intention or desire to enter the Catholic Church. Let us go through each one of them.

10. What kind of necessity is there to belong to the Catholic Church in order to be saved?

What is supposed in this question is the distinction between a necessity of means and a necessity of precept.

Many things in the Catholic religion are necessary by necessity of means, meaning that they are a means so necessary that one could not be saved without them. Thus, to be in the state of grace is absolutely necessary for salvation, in such a way that it is *intrinsically impossible* for someone in mortal sin to be saved. That is true by the very nature of the thing, and is so strong, that even God could not dispense from that necessity (nor would He ever want to anyway). This kind of necessity could be compared to the necessity by which a square

figure cannot be a circle. No one, not even God, could do otherwise. In this way, no one, not even God, could grant eternal salvation to someone in the actual state of mortal sin.

On the other hand, many commandments of the Catholic religion are necessary by a necessity of precept, such as, for example, the reception of the sacrament of baptism or of penance for justification. There is a commandment of Christ to be baptized, but one might be impeded from being baptized for reasons for which one is not responsible (such as being put to death for being a catechumen, as is the case of St. Emerentiana, or St. Rogatian of Nantes, who are acknowledged and venerated by the Church as saints, although they were never baptized by water). God does not account someone responsible for not observing a commandment that one was not able to observe due to obstacles independent of one's will. By the mercy of God, it is possible to be justified and obtain sanctifying grace without the external reception of baptism, when one is impeded. But it is not possible to be in the state of grace and positively refuse to be baptized, since to be in the state of grace one must desire to fulfill the commandments of Christ, not the least of which is to receive the actual sacrament of baptism. When something is necessary by necessity of precept, therefore, one must at least implicitly intend to accomplish it, since in order to be in the state of grace one must intend to fulfill the law of God. But it is not always necessary to have actually fulfilled the law.

Another example of that principle is the reception of the Holy Eucharist. Christ has said in very clear terms:

Amen, amen I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.¹⁷

Yet many people have not been able to ever receive the Holy Eucharist in this life, and were still able to be saved. They did not positively refuse to receive the Holy Eucharist, obviously, but were not able to fulfill this precept before dying. God did not hold them accountable for not fulfilling a precept they could not have fulfilled. God does not ask us impossible things.

But neither is God able to do impossible things, in the sense that His being omnipotent does not mean that He could do things that are contradictory, such as a square circle, or to make someone in a state of mortal sin enjoy the beatific vision. These are things even God cannot do, because these are not actually things, from the point of view of metaphysics, but are contradictions. They are not *beings*, they cannot ever *exist*.¹⁸

11. Membership in the Church is necessary by necessity of precept.

If we now apply these distinctions to membership in the Church, it is clear from the teaching of the Church that **to become a member of the Church is, at least, necessary by a necessity of precept**, just as is baptism:

He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jn. VI, 54.

¹⁸ In fact God cannot contradict Himself any more than He can sin. Because a contradiction is to truth what sin is to goodness, namely its contradictory opposition.

¹⁹ Mk. XVI, 16.

The letter of the Holy Office presents us with the obligation to belong to the one true Church of Christ from the following words of Our Lord:

Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.²⁰

12. However, to be a member of the Church *in re* is not necessary by a necessity of means.

To be member of the Church *in re* is to be truly and properly a member of the Church, while to be a member of the Church *in voto* is an expression used by theologians to indicate the situation of those who are not, strictly speaking, members of the Church, but are united to her by their desire to become a member.

Thus Pope Pius XII gives the following conditions of membership in the Church:

In fact only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed.²¹

It is clear that, for example, the reception of the sacrament of baptism is necessary to become a member of the Church *in re*. Yet, as we had said, the Church herself venerates as a Saint, St. Emerentiana, who was an unbaptized catechumen when she was

²⁰ Mt. XXVIII, 19-20.

²¹ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943), n. 22.

martyred. Thus the letter of the Holy Office explains that:

Toward the end of this same Encyclical Letter [*Mystici corporis*], when most affectionately inviting to unity those who do not belong to the body of the Catholic Church, he [Pope Pius XII] mentions those who “are related to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer by a certain unconscious *yearning* and *desire*,” and **these he by no means excludes from eternal salvation.**²²

Clearly, it is possible to not be a member of the Catholic Church (*in re*) and to be saved, on account of a union existing with the Church by the desire to enter the Church. Hence membership *in re* is not necessary by necessity of means. This kind of necessity would signify that no one could ever be saved without being a baptized member of the Catholic Church.

13. Nonetheless, at least the implicit desire to become a member of the Catholic Church is necessary by necessity of means.

As explained above, it is impossible to be saved unless one has the virtue of faith, and is in the state of grace.

Now, the virtue of faith is to believe, on the authority of God, everything which was revealed by God. One might be ignorant of some dogma of the faith and still preserve the virtue of faith. Most children, for example, would be unable to say whether in Christ there are one or two wills. Yet it has been defined by the Church as a dogma of faith that Christ, being both God and man, has both a divine will and a human will. The opposite doctrine was condemned as a

²² Emphasis added.

heresy. These children, perhaps unable to say which doctrine is true (and actually revealed by God) and which doctrine is heretical, are not heretics; they still have the virtue of faith, because with this virtue of faith they implicitly believe everything revealed by God. Anyone with the virtue of faith thus implicitly believes, as well, that the Catholic Church is the one true Church founded by Christ, and outside of which there is no salvation.

Similarly, the state of grace requires us to fulfill the entirety of the law of God. Thus, anyone in the state of grace is fundamentally disposed to fulfill all the commandments of God. Hence anyone in the state of grace would necessarily intend, at least implicitly, to be baptized, and to become an actual member of the true Church of Christ.

It is inconceivable that someone could be with the virtue of faith and in the state of grace, and at the same time positively refuse to be baptized and to be incorporated in the true Church of Christ.

Such is the meaning of the following paragraphs taken from the letter of the Holy Office:

Therefore, that one may obtain eternal salvation, it is not always required that he be incorporated into the Church *actually* as a member, but it is necessary that at least he be united to her by *desire* and *longing*.

However, this desire need not always be explicit, as it is in the case of catechumens; but when a person is involved in invincible ignorance, God accepts also an *implicit desire*, so called because it is included in that good disposition of soul whereby a person

wishes his will to be conformed to the will of God.

While someone can be saved without being a member of the Catholic Church *in re*, that is, truly, by baptism and by belonging visibly to the organization of the Catholic Church, it is, however, impossible that someone be saved without being a member of the Church *in voto*, that is, having at least the implicit desire to become a member of the Church, and thus being already united to the Church by desire.

14. This means that “*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” must be understood in the sense that the Church is the one and only means of salvation.

We have considered, from the psychological point of view, how someone with the virtue of faith and in the state of grace would, necessarily, implicitly desire to be baptized and to become an actual member of the Church. We can thus establish that no one is saved without at least *desiring* to be a member of the Church. This consideration, coming from the psychological point of view of the individual person, is rather indirect, since it presupposes the disposition to fulfill the precept of Christ, if it were known.

If we consider things directly, however, from the point of view of God, what this means is that just as Christ is the only Mediator, outside of whom there is no salvation, so also, by the disposition of God, the Catholic Church is the only means of salvation.

Of Christ it is said indeed:

This is the stone which was rejected by you the builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there

salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved.²³

Catholics are the members of the Mystical Body of Christ, and can be saved in her. Those who are not in the Mystical Body of Christ are deprived of many graces and helps only found through membership (*in re*) in the Catholic Church, but are not refused the possibility of salvation, thanks to a certain relationship and union to this same Mystical Body of Christ:

For even though by an unconscious desire and longing they have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church.²⁴

It is important to stress that these souls, if they are saved, must still be said to be saved through the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, to which they are united by their supernatural faith and charity. In doing so, they imitate this brave woman, spoken about by St. Matthew in chapter 9:

For she said within herself: If I shall touch only his garment, I shall be healed.²⁵

They benefit from the mediation of the Church, in a way similar to this woman of Canaan, who was at first ignored by Our Lord, because she was not “of the house of Israel”:

²³ Acts. IV, 11-12.

²⁴ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943), n. 102.

²⁵ Mt. IX, 21.

It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the dogs. But she said: Yea, Lord; for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters. Then Jesus answering, said to her: O woman, great is thy faith: be it done to thee as thou wilt.²⁶

Such souls are not saved “*extra Ecclesiam*”, “outside of the Church”, but they are actually saved “*per Ecclesiam*”, by the mediation of the Church. They are saved “*in Ecclesiam*” (“through the Church”) although they are not members *in re* “*in Ecclesia*” (“in the Church”): they are saved by the mediation of the Church, even though they are not members of the Church, in the proper and stricter sense of the term.²⁷

“*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” should not be understood as denying salvation except through strict membership in the Catholic Church, but rather it should be opposed to the notion of salvation being possible outside of the mediation of the Church.

In other words, “outside the Church there is no salvation” should not be understood as meaning as if “there is salvation only inside the Church” if by that one means proper

²⁶ Mt. XV, 26-28.

²⁷ In their effort to manifest their internal union with the Church, a number of past theologians referred to such souls as *imperfectly members*, or *incompletely members* of the Church. We do not see such expressions in the declarations of the magisterium. On the contrary, it is clear that these souls do not fulfill the conditions laid down by Pope Pius XII for membership in the Church. And among those “who do not belong to the visible organization of the Catholic Church,” Pope Pius XII explicitly includes those who “unsuspectingly are related to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer in desire and resolution.” Cf. Msgr. Fenton, *Membership in the Church* (in *American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. 112, Jan.-June 1945, pp. 287-305).

membership. Rather, “outside the Church there is no salvation” means that “there is salvation only by means of the Church” or, better, that “the Catholic Church is the only means of salvation.”

Thus it is that membership in the Church is of necessity of precept for salvation, while the mediation of the Catholic Church is of necessity of means for salvation. The letter of the Holy Office thus affirms (Emphasis added):

Not only did the Saviour command that all nations should enter the Church [here is the *necessity of precept*], but He also decreed the Church to be a means of salvation, without which no one can enter the kingdom of eternal glory [here is the *necessity of means*].

15. What, then, is the difference between belonging to the Church “*in re*” (“in reality”) and belonging to the Church “*in voto*” (“by desire”)?

Those who fulfill the *necessity of precept* of entering the Catholic Church belong to her *in re*, that is, really, actually, as true members.

The requirements for non-Catholics to enter the Church *in the strict sense*, and thus become members *in re*, can be found in the 1917 Code of Canon Law²⁸ and in the Roman pontifical.²⁹

²⁸ Canon 2314, § 2. Commentaries on this canon will also commonly refer to the numerous decisions of the Holy Office on the reconciliation of heretics.

²⁹ *Ordo ad reconciliendum apostatam, schismaticum vel haereticum*. The office of reconciling heretics to the Church belongs primarily to the diocesan bishop. Hence this rite is primarily found in the pontifical. Since, however, priests are often delegated to this function, simpler formulas are found in the Roman ritual as well.

In the case of infidels, or of heretics whose baptism was certainly invalid, entry into the Church is accomplished by the reception of Catholic baptism. Neither abjuration nor sacramental absolution is further required.

Members of heretical sects whose baptism is doubtful must first make an abjuration of their errors (found in the pontifical or the ritual), then undergo a conditional baptism, after which they must go to confession and be conditionally absolved.

If, however, it is established that the baptism received in a non-Catholic sect was certainly valid, the sacrament of baptism is not reiterated, but an abjuration of errors is required, after which the penitent is absolved of his censures and receives sacramental confession.

It is thus clear that a non-Catholic does not enter the Catholic Church *in re*, (that is, become an actual member in the proper sense), by a mere internal decision to do so, but *he must externally enter the Church* by the reception of baptism and, if necessary, an abjuration of the errors to which he formerly publicly adhered to.

Those who cannot enter the Church but are moved by a supernatural desire to do so fulfill, however, the *necessity of means*, and belong to the Church *in voto*, that is, by *desire* and *longing*.

It is important to not exaggerate the meaning of this desire, and we shall examine it carefully here below.

16. The desire required for one to belong to the Church “*in voto*” is not a mere inefficacious wish.

The Holy Office compares the desire of becoming an actual member of the Church to the desire sufficient for justification before

baptism or confession. Such a desire is one moved by supernatural faith and charity. It is indeed an act of perfect charity and perfect contrition for sin. It is a very serious thing. It means a real *craving* of the soul to please God and do the right thing. It is not a simple wish, of someone who *would wish* to convert and join the true Church, but is set back by attachments to vices and errors. This *desire* is not fulfilled only because of an impossibility extrinsic to the will of the person.

Therefore, one should not universally presume people to possess such a desire, and imagine that everyone, or almost, is likely to go to heaven, since it would seem that no one would refuse the truth if one saw it, and certainly no one would refuse to be saved. Such a thought would be very naive. The Church actually establishes a juridical presumption to the contrary, namely, she presumes that non-Catholics adhere truly to the errors of their sect, and therefore requires of them an abjuration of errors, when they convert. The Church presumes, similarly, that the sinner is likely to not have a sufficient regret of his sins, and forbids him to approach the communion rail until he confesses his sins and receives the sacramental absolution.

To presume that all (or most) non-Catholics are in good faith is as ridiculous as presuming that all (or most) sinners are sinning only materially, and in good faith. Certainly, one must not judge his neighbor, in his internal relation to God, but externally, one is presumed to mean what he says and to agree to what he does.

This desire to become a member of the true Church of Christ is a rare grace, and this says yet nothing about the natural law, which

such a person must also keep, in order to be saved. Anyone who has lived in the world knows very well that today, sadly, the quasi universality of non-Catholics live in mortal sin, even if one were to only take the natural law as a standard of judgment.

On the bright side, we also regularly see the work of grace, in converting perhaps the most unlikely persons, taken out of this mass of unbelievers and sinners, and gradually leading them to the truth of the Catholic faith, and strengthening them to entirely reform their life.

17. This *desire* need not always be explicit but may be only implicit.

The letter of the Holy Office explains:

However, this desire need not always be explicit, as it is in the case of catechumens; but when a person is involved in invincible ignorance, God accepts also an *implicit desire*, so called because it is included in that good disposition of soul whereby a person wishes his will to be conformed to the will of God.

This means that the possibility to be saved *through the mediation of the Catholic Church, unique means of salvation*, is not reserved to the explicit desire of people actively preparing to get baptized, such as catechumens, because they have actually found the Catholic Church to be the true Church of Christ. But this desire can also be found in a person who is in a false church, and is not actually taking any practical steps to become a Catholic, since he has not even realized yet that he is in a false church, and that he needs to become a Catholic.

18. This *desire* cannot be merely natural, but must be motivated by supernatural faith and charity.

The Holy Office insists upon the necessity of true and supernatural divine faith in any man who attains eternal salvation. If he is saved, he achieves the Beatific Vision as one who has died with genuine supernatural divine faith.³⁰

As we have explained earlier, even a Catholic child might be in ignorance of certain truths of the faith, such as the doctrine that there is both a human will and divine will in Christ, but the child believes all the dogmas of the faith implicitly, because he wants to believe everything revealed by God. Hence it is not necessary for the virtue of faith to know all the dogmas of the faith. However, and this is a very important point, the virtue of faith cannot exist in a person (having the use of reason) unless there are at least some truths actually known and believed by that person.

Sacred Scripture clearly requires that at least two truths be known and believed:

But without faith it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and is a rewarder to them that seek him.³¹

Hence one must at least believe, explicitly, in the existence of God, and that God will reward good and punish evil. This belief must not be a mere natural conviction. It has to emanate from an act of supernatural faith,

³⁰ God could not grant the beatific vision of heaven to someone dying without supernatural faith and charity any more that He could make a figure which would be both a circle and a square at the same time and under the same aspect. It is an absurdity, an impossible contradiction.

³¹ Hebr. XI, 6.

which is motivated by the authority of God revealing these truths.

It appears immediately that such an implicit desire cannot ever be found in an atheist, or even a rationalist, since by definition they reject the existence of God, or His revelation.

In these times of confusion, we feel the need to stress this truth and repeat it loud and clear: **Catholic dogma teaches that atheists will infallibly go to hell, unless they convert before death. Period.** There is no possible exception, even for “nice guys”,³² since one absolutely needs the supernatural virtue of faith in order to be saved.³³

Now some theologians teach that the minimum explicit content of supernatural and salvific faith includes, not only the truths of God’s existence and of His action as the rewarder of good and the punisher of evil, but also the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation. The Church’s magisterium has never pronounced on that question yet, but it is worth knowing that, if we were to follow this opinion of theologians, we have to conclude that no one could be saved, unless he explicitly believes in the

³² This expression refers to the false hope given by Bergoglio, who makes people believe that atheists can go to heaven if they are “nice guys.” Someone denying the existence of God almighty is inexcusable and should never be thought of as a “nice guy” anyway.

³³ For a similar reason, while errors spread everywhere on these questions, even among Catholics, it must be maintained that babies dying without baptism cannot enter heaven, since they do not have the virtue of faith. They will not suffer with the damned either, since they do not have any personal sin, but they would enjoy a certain natural happiness, which is not and cannot be the beatific vision.

mystery of the Blessed Trinity and of the Incarnation.

This, certainly, is an important consideration for those who are tempted to stretch this implicit desire of membership in the Church to all pagans and idolaters.

However, theologians do not consider that the knowledge of the Catholic Church as the true Church of Christ is one of the truths which need to be explicitly believed, although it certainly is a truth revealed by God. Hence ignorance of this truth is not intrinsically incompatible with the virtue of faith. This explains the possibility that a person may have the supernatural virtue of faith while being in ignorance of the Catholic Church. **But in this case of invincible ignorance of the truth of the Catholic Church, it must still be maintained that this supernatural gift of faith is given to him by God through the mediation of the Catholic Church,** even if there is no actual human interaction with that person from any of Christ's ministers, just as the woman touching the hem of Our Lord's garment was healed by His divine power, despite being unnoticed by His human knowledge, and to the surprise of his apostles:

And Jesus said: Who is it that touched me? And all denying, Peter and they that were with him said: Master, the multitudes throng and press thee, and dost thou say, Who touched me? And Jesus said: Somebody hath touched me; for I know that virtue is gone out from me.³⁴

³⁴ Lk. VIII, 45-46.

19. A side note on membership in the Church and sedevacantism.

The Thesis considers the reforms of Vatican II to be a false religion. As a consequence, the Thesis considers the "Vatican II popes" to be deprived of any authority in the Church, for promulgating false doctrine, false discipline, false worship.

Some sedevacantists claim, however, that there is such a thing as a "Novus Ordo Church", or a "Vatican II sect", juridically distinct from the Catholic Church. They believe that the "Vatican II popes and bishops" are not only deprived of authority in the Church, but have actually founded a non-Catholic sect, entirely distinct, even juridically, from the Roman Catholic Church. We discuss and refute this claim in detail in its proper place. But we would like to stress here that, logically, in light of the doctrine presented above, such sedevacantists are committed to conclude that anyone adhering externally to this sect is by that very fact forfeiting membership in the Catholic Church. **Whether they are in good faith or not is entirely irrelevant.** As we have explained, people in false churches are not necessarily excluded from eternal salvation. However, these persons would not be *members* of the Catholic Church. If they were to convert, they would have to be externally and officially received back into the "true Catholic Church."

It is obvious that such sedevacantists do not make these conclusions, and are therefore inconsistent. For they explicitly recognize that there are true Catholics (that is, members of the Catholic Church) who, in good faith, attend the new Mass, and obey the "Vatican II popes and bishops" as their legitimate shepherds.

However, by maintaining that there can be true Catholics, deceived in good faith, in what they consider to be a non-Catholic sect, **these sedevacantists implicitly profess that membership in the Church of Christ is compatible with external adherence and membership in a false church, which is as bold and as dangerous a statement as the doctrines of Vatican II** which we shall soon analyze, since it destroys the objective criteria of membership in the Mystical Body of Christ, as given by Pope Pius XII, to replace them with something invisible and subjective, namely the good faith of a person.

As we have explained at length, a person who is in a false church could, possibly, have the virtue of faith, and have the efficient desire to be in the true Church of Christ. He would not, however, thereby be a *member* of the Catholic Church *in re*.

Someone in a non-Catholic sect is not a member of the Catholic Church, in the proper sense (*in re*) but must be received publicly into the bosom of the Church.

These sedevacantists, therefore, would have ceased, at some point, to be themselves members of the Church *in re*. Who then has received them back into the true Church?

Of what good is it to reject the errors of Vatican II in the field of ecclesiology (whether it be about the episcopacy or about membership in the Church) if one falls into **the very same errors** by lack of prudent discernment?

Rather than claiming the “Novus Ordo Church” to be a sect juridically distinct from the Catholic Church, therefore, let these sedevacantists acknowledge that the “Vatican II religion” is being imposed on *Catholics* by false shepherds, who are certainly deprived of authority, but who have succeeded to climb

to high *positions* of authority in the Church, as Pope St. Pius X was fearful modernists would do. These Catholics, however, who have not yet arrived at this conclusion, are still members of the Catholic Church, and have never left her for a non Catholic sect. We were ourselves among them.

20. Conclusion on this section.

The doctrine according to which “outside the Church there is no salvation” is a dogma of our faith revealed by God, and which the Church has always preached, and will always preach, and cannot ever cease to preach.

This dogma should be understood in the sense that the Catholic Church is the one and only means of salvation. Anyone who is saved is saved through the Catholic Church.

Anyone who is saved indeed must have the supernatural virtue of faith, and be in the state of grace. These supernatural gifts were entrusted by Christ to the Church, and cannot ever be obtained except through the Church.

In addition, Christ has given the explicit command to enter His only one true Church, under pain of eternal loss. This precept is of such strength, that its fulfillment must be efficaciously desired by anyone, in order to be saved.

However, those who, through no fault of their own, die without being able to actually fulfill this precept, by becoming a member of the Catholic Church, are not thereby excluded from eternal salvation. For it is sufficient for them to have the efficacious desire to become a member of the true Church of Christ, and they are thereby united to this Church of Christ in such a way as to be able to be saved.

Those who are thus united by desire to the Catholic Church are not, however, members of the Church in the proper sense (*in re*). Anyone who would contradict that by supporting the idea that *members of the Mystical Body of Christ* cannot be found outside the Catholic Church are grievously mistaken, and cannot escape the condemnation of Pope Pius XII:

For this reason We deplore and condemn the pernicious error of those who dream of an imaginary Church, a kind of society that finds its origin and growth in charity, to which, somewhat contemptuously, they oppose another, which they call juridical.³⁵

There is only one Church of Christ, which is the Catholic Church, and is the Mystical Body of Christ, outside of which there is no salvation.

Anyone establishing some kind of spiritual society which extends beyond the juridical boundaries of the Catholic Church, by which people outside of the Catholic Church, are in serious error. This error is found in the teaching of Vatican II, as we shall see, since the entity referred to as the “Church of Christ,” or “Mystical Body of Christ,” or again “the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church”, is something which extends *beyond* the juridical barriers of the “Catholic Church” in which this “Church of Christ” subsists.

Sadly, a similar observation must be made of those who misapply the distinctions of body and soul applied analogously to the Church by St. Robert Bellarmine, to picture a sort of “soul of the Church” which extends

³⁵ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943), n. 65.

beyond the confines of the “body of the Church” (in which would subsists the “soul of the Church”, one would concede), in such a way that it is said that someone could be “a member of the soul of the Church” without being “a member of the body of the Church.” In light of the teaching of Pope Pius XII, we agree with Msgr. Fenton that such expressions can no longer be tolerated.³⁶ Indeed they implicitly portray the same error as Vatican II on membership in the Church.

There is a true and legitimate use of the terms “body” and “soul” applied to the Church, as we shall see when we discuss the doctrine of *communio*. But neither Pope Pius XII nor the Holy Office have made any use of these expressions in terms of *membership in the Church*. Certainly, Pope Pius XII has repeated the teaching of Leo XIII that the Holy Ghost is the *soul* of the Church. But Pope Pius XII has not otherwise used the analogy of body and soul, except *precisely* in the context of condemning the distinction of some sort of invisible “society of charity” which would extend beyond the “juridical Church.” Pope Pius XII teaches indeed the perfect coordination of the divine and human aspects of the Church:

There can, then, be no real opposition or conflict between the invisible mission of the Holy Ghost and the juridical commission of Ruler and Teacher received from Christ, since they mutually complement and perfect each other - as do the body and soul in man.³⁷

³⁶ These expressions were used in very ambiguous ways by many theologians, which explains the intervention of Pope Pius XII and of the Holy Office.

³⁷ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943), n. 65.

Hence, non-Catholics who are in the state of grace, through faith and invincible ignorance are not properly speaking members of the Church, but are *united to her by desire* and may be saved by her.³⁸

³⁸ Hence they may be said to be members *in voto*, that is, by desire. But it is not correct to think that they thereby enjoy a kind of real membership, any more than those who are saved through the desire of baptism could be said to be “really baptized by desire.”

SECOND ARTICLE

ON THE CATHOLIC NOTION OF COMMUNION

21. The communion of the Mystical Body of Christ.

The notion of communion obviously concerns the unity of the Catholic Church, and is utterly incomprehensible without it. For communion is an *unio cum* (union with), and this union with something implies a joining into one thing of many different things. The many different things in this case are the members of the Catholic Church; they are united into one thing, namely the Catholic Church. Because these otherwise disparate members are joined into a single entity, the Catholic Church, they enjoy with each other a communion, a mutual bond, which flows directly from their being constituted into one Body of Christ.

Pope Leo XIII spoke about the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ in his encyclical *Satis Cognitum*:

Furthermore, the Son of God decreed that the Church should be His Mystical Body, with which He should be united as the Head, after the manner of the human body which He assumed, to which the natural head is physiologically united. As He took to himself a mortal body, which He gave to suffering and death in order to pay the price of man's redemption, so also He has one Mystical Body in which and through which He renders men partakers of holiness and of eternal salvation. "God hath made Him (Christ) head over all the Church, which is His body." (Eph. 1:22-23) Scattered and separated members cannot possibly cohere with the head so as to make one body. But St. Paul says: "All members of

the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ." (1 Cor. 12:12) Wherefore this Mystical Body, he declares, is "compacted and fitly jointed together. The Head, Christ: from whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly jointed together, by what every joint supplieth according to the operation in the measure of every part." (Eph. 4:16) And so dispersed members, separated one from the other, cannot be united with one and the same head. "There is one God, and one Christ; and His Church is one and the faith is one; and one the people, joined together in the solid unity of the body in the bond of concord. This unity cannot be broken, nor the one body divided by the separation of its constituent parts." (St. Cyprian, *De Cath. Eccl. Unitate*, n.23) And so to set forth more clearly the unity of the Church, he makes use of the illustration of a living body, the members of which cannot possibly live unless united to the head and drawing from it their vital force. Separated from the head they must of necessity die. "The Church," he says, "cannot be divided into parts by the separation and cutting asunder of its members. What is cut away from the mother cannot possibly live or breathe apart" (*Ibid.*) What similarity is there between a dead and living body? "For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the Church: because we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." (Eph. 5:29-30)³⁹

³⁹ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis cognitum* (1896), n. 5.

Pope Pius XII devoted an entire encyclical to this doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, entitled *Mystici Corporis*, wherein he states:

If we would define this true Church of Jesus Christ — which is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church — we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression “the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ”— an expression which springs from and is, as it were, the fair flowering of the repeated teaching of the Sacred Scriptures and the Holy Fathers.⁴⁰

Pope Pius XII develops this doctrine in the encyclical, drawing out the entire analogy of the Church to the Body of Christ.

22. The unity of communion is the very unity of the Church as it is the Mystical Body of Christ.

Pope Leo XIII teaches that the unity of the Church is threefold: (1) the unity of *faith*, (2) the unity of *government* and (3) the unity of *communion*.⁴¹ The unity of faith is that unity which is effected by the common belief in and profession of the same truths revealed by God and taught by the Catholic Church. The unity of government is that unity which is effected by the submission of all of the faithful to the Roman Pontiff. The unity of *communion*, which is of special interest to us here, is that unity which is effected by the unity of government, and is the *mutual bonds which exist among the faithful, resulting from their relation to one head*.

⁴⁰ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943), n. 13.

⁴¹ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis cognitum* (1896), n. 13.

Finally it [the Church] is the body of Christ — that is, of course, His Mystical Body, but a body living and duly organized and composed of many members; members indeed which have not all the same functions, but which, united one to the other, are kept bound together by the guidance and the authority of the head.⁴²

The Pope further points to the Fathers to support this close link between the unity of government and the unity of communion:

“To be in communion with Cornelius is to be in communion with the Catholic Church.” (St. Cyprian, Ep. LV, n.1) In the same way Maximus the Abbot teaches that obedience to the Roman Pontiff is the proof of the true faith and of legitimate communion. “Therefore if a man does not want to be, or to be called, a heretic, let him not strive to please this or that man... but let him hasten before all things to be in communion with the Roman See. If he be in communion with it, he should be acknowledged by all and everywhere as faithful and orthodox.”⁴³

Pope Leo’s teaching is, therefore, that the unity of communion is the very unity of the Catholic Church itself considered as the body of the faithful. Pope Pius XII further points out that as the Mystical Body, the bonds of union which exist between the diverse members of the Church are supernatural and are superior to the bonds found in ordinary human societies:

But if we compare a mystical body with a moral body, it is to be noted that the difference between them is not slight; rather it is very considerable and very

⁴² *Ibid.*, n. 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, n. 13.

important. In the moral body the principle of union is nothing else than the common end, and the common cooperation of all under the authority of society for the attainment of that end; whereas in the Mystical Body of which We are speaking, this collaboration is supplemented by another internal principle, which exists effectively in the whole and in each of its parts, and whose excellence is such that of itself it is vastly superior to whatever bonds of union may be found in a physical or moral body. As we have said above, this is something not of the natural but of the supernatural order; rather it is something in itself infinite, uncreated: the Spirit of God, who, as the Angelic Doctor says, “numerically one and the same, fills and unifies the whole Church.”⁴⁴

Popes also commonly use the term *communio* to indicate those bishops who are united to the Holy See. Thus Pope Leo says in *Satis Cognitum*:

These things enable us to see the heavenly ideal, and the divine exemplar, of the constitution of the Christian commonwealth, namely: When the Divine founder decreed that the Church should be one in faith, in government, and in communion, He chose Peter and his successors as the principle and center, as it were, of this unity... No one, therefore, unless in communion with Peter can share his authority, since it is absurd to imagine that he who is outside can command in the Church... But the episcopal order is rightly judged to be in communion with Peter, as Christ commanded, if it be subject to and obeys

⁴⁴ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943), n. 62.

Peter; otherwise it necessarily becomes a lawless and disorderly crowd.⁴⁵

23. Excommunication and communion.

The notion of communion can be further inferred from *excommunication*. In the pre-1917 legislation, excommunications were either *major* or *minor*. Major excommunications had the effect of terminating membership in the Catholic Church, while minor ones merely cut the excommunicate off from the spiritual benefits of the Church. With the introduction of the 1917 Code, the difference between major and minor was dropped, but it is clearly defined by most canonists and theologians as that censure “by which someone is excluded from the communion of the faithful.”⁴⁶

In the rite of the reception of converts into the Catholic Church, the priest is instructed to pronounce the following formula over them, once they have completed their abjuration of error:

By the apostolic authority which I enjoy in this matter, I absolve you of the chains of excommunication which (perhaps) you have incurred, and I restore you to the most holy sacraments of the Church, to communion, and to the unity of the faithful in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis cognitum* (1896), n. 13.

⁴⁶ Canon 2257 § 1.

⁴⁷ “Auctoritate apostolica, qua fungor in hac parte, absolvo te a vinculo excommunicationis quam (forsan) incurristi, et restituo te sacrosanctis Ecclesiae sacramentis, communioni et unitati fidelium in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.”

24. The threefold unity of the Church, as it is commonly described by theologians.

The common teaching of theologians concerning the unity of the Church is that the Church enjoys a threefold unity, that of *faith, government, and worship*.⁴⁸

Any religion is indeed characterized by a threefold aspect: it teaches a system of philosophy or belief (“doctrine”), it indicates a way of life (“discipline”), and it prescribes some form of worship of God (“liturgy”).

The Catholic Church has been given authority to teach the true religion revealed by God, and therefore has the authority of Christ in these three aspects, according to these solemn words of Christ, which end the Gospel of St. Matthew:

Going therefore, teach ye all nations [DOCTRINE]; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [LITURGY]. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you [DISCIPLINE]; and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.⁴⁹

St. Paul expressed similarly that the mark of unity must be found in the Church:

One Lord, one faith, one baptism.⁵⁰

By these words He expressed unity of government (discipline), unity of faith (doctrine), and unity of sacraments (liturgy).

By the unity of faith, all believe the same supernatural truths, and are prepared to believe whatever should be taught by the

⁴⁸ Such as De Groot O.P., Schultes O.P., Zubizarreta O.C.D., Berry, Garrigou-Lagrange O.P., Hurter S.J., Pesch S.J. and many others.

⁴⁹ Mt. XXVIII, 19-20.

⁵⁰ Eph. IV, 5.

Church in the future as having been divinely revealed. By the unity of government, all Catholics are subject to one visible Head, the Pope. By unity of worship, all of the faithful adhere to the same essential act of worship, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the same sacraments. Ecclesiastical communion for these authors is that union among the faithful which is the result of being members all of the same Church, united by these three principles of unity.

These three things must be taken *together* and *formally: together*, because unless taken together they do not show the Church *one* and *whole; formally*, because the material fact must adhere to the firm, stable, and constitutive principle of unity. So in its unity of faith, of hierarchy, and of worship, the Church stands as *undivided in itself, and divided from anything else*.⁵¹

While this is the common way of presenting the unity of the Church, some theologians explain things in a slightly different way, which will actually shed light on the notion of communion.

25. The teaching of Cardinal Franzelin.

Cardinal Franzelin speaks about communion in his *De Ecclesia Christi*.⁵² He first describes the threefold unity of the Catholic Church. The first is that of *unity of faith and profession* in the universal Church by which all adhere to and profess the same Catholic truths. The second is the *unity of sacraments* by which all the faithful are joined together and formed into one body of

⁵¹ J.V. De Groot O.P., *Summa Apologetica de Ecclesia Catholica*, Ratisbonne, 1906, p. 153.

⁵² Franzelin, *De Ecclesia Christi*, Thesis XIV Rome, 1887.

Christ. The third is the *unity of communion in social life*, by which all the particular Churches and individual faithful are theoretically and practically shown to be and recognized as members of one religious society. These three unities correspond to the triple power conceded to the Church by Christ: (1) the power to teach, (2) the power to sanctify, and (3) the power to rule. Ecclesiastical communion for Cardinal Franzelin, therefore, means one thing: *to be in the same Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ*.

This is a communion of all of the faithful among themselves, with the Apostles, with Christ the Head [of the Church] and with God: “that you also may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship may be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 Jn. 1:3)⁵³

26. The teaching of Cardinal Billot.

Cardinal Billot distinguishes the threefold unity of *regimen, faith, and communion*. The unity of regimen is that lack of division in the Church’s government, i.e., that it is ruled by a single person, namely the pope.

[The unity of communion consists] in the cohesion of all individuals and particular groups to one another, in the manner of compacted parts of one individual moral body, of which there are common goods, a common sacrifice, and common support.⁵⁴

He is careful to point out that communion involves not only the submission of individuals to the Roman Pontiff, but also and at the same time their coordination with

⁵³ Franzelin, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Cardinal Billot S.J., *De Ecclesia Christi*, ed. 5^a, Rome, 1927, p. 150.

each other. For it is possible for many to be subject to one head, but not united to each other. For this reason, St. Thomas shows⁵⁵ that schism is possible in two ways, either by refusing to be submitted to the Roman Pontiff, or by refusing to be in communion with the members of the Church subjected to him.

The unity of faith consists in the fact that all assent to the articles of faith proposed by the Church, and are prepared to believe everything that may be proposed by the Church’s magisterium for belief.

27. The teaching of the DTC.

A. Michel, writing in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*⁵⁶ (“DTC”), speaks of the same threefold unity as Cardinal Billot, that is, of *faith, regimen, and communion*.⁵⁷

His description of communion is very useful to our present topic:

There is, finally, a *unity of communion* between pastors and faithful and of the faithful among themselves. “That they may be made perfect in one!” (Jn 17:23) This unity is a union in the mutual charity of the members under the direction of their leaders and this unity cannot be realized except by the life of Christ, the Head of the Church, circulating in the members of His Mystical Body. (Parable of the vine and the branches, Jn. 15:1-12) Interiorly, therefore, this communion presupposes the participation of the souls in the life of Christ. Exteriorly it implies, first of all, the adherence of intellects to the same

⁵⁵ IIa IIæ q. 39 a. 1.

⁵⁶ Article “*Unité de l’Église*”, tome 15, col. 2175.

⁵⁷ This threefold distinction is the same as that mentioned by Leo XIII in *Satis Cognitum*.

faith, as well as the cohesion of wills under the impulsion of the Supreme Head: thus to the exterior unity of faith and government, one must also add the coherence of the members among themselves, *singuli alter alterius membra*, as Saint Paul would say.⁵⁸

It is clear from the author's words that communion of the members with the head and with one another is dependent upon membership in the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Catholic Church. One can legitimately infer from this that *to declare that you are in communion with someone is to declare that you are in the same Mystical Body of Christ, and in the same Catholic Church.*

28. The teaching of Cardinal Mazella.

Cardinal Mazella⁵⁹ distinguishes the *unity of faith* and *unity of regimen*, and says that the *unity of communion* is the natural effect of the first two, and is the union of the members of the Church among themselves, and implies a mutual concurrence of all of the

⁵⁸ "C'est enfin une *unité de communion* entre pasteurs et fidèles et des fidèles entre eux. "qu'ils soient consommés en un!" Joa., XVII, 23. Cette unité est l'union dans la charité mutuelle des membres sous la direction des chefs et cette unité ne peut être réalisée que par la vie du Christ, chef de l'Église, circulant dans les membres de son corps mystique. Parole de la vigne et des sarments. Joa. XV, 1-12. Ainsi, intérieurement, cette communion suppose la participation des âmes à la vie du Christ. Extérieurement, elle implique d'abord l'adhésion des intelligences à la même foi, mais aussi la cohésion des volontés sous l'impulsion du chef suprême: ainsi, à l'unité extérieure de la foi et du gouvernement s'ajoute la sympathie des membres entre eux, *singuli alter alterius membra*, dira Saint Paul."

⁵⁹ Mazella S.J., *De Religione et Ecclesia Prælectiones Scholastico-dogmaticæ*, Rome, 1896, p.489-490.

members toward the same end through the same means under the direction of one and the same government. He further points out that there is a unity of worship (or *cultus*, as most would say), whereby all observe the same essential rites, the same sacraments, the same sacrifice, but that this unity flows from the unity of faith and regimen, since the unity of ritual cannot be lacking if there is a unity of faith and regimen. He therefore concludes that the unity of *faith* and *regimen* are the two essential unities of the Catholic Church.

Communion, therefore, for Cardinal Mazella is a natural effect of membership in the Catholic Church.

29. The teaching of Father Palmieri.

Fr. Dominic Palmieri S.J. distinguishes unity of *communion*, *faith*, and *worship*. Unity of communion for him is the social unity of the Catholic Church which arises from the fact that all the faithful constitute one society, all mutually cooperating toward the same end under the authority of one government. He comments:

[This unity] excludes the multiplicity of Churches, where each would be complete societies unto themselves, each having its own government.⁶⁰

This unity of communion is what constitutes the Church as a single society. He further adds:

And therefore whatever man or group should not be a member or part of it,

⁶⁰ Palmieri S.J., *Tractatus de Romano Pontifice cum Prolegomeno de Ecclesia*, Prati, 1891, p. 252.

would not be in any way the Church of Christ or of the Church of Christ.⁶¹

30. The analogy of body and soul is applied to the notion of communion.

In speaking about the Church, one must constantly keep in mind that it is analogous to a human body inasmuch as it is composed of a material part and a spiritual part. The spiritual part of man is the form which gives to the body its human nature and species, and is its vital principle. The Church's spiritual and supernatural part, by analogy, is its faith, charity, grace, its divine power and authority given to it by God as well as all of the spiritual influence of Christ and of the Holy Ghost. The Church's material part, on the other hand, is its visible society with its members and institutions.⁶²

Consequently one must distinguish between *the internal, spiritual* aspect of communion and *the external, corporeal* aspect of communion. Many mistakes are made through a confusion of these two ways of being in communion.

This distinction accounts for the possibility of the salvation of those who are not properly speaking members of the Catholic Church, since through their at least implicit desire to belong to the true Church, it is possible for them to achieve the state of sanctifying grace and thereby be united to the true Church. Thus their adherence to the visible society of the Church is not *in fact (in re)* but *in desire (in voto)*. Communion with the Church, in them, is *really* present in its internal aspect. Externally, however, union with the Church exists only *by desire*.

⁶¹ Palmieri, *Ibid.*

⁶² Cf. P. Reginaldo-Maria Schultes O.P., *De Ecclesia Catholica Praelectiones Apologeticae*, Paris, 1925, p. 97.

It is important to point out at this juncture, however, that there is *but one communion*. Just as there is only one Christ, and only one Church, and just as the Body and Soul of Christ are perpetually united, as well as the body and soul of the Church, so there can only be *one communion*. Either you are in communion with the Church or you are not. There exists, however, a twofold aspect of being in communion, the one *internal*, the other *external*. One is in communion with the Church internally if he is in the state of sanctifying grace, that is, if he is justified by supernatural faith and charity, for it is impossible to be so justified without communion with the Church. The external communion consists of the mutual external bonds among the faithful, resulting from their relation to one visible head. The external communion, therefore, is caused by valid sacramental baptism, which has the effect of *incorporating* the baptized person into the Mystical Body of Christ. This effect continues until some obstacle is placed in its path, which obstacles are *excommunication, notorious heresy or schism*.

Internal communion is invisible and undetectable. The Church never makes any judgment about it. **When the Church speaks about communion, it is always in the sense of a real external communion, that is, actual membership in the Mystical Body of Christ.** For even internal union with the Church presupposes at least the implicit desire of external communion and of actual membership in the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Billot thus explains:

The other [principle] is that no one has this habitual grace, or can have it, if he does not belong to the visible body of the Church in some way, for in such a case he

lacks the means which is necessary for salvation, and therefore for justification and grace which salvation per se follows as an effect.⁶³

He goes on to say that the defect of adherence *in re* can be supplied by an adherence *in voto*. This point is of extreme importance, namely that one cannot detach interior justification from adherence, *in some way, at least in voto*, to the body of the Church. **For one cannot divide the body and soul of the Church; they are distinguished, but not separated.** The interior life of grace is dependent upon the exterior, visible society of the Church.

31. Conclusion and summary on the Catholic notion of communion.

Communion consists, therefore, in a relation of member to head and of member to member of the Mystical Body. This relation is founded on the act of incorporation into the Mystical Body through (1) valid Baptism (2) the profession of the Catholic Faith, and (3) submission to the pope, the authority of the Catholic Church. All three things are necessary for the incorporation; the absence of one of them would effect a separation from the Mystical Body.⁶⁴

The terms of the relation are the individual member, on the one hand, and the Head

(Christ and His Vicar) on the other, or member and member. The relation is mutual, that is, both are subject and term to each other.

Communion relies on this mutuality to survive, since the incorporation necessarily causes a mutual relationship. If it should break down on one or the other side, the whole relation collapses, *since its foundation, its cause, which is incorporation, cannot produce the relation only on one side.* Just as generation must necessarily produce a mutual relation, e.g., of father and son, so does communion with the Mystical Body, of member to Head, or member to member. If, therefore, communion is broken on one end, it is necessarily broken on the other. If the Roman Pontiff, therefore, should refuse communion to someone, that person ceases to be in communion with the Roman Pontiff, since the relation must be mutual, or two-sided. He would be, therefore, outside the Church, since communion is a necessary effect of incorporation, and one cannot be incorporated without being in communion.

⁶³ Billot, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁶⁴ In the case of infants, only valid baptism is necessary, and implicitly fulfills the two other conditions. For this reason, the Church considers as Catholics those children of heretics who are validly baptized, but who have not yet reached the age of reason. Upon reaching the age of reason these children of heretics are presumed to profess the same heresies and lack of submission to authority as that of their parents, and are therefore considered at that point to be outside of the Mystical Body.

THIRD ARTICLE

OVERVIEW OF THE VATICAN II ECCLESIOLOGY

32. The new notion of “Mystical Body of Christ” according to Vatican II.

The central error of Vatican II is *the lack of exclusive identification of the Mystical Body of Christ with the Catholic Church*. Vatican II sees the Mystical Body of Christ as all those who profess to be Christian:

That Church, Holy and Catholic, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government and who, combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or rites.⁶⁵

Note that this definition is broad enough to be acceptable to the Orthodox and the Protestants. According to Vatican II, this Mystical Body has been scandalously torn into many pieces over the centuries:

From her very beginnings there arose in this one and only Church of God certain rifts, which the apostle strongly censures as damnable. But in subsequent centuries more widespread disagreements appeared and quite large Communities [capitalization *sic*] became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church — developments for which, at times, men of both sides were to blame.⁶⁶

But the Spirit of Christ remains in these separated “ecclesial bodies,” and uses them as means of sanctification, says Vatican II:

But the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them [these separated Churches and Communities] as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.⁶⁷

It is therefore the duty of these bodies to come together, just as a dismembered human body ought to be sewn together by surgeons, in order that the Mystical Body of Christ be no longer “split up.” Thus in the Vatican II view, the Mystical Body of Christ is much broader than the Roman Catholic Church, but extends to the communities of the Lutherans, Presbyterians, Greek Orthodox or Anglicans. All are members of this great Mystical Body of Christ. Just as the human soul is present in the whole body and completely in each of its parts, so the Spirit of Christ, in this Vatican II ecclesiology, is present and active in the whole Mystical Body, and in each of its parts. All the parts, therefore, are truly the Body of Christ. They should break down their differences so that the communion among them is no longer “partial” but “full.”

Multiple efforts are being expended through prayer, word, and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires.⁶⁸

We shall hereafter present the official teaching of Vatican II, of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, as well as of a few other documents which have been promulgated over

⁶⁵ Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, n. 2.

⁶⁶ Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 4.

time, after Vatican II, and which further confirm the heretical import of the new Vatican II doctrine.

33. Teaching of Vatican II.

This Church [the sole Church of Christ], constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him.⁶⁹

Such division [of Christian communions] openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the gospel to every creature.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards Catholic unity.⁷¹

All those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the Church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity.⁷²

The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but who do not however profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter... These Christians are indeed in some real way joined to us in the Holy

⁶⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8.

⁷⁰ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 1.

⁷¹ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8.

⁷² *Lumen Gentium*, n. 9.

Spirit for, by his gifts and graces, his sanctifying power is also active in them and he has strengthened some of them even to the shedding of their blood.⁷³

34. Some relevant canons of the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

Can. 204 § 1 Christ's faithful are those who, since they are incorporated into Christ through baptism, are constituted the people of God. For this reason they participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They are called, each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world

§ 2 This Church, established and ordered in this world as a society, subsists in the catholic [*sic*] Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.

Can 205 Those baptized are in full communion with the catholic [*sic*] Church here on earth who are joined with Christ in his visible body, through the bonds of profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesiastical governance.

Can. 844 § 1 Catholic ministers may lawfully administer the sacraments only to catholic [*sic*] members of Christ's faithful who equally may lawfully receive them only from catholic [*sic*] ministers, except as provided in §§ 2, 3 and 4 of this canon and in can. 861 § 2 [Emphasis added].

35. Preliminary commentary on the preceding.

From these passages, which are by no means exhaustive, we see the image emerge

⁷³ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 14.

of the Vatican II ecclesiology: the “Superchurch,” i.e., “Christ’s faithful”, the “People of God”, the “Church of Christ”, composed of all those who look with faith towards Jesus, and which has been split up scandalously into various Churches, in which are found many elements of sanctification and truth, which are used by the Spirit of Christ as means of salvation. This Church of Christ “subsists in” (notice it does not say *is*) the Roman Catholic Church, which is joined in many ways to other Christians who do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety (read *Protestants*).

In the 1983 Code, the *Superchurch* is distinguished against the catholic [small “c” — sic] Church, which is the *Superchurch* subsisting in an organization on earth. A distinction is established, at least in some

canons, between *catholic* [sic] *members of Christ’s faithful* versus *Christ’s faithful (christifideles catholici vs. christifideles)*.

We shall minutely explain the following errors of Vatican II one after the other:

(1) The heretical distinction between the “Church of Christ” and the “Catholic Church.”

(2) The heretical theological system of ecclesial communion.

(3) The heretical teaching that false churches can be used by the Holy Ghost as means of salvation.

We have qualified these errors with the “heresy” word, which we are not prone to use lightly. We shall indeed prove diligently that the ecclesiology taught by Vatican II is properly heretical in nature, that is, contrary to the truth of the faith revealed by God, and proposed as such by the Catholic Church.

FOURTH ARTICLE

ON THE HERETICAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE “CHURCH OF CHRIST” AND THE “CATHOLIC CHURCH”

36. The notion of “Christ’s faithful” is explicitly made broader than the members of the Catholic Church by Vatican II and the 1983 Code.

As we have shown above, canon 204 of the 1983 Code describes the “Christ’s faithful” as the “people of God”. These terms apply to all the baptized:

Christ’s faithful are those who, since they are incorporated into Christ through baptism, are constituted the people of God.⁷⁴

It is very important to notice that both the Vatican II dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, and the 1983 Code of Canon Law, proceed to first describe the “Church of Christ” as the “people of God” before describing the internal and hierarchical organization proper to the Catholic Church. The expression “people of God” and “Church of Christ” apply to all the baptized, and are not to be understood as an organized society yet. Indeed, this “people of God” extends beyond the juridical borders of the Catholic Church. This people of God, or Church of Christ, however, has been granted a divinely organized constitution in the Catholic Church, in which it *subsists*. Such is the teaching of *Lumen gentium*, and such is the content of the next paragraph of the 1983 Code:

This Church, established and ordered in this world as a society, subsists in the

⁷⁴ Canon 204 § 1.

catholic [*sic*] Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.

37. The commentary given by approved and recognized commentators confirm our understanding.

A distinguished commentary on this canon reads as follows:

Paragraph two, citing *Lumen gentium* 8, expresses a **theological principle foundational to a *communio* ecclesiology, namely, the fact that the two terms “Church of Christ” and “Catholic Church,” are not identical with one another; rather, “this Church (of Christ)... subsists in the Catholic Church.”**⁷⁵

Commenting on the first part of this canon, the same commentary makes it clear that the expression “Christ’s faithful” had a broader extension than merely designating Catholics:

All the baptized, therefore, constitute the Christian faithful, the *Christi fideles*. Like the other sacraments, baptism has both social and individual effects inasmuch as the sacraments influence not only the relationship between God and a particular individual but necessarily involve a specific community of faith.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, commissioned by the Canon Law Society of America, edited by John P. Beal, James A. Coriden, and Thomas J. Green, New-York, 2000, p. 247. Emphasis added.

⁷⁶ *New Commentary*, p. 245.

The effects and consequences of baptism expressed in § 1 apply to all the baptized, whether Catholic or not.⁷⁷

Hence the term “*christifideles*”, “people of God”, and “Church of Christ”, apply to all the baptized “whether Catholic or not.”

The same commentary however warns us that the term *christifideles*, in the rest of the Code, usually refers to Catholics only:

Specifically within the code, apart from such theological statements as in this paragraph, the term “Christian faithful” (*Christifideles*) applies to the baptized who live in full communion with the Catholic Church.⁷⁸

Another commentary says similarly:

The heretic and the schismatic are not in full communion with the Church, for their actions affect their very condition as members of the faithful. They are not members of the faithful nor disciples of the Lord *fully*, but in some incomplete degree. They are members of the Church and of the faithful, but *separate*.⁷⁹

Juridically, this situation involves the suspension of specifically ecclesiastical rights and obligations with the exception of those that refer to reincorporation into full ecclesiastical communion. Charity, not justice, allows heretics and schismatics to be admitted to participation in Catholic worship or in some sacraments...⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *New Commentary*, p. 246.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 4th edition, edited by Juan Ignacio Arrieta, Chambly, 2022, p. 168. Original emphasis.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

We present again the testimony of a third commentary of the 1983 Code, to make it clear that we are in no way taking things out of context, or spinning them in a sense which was never intended:

The Church is not to be understood solely as an invisible, spiritual reality but also as an organized human society. This society is said to “subsist” in the catholic Church. **Vatican II deliberately chose to use this term, not wishing to identify the Church of Christ with the catholic Church in a way which excluded other churches and christian communities.** It recognised that some ecclesial elements of sanctification and truth are found outside the catholic Church. The use of the word “subsists” is thus a positive statement of identity without being exclusive.⁸¹

38. The official interpretation given by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2007 confirms the distinction between the “Church of Christ” and the “Catholic Church.”

On June 29th, 2007, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the approbation of Benedict XVI, published an official interpretation of the words “*subsistit in*” of Vatican II. After assuring us that the doctrine has not changed, the Congregation explains to us why the doctrine was in fact changed from a complete and exclusive identification between the “Church of Christ” and the “Catholic Church” to the notion of

⁸¹ *The Canon Law, Letter and Spirit*, prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, London, 1995, p. 116. Emphasis added.

the “*subsistit in.*” Indeed it repeats an explanation already given by John Paul II.⁸²

It is possible, according to Catholic doctrine, to affirm correctly that the Church of Christ is present and operative in the churches and ecclesial Communities not yet fully in communion with the Catholic Church, on account of the elements of sanctification and truth that are present in them.

In other words, the “Church of Christ” while only being *fully present*, or “subsisting” in the “Catholic Church”, is also present in other churches and communities, that is *outside the Catholic Church*. Thus, although the Catholic Church is identified with the Church of Christ, it does not exclude that the Church of Christ is able to be somewhat present outside the Catholic Church. The Vatican II doctrine is that the Church of Christ is not exclusively limited to the Catholic Church, although it only *subsists*, with *full presence*, in the Catholic Church.

Commenting on the change of expression from saying that the Church of Christ *is* the Catholic Church to the expression that the Church of Christ *subsists in* the Catholic Church, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explains:

It is precisely this change of terminology in the description of the relationship between the Church of Christ and the Catholic Church which has given rise to the most varied interpretations, above all in the field of ecumenism. In reality, the Council Fathers simply intended to recognise the presence of ecclesial

⁸² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n. 11.

elements proper to the Church of Christ in the non-Catholic Christian communities. It does not follow that the identification of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church no longer holds, nor that outside the Catholic Church there is a complete absence of ecclesial elements, a “churchless void”.⁸³

Here a “change of terminology” is explicitly confessed. A change of doctrine is denied. But in reality, the congregation does admit that this change of terminology was done for doctrinal reasons. Hence, one may wonder, why would you need to change terminology to correctly reflect doctrine, if that same doctrine has not changed? It does not make any sense, obviously. The doctrine *has* changed, and it is very clear. The expressions “Church of Christ” and “Catholic Church” have always been understood to signify the exact same thing, while in the documents of Vatican II they have two different significations. The doctrine which Vatican II claims to maintain is that the Catholic Church is identified with the Church of Christ. What it openly admits to have changed, is that this identification is no longer considered as exclusive, as if outside the Catholic Church there would be “a churchless void”:

Contrary to many unfounded interpretations, therefore, the change from “*est*” to “*subsistit*” does not signify that the Catholic Church has ceased to regard herself as the one true Church of Christ. Rather it simply signifies a greater openness to the ecumenical desire

⁸³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Commentary on the document “Responses to some questions regarding certain aspects of the doctrine on the Church”*, June 29th, 2007.

to recognise truly ecclesial characteristics and dimensions in the Christian communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church, on account of the “*plura elementa sanctificationis et veritatis*” present in them. Consequently, although there is only one Church which “subsists” in one unique historical subject there are true ecclesial realities which exist beyond its visible boundaries.⁸⁴

Hence we are meant to believe in a sort of “churchness” (the ideal, abstract “Church of Christ”, as was intended by Christ) present *fully*, and *subsistently* in the Catholic Church alone, but also present *partially*, and *by participation* in the other churches, since outside of the Catholic Church there is no “churchless void.”

39. The denial of perfect and exclusive identification of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church is a heresy.

That the Catholic Church is perfectly and exclusively identified with the Church of Christ is such a basic dogma that it is very sad to observe its being openly denied with such audacity today. Of course, modernists claim that they still identify the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church, but they don't, as we have seen. For them, the terms “Catholic Church” and “Church of Christ” are not entirely synonymous, but have a different connotation.

In Catholic doctrine, however, they are synonyms, they refer to the exact same notion, and they can therefore be used one for the other. Everything which can be said about the Church of Christ can be said of the Catholic Church, and vice versa. It is obvious, however, that the innovators have

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

purposely taught the presence of the Church of Christ outside the confines of the Catholic Church, in order to please the schismatics and heretics, by recognizing them as members of the Church of Christ, something which has always been denied to them.

Hence we say that the Vatican II denial of exclusive identification of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church is a heresy.

They believe that some of “Christ's faithful” although they are not members of the Catholic Church are nonetheless members of the “people of God” which is the “Church of Christ.” If membership in the “Church of Christ” does not coincide with membership in the “Catholic Church” then it is clear that the “Church of Christ” does not exactly signify the same thing, and does not refer to the same people as the “Catholic Church.”

40. A few declarations of the magisterium of the Church.

Let us now adduce some texts of the magisterium of the Church, showing that the Church of Christ has always been considered to be exclusively the Catholic Church, and cannot be in any way found outside of her, namely in non Catholic sects.

Pius IX: Now, anyone who wishes to examine with care and to meditate on the condition of the different religious societies divided among themselves and separated from the Catholic Church... will easily be convinced that **no one of these societies nor all of them together in any way constitute or are that one Catholic Church which Our Lord founded** and established and which He willed to create. **Nor is it possible, either, to say that these societies are either a member or part of this same**

Church, since they are visibly separated from Catholic unity.⁸⁵

Leo XIII: All who dissent from the Scriptures concerning Christ, although they may be found in all places in which the Church is found, **are not in the Church**; and again all those who agree with the Scriptures concerning the Head, and do not communicate in the unity of the Church, **are not in the Church**.⁸⁶

Pius XI: Now those who profess to be Christians cannot not believe, it seems to Us, that there is one Church, and only one Church, founded by Christ; but if they are asked further what, according to the will of the Founder, this Church must be, they no longer agree. Many among them, for example, deny that **the Church of Christ must be an external and visible society**, and that it must present the appearance of **one body of faithful, all united in one faith under a single teaching authority and government**. On the contrary they understand the external and visible Church as nothing more than a Federation made up of various Christian communities, which adhere to different — and sometimes contradictory — doctrines.⁸⁷

Pius XI: If they [the faithful] were to go [to ecumenical gatherings], they would be attributing authority to **an erroneous form of the Christian religion, entirely alien to the one Church of Christ**.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Pope Pius IX, Letter *Jam vos omnes*, September 13, 1868, to Protestants and other non-Catholics. Emphasis added.

⁸⁶ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis cognitum*, June 29, 1896. Emphasis added.

⁸⁷ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, January 6, 1928. Emphasis added.

⁸⁸ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, January 6, 1928. Emphasis added.

Pius XI: No one is in the Church of Christ, and no one remains in it, unless he acknowledges and accepts with obedience the authority and power of Peter and his legitimate successors.⁸⁹

Pius XII: In the Church they alone are to be counted as members who have received the baptism of regeneration and profess the true faith, who, moreover, **have not had the misfortune to separate themselves from the assembly of the Body**, or been excommunicated by the legitimate authority by reason of very grave faults.⁹⁰

Pius XII: Consequently, as in the real assembly of the faithful there can be only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, so there can be only one faith: and he who refuses to hear the Church must be considered, by the order of the Lord, as a heathen and a publican. And **they who are divided by reasons of faith or of government cannot live in this one Body**, and in its one Divine Spirit.⁹¹

Pius XII: Therefore they are in dangerous error who **think that they can attach themselves to Christ the Head of the Church, without adhering faithfully to his Vicar on earth**.⁹²

Pius XII: The Church established on Peter and his successors, and she alone, must be the Church of Christ, one in herself and destined to remain until the

⁸⁹ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, January 6, 1928. Emphasis added.

⁹⁰ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943. Emphasis added.

⁹² Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943. Emphasis added.

end of time by means of submission to a personal and visible Head.⁹³

Pius XII: Some say they are not bound by the doctrine, explained in Our Encyclical Letter of a few years ago, and **based on the sources of revelation**, which teaches **that the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing**. Some reduce to a meaningless formula the necessity of belonging to the true Church in order to gain eternal salvation.⁹⁴

Pius XII: To be Christian one must be Roman; one must recognize the oneness of Christ's Church, that is governed by one successor of the Prince of the Apostles, who is the Bishop of Rome, Christ's Vicar on earth.⁹⁵

Pius IX: He who leaves this [Roman] See cannot hope to remain within the Church; he who eats of the lamb outside of it has no part with God.⁹⁶

41. Conclusion of this section.

It is evident that the immutable faith of the Church is that Christ instituted one Church to be the unique means of salvation. This Church of Christ is the Catholic Church, to the exclusion of all other "churches" and "communities" of "christian."

The Church of Christ is not found, in any way whatsoever, outside the Catholic Church, because the Catholic Church is that Church established by Christ. To merely hint

⁹³ Pius XII, Allocution to Roman students, January 30, 1949. Emphasis added.

⁹⁴ Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani Generis*, August 12, 1950. Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ Pius XII, Allocution to the Irish pilgrims, October 8, 1957. Emphasis added.

⁹⁶ Pius IX, Encyclical *Amantissimus*, April 18, 1862. Emphasis added.

that there is a distinction (of *non exclusivity*) between the Church established by Christ and the Catholic Church is a blasphemy, indeed a heretical blasphemy. It contradicts the immutable faith in something so important and so central to our Catholic religion, that it defies understanding that anyone would ever be bold enough to proffer it.

In 1870, the Vatican Council solemnly repeated this dogma:

The Church of Christ is one flock under one Supreme Pastor through the preservation of unity both of communion and of profession of the same faith with the Roman Pontiff. *This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and of salvation.*⁹⁷

⁹⁷ First Vatican Council, Dogmatic constitution on the Church *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 3, July 18, 1870. Emphasis added.

FIFTH ARTICLE

ON THE HERETICAL ECCLESIOLOGY OF COMMUNION

42. Can there be a communion between the Catholic Church and non Catholic individuals?

We have shown that the Catholic Church can be aptly described as a communion, so strong are the bounds uniting her members together. Indeed, there are in the Catholic Church external bounds as well as internal bonds.

The Holy Ghost, described by Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XII as the “soul of the Church” is the strongest bond which can ever be thought of, since that bond is not anything created, not even something supernatural such as the union of faith and charity, but the Holy Ghost Himself. As the soul of the Church, He is present entirely in the Church as a whole, and entirely in each of her living members. The mystery of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the soul of the just ought not to be considered as separate from the mystery of the Holy Ghost being the soul of the Church. Hence we can say that this communion is strong of the very strength of God, for the bound is God Himself.

Below this communion of indwelling of the Holy Ghost, is the communion of supernatural created gifts, and, as well, the external communion of being members of the same society, namely the Catholic Church.

Now, Pope Pius XII has clearly established that the Catholic Church shares indeed a communion with some people who are not her members:

For even though by an unconscious desire and longing they have a certain

relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church.⁹⁸

In this passage, Pope Pius XII is talking about “those who are united to the Church only by desire,”⁹⁹ about whom we have already spoken in the first part of this chapter, when explaining the dogma “*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus.*”

We have shown that these persons could indeed be saved, provided that they have the supernatural virtue of faith and charity. But if they are saved, it is precisely *by being united to the Catholic Church*, at least by an implicit desire of membership.

There is, then, a union of faith and charity with these persons. But this supernatural communion can happen only because there is also a true desire of *external communion* and membership in the Catholic Church. No one can be saved without at least the desire of this external membership in the Catholic Church.

If it is true to say that the Catholic Church can have a communion with non-Catholics, it should be understood thus: these are not *members* of the Catholic Church in reality, but they truly *desire to be members*.

But the Catholic Church does not have any communion with persons who have *no relation of membership whatsoever*, not even

⁹⁸ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, June 29th, 1943, n. 103.

⁹⁹ Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston, August 8th, 1949.

the *desire of it*. The Catholic Church has no communion with anyone positively refusing membership in the Catholic Church.

43. Can there be a communion between the Catholic Church and non-Catholic churches and communities?

There is an essential difference between individuals and organized churches.

Individuals can be in invincible ignorance, and therefore individuals can be excused from proper membership and saved by an implicit desire of membership in the Catholic Church. This is true because in their moral lives individuals are bound to follow their (well informed) conscience, which is a subjective norm, which is meant to apply the objective law of morality to individual circumstances. This subjective norm of morality, however, is often wrong about what is the objective law of morality which must be followed. Most of the time, this error is imputable to the individual, who was negligent or in any other way responsible for not having discovered the truth. But it also happens that a person can be excused by invincible ignorance: one was unable to know the truth on account of obstacles entirely independent of one's will. In that case, one would not be held accountable, morally, for something for which one has no responsibility.

The same thing cannot be said of religious societies. Religious societies are something very objective: is this church the Church which was instituted by Christ? This question expects a "yes" or "no" answer. It is something objective, independent of any possible good faith of its members.

Objectively, a non-Catholic church is separate from the Catholic Church. We have said that no one can be saved by a positive

refusal of membership in the Catholic Church. But, precisely, a non Catholic church is in its very essence the embodiment of refusal of membership in the Catholic Church.

Hence, one cannot apply to non Catholic churches the possibility of an implicit desire of a person to become Catholic.

Such a person will be excused from being in a false church just as one can be excused from sin: by ignorance and inadvertence. In other words, adherence to sin, or to a false church, was only *material*.

Obviously this cannot be said of the false church itself. It is something objective, and it is an objective organization of refusal to be Catholic.

False churches are not the Church of Christ, and have no communion with her, just as a false god is not the true God at all, and has no "elements of communion" with Him; or just as the harlot and the adulterous mistress is not the legitimate wife, in any way whatsoever, no matter how much she resemble her.

44. The Branch Theory was a precursor of this new ecclesiology of communion.

The effort to find a way to somehow theologically integrate false churches into the Church of Christ is not new. Many attempts have been made, and have always been condemned by the Church. Of these, the system of the "branch theory," although not perfectly identical with the doctrine of Vatican II, is certainly one of its closest precursors. Thus, it is worth explaining this error, and why it was condemned, in order to then understand how, despite some difference, the ecclesiology of communion proposed by Vatican II should equally be

rejected by Catholics, since it proposes the same essential error, only with a slightly different coating.

This Branch Theory was a system proposed by Anglicans in the nineteenth century, which held that the “Universal Church” consisted of three branches: the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox, and the Anglicans. Although not in communion with each other, they are, nonetheless, all part of the “Universal Church.” These Anglicans identify the “Universal Church” with the Mystical Body of Christ, which, as such, has no visible regimen, and therefore no visible head. They thus will not identify any one existing “Church” exclusively with the Mystical Body or “Universal Church.”

Commenting on this error, Cardinal Mazzella quotes an Anglican by the name of Litton, who sounds just like Vatican II:

Particular churches, separated in some ways, are one because of a common relation to the one true Church, that is, the Mystical Body of Christ, and by its connection to it.¹⁰⁰

According to the Cardinal, they say that the *unity of government* of the Catholic Church is better, and possibly even falls under precept, but is in no way *essential*, and can therefore be absent, without detriment to being the Church. When schism occurs within this “Universal Church,” that is, when one church breaks off from another, as in the case of the Orthodox and the Anglicans with regard to the Roman Catholic Church, *the separation is not total and perfect*, nor is it even a separation from the Roman Catholic

¹⁰⁰ Mazella, *De Religione et Ecclesia Prælectiones Scholastico-dogmaticæ*, Rome, 1896, p. 340.

Church inasmuch as it is true, but only inasmuch as it has been corrupted in the area of faith or morals. Therefore, there remains, according to this theory, an essential communion, in those things which are true and right, whereas communion is rejected in the area of erroneous doctrine, in superstitious worship, or tyrannical rule.

45. Sidenote of comparison between the R&R position and the Branch Theory.

Parenthetically, this Protestant idea of being in communion with what is right, and not in communion with what is wrong is exactly the position of the Society of Saint Pius X with regard to Vatican II and the “Vatican II popes.” They therefore accept certain doctrines and disciplines of the New Religion, while rejecting others. They are in communion with the “pope” when he talks like a Catholic, and not in communion with him when he talks like a non-Catholic.

46. Condemnation of the Branch Theory by the Church.

In 1857 a society was founded in London called the *Association for Promoting the Union of Christendom*. In 1864, the Holy Office issued a letter forbidding Catholics to take part in it. In the letter Cardinal Patrizi mentioned that the members of the group are called upon to say prayers and offer “masses” for the intention that the three “Christian communities, namely those which, as it is supposed, *taken all together already constitute* the Catholic Church, eventually come together to form one body.”¹⁰¹

Overwhelmed with grief by the blow, 198 Anglican divines wrote to Cardinal Patrizi

¹⁰¹ Letter of the Holy Office to the English bishops, September 16th, 1864.

asking him to reconsider, saying that they were asking nothing else from God than that “ecumenical intercommunion which existed before the schism of East and West.” His Eminence responded on November 8, 1865:

The Sacred Congregation vehemently regrets that you should happen to think that those Christian groups are parts of the true Church of Jesus Christ which boast that they have the inheritance of a priesthood and the name of Catholic, even though they are separated from the Apostolic See of Peter. **Nothing could be more averse to the true notion of the Catholic Church.** For the Catholic Church... is that which is founded on the one Peter and which forms one body connected and compacted together by unity of faith and charity.¹⁰²

This same condemnation was included in the schema on the Church (written by Joseph Kleutgen S.J.) which was worked upon by the Council Fathers at the Vatican Council of 1870:

If anyone should say that all or some of the sects which dissent from the Roman Church compose together with her the universal Church of Christ: let him be anathema.¹⁰³

This canon was never voted upon definitively, due to the Franco-Prussian War and the invasion of Garibaldi. It does

¹⁰² Emphasis added. This letter has been widely published and translated at the time by both Catholics and Anglicans in their reviews. It can be found, for instance, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. XIV, July-Dec. 1919, Dublin, 1919.

¹⁰³ Canon 5: “Si quis dixerit, sectas omnes vel aliquot, quae a Romana ecclesia dissident, una cum hac Christi ecclesiam universalem componere: anathema sit.” (Mansi 53, col. 316).

however reflect the universal faith of the Church at the time, since this point was not the object of any discussion among Catholics.

47. What the Branch Theory and the Vatican II “theology of communion” have in common.

Both systems embody the same fundamental errors:

(1) The universal Church of Christ, His Mystical Body, is *somehow* not perfectly and exclusively identified with the Catholic Church, but can be *somehow* present outside of her.

(2) The other churches are *somehow* in a partial communion with the Catholic Church.

Both theories agree on these principles, although they slightly differ in explaining this “*somehow*”, that is, *how* it actually happens. It is important to understand that both principles are heretical in themselves, no matter how the “*somehow*” is understood.

Both of these principles were condemned and rejected in the condemnation of the Branch Theory. The Letter of the Holy Office thus denounces this new theory as very dangerous and pernicious:

This novelty is all the more dangerous in that it is presented under the appearances of piety and eager solicitude for the unity of Christian society. The foundation on which it is built is such that it destroys at one stroke the divine constitution of the Church.

The Letter then condemns the first principle which we have listed, namely that the Church of Christ is not exactly and exclusively identified with the Roman Catholic Church:

It can be summed up in the proposition, that the true Church of Jesus Christ is made up of one part Roman Church, established and propagated throughout the world, and one part the schism of Photius, and the Anglican heresy, both of which have, with the Church of Rome, one same Lord, one same faith, and one same Baptism.

Again we concede that this “partition” and “composition” is not understood by Vatican II in the same way as the Branch Theory. But as we shall soon explain, partition and composition are present in both errors. The Letter obviously rejects any idea of partial communion or partial presence of the Church of Christ in false churches:

There is no other Catholic Church than this one which, built on Peter alone, rises as a compact body, united by bonds of faith and charity. This is what St. Cyprian professed in all sincerity when he addressed himself in these terms to Pope Cornelius: “in order that our colleagues firmly prove and adhere to you and your communion, which is the unity as well as the charity of the Catholic Church.”

The Holy Office is obviously not very impressed with the recognition of “elements of truth” having a “salvific significance” in false churches:

Another reason for the faithful to remain outside of the London Society is to be found in the fact that its members favor indifferentism and are a cause of scandal. This Society, or at least its founders and directors, profess that Photianism and Anglicanism are two forms of the true Christian religion in which it is possible to please God, as in the Catholic Church;

that, if these differing Christian communions are a prey to dissensions, it is without loss to the faith, for the faith remains one and the same for all communions. But this is the height of that most pernicious indifferentism in matters religious; in our times above all it is on the increase, with great damage to souls.

It is clear that the principles on which are based both the Branch Theory and the Vatican II “theology of communion” are alien to the Catholic Faith, and “destroy at one stroke the divine constitution of the Church.”

48. In what way do the Branch Theory and the Vatican II “theology of communion” differ?

For the sake of precision, and in order that the comparison that we establish between Vatican II and the Branch Theory be not gratuitously rejected under the pretext that there is a difference between the two systems, we shall precisely point out their differences. Once the differences will be established, indeed, the fact that these errors are equivalently heretical will be all the more evident and striking to the reader.

Both systems admit that the Church of Christ, the Mystical Body of Christ, is *somehow* present in churches other than the Catholic Church.

This “*somehow*” in the Branch Theory, is to be likened to a *physical composition* while in the Vatican II system it is to be likened to a *metaphysical composition*. Let us explain.

49. The Branch Theory establishes a sort of *physical composition* in the Mystical Body of Christ.

These concepts, obviously, have to be understood analogically. A society is likened to a *body*, but it is not a real human body. The kind of division and composition used in the Branch Theory can be likened, by analogy, to what a *physical composition* is in a man.

Thus, in the Branch Theory, the Anglicans, the Catholics, and the Photians, are three branches of the same tree, or members of the same Mystical Body. The soul of this body is common to all of them. So also in the human body, there is a physical composition of various organs, although the soul is found in all the members of the body.

50. The Vatican II “theology of communion” establishes a sort of *metaphysical composition* in the Mystical Body of Christ.

In this system, the different churches are not integral parts of the same body, as in the Branch Theory.

Rather, we are told, the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, but not in the other churches. In the other churches it is present only *partially*, by participation:

Therefore, the Church of Christ is present and operative also in these Churches, even though they lack full communion with the Catholic Church, since they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy, which, according to the will of God, the Bishop of Rome

objectively has and exercises over the entire Church.¹⁰⁴

This system makes the Church of Christ into a sort of *form*, or *perfection* which can be participated in. This abstract “Church of Christ” which can be present in different ways, we could call “churchness” for the sake of simplicity. This perfection of “churchness” is subsistent in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is, as it were, *subsistent churchness*, while the other churches have only a *participation of churchness*:

The elements of this already-given Church exist, found in their fullness in the Catholic Church, and without this fullness, in the other communities¹⁰⁵

This idea is similar to the theory of subsistent ideas of Plato: in a heavenly place are found all the perfections, which serve as models for the created world. In this imaginary world, you will find the subsistent *blue*, for example, while it is found on earth only as *participated*. On this earth, *blue* is always found in things: you see a blue car, a blue sky, a blue pen, etc. You never see *blue* alone, without it being in something. This is because blue is an accidental perfection, what is called in philosophy a *secondary form*. All these different “*blue’s*” do not give the full example and perfection of what *blue* is. They are only *instances* and *examples* of *something blue*. But Plato had this theory according to which there was a heavenly world in which all ideas and perfections existed without being received in any subject. In this

¹⁰⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Jesus*, n. 17, August 6th, 2000.

¹⁰⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, n. 14, May 25th, 1995.

imaginary world of Plato, therefore, you would find *blue*, subsisting on its own: not a “*blue thing*”, but “blue” alone. This would be subsistent *blue*, the perfect *blue*, the full *blue*. All the blue things existing on earth would be imperfect and partial imitations of this perfect subsistent blue.

By analogy, Vatican II establishes a subsistent “churchness”, which is the Catholic Church. It is the perfect, full, subsistent churchness, existing alone, without being only participated in something else. The other churches, however, would have only a partial churchness, a participated churchness, to a greater or lesser intensity. The official doctrine talks about “spheres of belonging” as if you could increase or decrease in the perfection of churchness:

In these truly plenary [read: *ecumenical*] gatherings, the ecclesial communities of different countries make real the fundamental second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* which treats of the numerous “spheres” of belonging to the Church as People of God and of the bond which exists with it, even on the part of those who do not yet form a part of it.¹⁰⁶

Churchness would be indeed present in false churches, but not perfectly, in its fullness. If you wanted to look for churchness, you would still point to the Catholic Church as the one unique churchness, of whose fullness the others all participate in and imitate.

We apologize to the reader for presenting such a mythological system, but we wanted to show that we understand that the Vatican II system is not, indeed, saying that the

¹⁰⁶ John Paul II, *Discourse to the Roman Curia*, June 28th, 1981.

Church of Christ is composed of parts like a *physical composition* would explain it. Rather, the Vatican II system would have to be categorized as a system of *metaphysical participation in churchness*, which *churchness* can be more or less intense in false churches, while the Catholic Church would be the embodiment of perfectly full and unlimited, subsistent *churchness*.

It might sound very smart and elaborated, and modernists insist a lot on the fact that thanks to the “theology of communion” they have moved beyond the theology of membership (which clearly excluded any sort of *physical composition*). They thought that using this analogy of *metaphysical participation* they could somehow include the false churches in the Mystical Body and get away with it.

Needless to say, this system is just as heretical as the “Branch Theory” since it still denies the exclusive identification of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church, and claims a sort of participation and presence of the Church of Christ in false churches.

51. Matrimony is an image of the union of Christ and His Church.

Not everything, indeed, is able to be *participated* and found *imperfectly* in other things. Certainly being the legitimate wife is not something that admits degrees of intensity and perfection. A woman is either the legitimate wife or she is not. She cannot be *partially* the wife, on account of “elements of the wife” which one would find in her.

Imagine a husband telling his wife that he “does not refrain from using them,” meaning other women, because they resemble her, and for some of them are even dressed in the

wife's clothing, and adorned with her jewelry (which they *stole* from the true wife), and have other many elements of the wife, which certainly, are not without precious significance of "wifeness." Hence, he tells her, although she is the one true wife, in which fully subsists "wifeness," she should not think that outside of her there is a "wifeless void." Furthermore, he adds, whenever he has an intimate relationship with these women, the wife is actually "made present" anyway.

We apologize for this analogy, which translates the doctrines of Vatican II in terms of relation of husband and wife. Yet, as horrific as this might seem, marriage is *only the imperfect image* of the union of Christ and His one true Church, the Catholic Church. In making this parallel, we have been very faithful to the concepts of the "theology of communion" and we have not exaggerated anything. Thus the teaching of Vatican II is much more perverted, and is an awful blasphemy which claims that Christ would be unfaithful to His one only spouse, the Roman Catholic Church, and that He would find elements of espousal in other churches and communities.

St Paul compares indeed the union of husband and wife to the union of Christ and His Church. The wife is likened to the body of the husband, just as the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ:

So also ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the church: Because we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother,

and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh. This is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the church.¹⁰⁷

Following this analogy, Pope Leo XIII endorses the teaching of St. Cyprian, saying:

Whosoever is separated from the Church is united to an adulteress.¹⁰⁸

What we gather from documents such as the letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, is that Vatican II did not want to deny directly that the Catholic Church is the true Church. What it wanted to change in this doctrine is the *exclusivity* of this identification of the Catholic Church. It is similar to a husband who claims to remain faithful to his wife, assuring her that she will forever be the only fully true wife, while denying her exclusivity, and explaining to her how other women have elements of "wifeness" that he cannot ignore, and which justifies his occasional relationships with them.

Exclusivity, indeed, is of the essence of the sacrament of matrimony. And so is it, in the relationship between Christ and the Catholic Church.

Exclusivity of the wife is denied if the husband has many wives, and exclusivity of being the true Church is denied to the Catholic Church in a similar way by the Branch Theory.

But exclusivity is also denied to the wife if the husband finds elements of the wife in other women, with whom therefore he would entertain a partial communion of marriage.

¹⁰⁷ Eph. V, 28-32.

¹⁰⁸ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis cognitum* (1896), n. 5. It is a quote of St. Cyprian (*De Cath. Eccl. Unitate*, n. 6).

So also Vatican II denies to the Catholic Church the absolute exclusivity of being the one true Church established by Christ, and this is a heresy to which we shall never subscribe.

52. Vatican II does not consider submission to the Roman Pontiff as an absolute necessity to remain in the Church of Christ.

Vatican II makes, in particular, very little about the submission to the Roman Pontiff. Instead of being absolutely essential to salvation (Boniface VIII), in the Vatican II system it can be denied without losing all communion with the “Church of Christ.” You would merely be “wounded”, but certainly still have a true apostolic succession:

Therefore, **the Church of Christ is present and operative also in these Churches**, even though they lack full communion with the Catholic Church, since **they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy**, which, according to the will of God, the Bishop of Rome objectively has and exercises over the entire Church.¹⁰⁹

This communion exists especially with the Eastern Orthodox Churches which, though separated from the See of Peter, remain united to the Catholic Church by means of very close bonds, such as the **apostolic succession** and a valid Eucharist, and therefore **merit the title of particular Churches**.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Jesus*, n. 17, August 6th, 2000. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, n. 17, 1992. Emphasis added.

The universal Church is therefore the body of the Churches [i.e., the particular Churches].¹¹¹

Hence it is clear that schismatic churches have a true apostolic succession, are true churches, and are to be counted in the universal “Church of Christ.”

Much of this doctrine is justified by the doctrine of collegiality. Indeed, according to Catholic doctrine, bishops are given jurisdiction over particular churches by the Pope. It is in this way that bishops are properly the successors of the apostles. On the contrary, in the Vatican II system, bishops are successors of the apostles by the episcopal consecration, which is said to give the threefold function of teaching, ruling, and sanctifying the Church.

According to Catholic doctrine, then, the apostolicity of the bishops is dependant on their relation to the Roman Pontiff, whose see is called, for that reason the *Apostolic See*, and from whom flow the apostolicity of the Church.

On the contrary, in the Vatican II system, denial of the primacy and refusal of obedience of the Roman Pontiff is considered to merely be a *wound*, and would not take away apostolic succession.

53. The teaching of the Church is incompatible with the “theology of communion” of Vatican II.

The faith of the Church is very clear: there is no communion whatsoever with heretical and schismatic churches. The Church of Christ is not found in them, not even a little bit, and they are not in the Church of Christ, not even in the slightest. It is also very clear

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, n. 8.

that denial of the primacy and refusal to submit to the Roman Pontiff makes you leave the Church altogether.

Let us present here a few samples from the Church's magisterium to illustrate our argument.

He who leaves this [Roman] See cannot hope to remain within the Church; he who eats of the lamb outside of it has no part with God.¹¹²

Now, anyone who wishes to examine with care and to meditate on the condition of the different religious societies divided among themselves and separated from the Catholic Church... will easily be convinced that **no one of these societies nor all of them together in any way constitute or are that one Catholic Church which Our Lord founded** and established and which He willed to create. **Nor is it possible, either, to say that these societies are either a member or part of this same Church,** since they are visibly separated from Catholic unity.¹¹³

He who abandons the Chair of Peter on which the Church is founded, is falsely persuaded that he is in the Church, since he is already a sinner and a schismatic who raises up a chair against the one **Chair of Peter, from which flow to all others the sacred rights of communion.**¹¹⁴

The very first elements of Catholic doctrine teach that no one can be considered a legitimate bishop if he is

¹¹² Pius IX, Encyclical *Amantissimus*, April 18, 1862. Emphasis added.

¹¹³ Pius IX, Letter *Jam vos omnes*, September 13, 1868. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ Pius IX, Encyclical *Quartus supra*, January 6, 1873. Emphasis added.

not united by the communion of faith and charity with the Rock on which the Church of Christ is built, if he does not adhere to the Supreme Pastor to whom are confided all the sheep so that he may feed them, and if he is not bound to him who has the office of confirming his brethren who are in the world.¹¹⁵

The Church, founded on these principles and mindful of her office, has done nothing with greater zeal and endeavor than she has displayed in guarding the integrity of the faith. **Hence she regarded as rebels and expelled from the ranks of her children all who held beliefs on any point of doctrine different from her own.** The Arians, the Montanists, the Novatians, the Quartodecimans, the Eutychians did not certainly reject all Catholic doctrine: they abandoned only a certain portion of it. **Still who does not know that they were declared heretics and banished from the bosom of the Church?**¹¹⁶

If they [the faithful] were to go [to ecumenical gatherings], they would be attributing authority to **an erroneous form of the Christian religion, entirely alien to the one Church of Christ.**¹¹⁷

The union of Christians cannot be fostered otherwise than by promoting the return of the dissident to **the true Church of Christ, which in the past they unfortunately abandoned.**¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Pius IX, Encyclical *Etsi multa*, November 21, 1873. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁶ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis cognitum*, June 29, 1896. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁷ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, January 6, 1928. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁸ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, January 6, 1928. Emphasis added.

It is therefore inconsistent and foolish to say that the Mystical Body could be formed of disjointed and separated parts; therefore whoever is not joined to it is not a member of it and is not in union with Christ the Head.¹¹⁹

No one is in the Church of Christ, and no one remains in it, unless he acknowledges and accepts with obedience the authority and power of Peter and his legitimate successors.¹²⁰

Therefore **they are straying from divine truth** who imagine the Church to be something which can neither be touched nor seen, that it is something merely “spiritual,” as they say, **in which many Christian communities, although separated from one another by faith, could be joined by some kind of invisible link.**¹²¹

Wherefore, since outside the Catholic Church there is nothing undefiled, the Apostle declaring that “all that is not of faith is sin,” we are in no way likened with those who are divided from the unity of the Body of Christ; **we are joined in no communion.**¹²²

He who so separates himself from this See becomes a stranger to the Christian religion, since he ceases to be part of its structure. (St. Boniface I, *Ep.* 14)¹²³

¹¹⁹ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, January 6, 1928.

¹²⁰ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, January 6, 1928. Emphasis added.

¹²¹ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943. Emphasis added.

¹²² Pope St. Leo the Great, Sermon CXXIX. Emphasis added.

¹²³ Pius IX, Encyclical *Etsi multa*, November 21, 1873. Emphasis added.

54. Conclusion of this section.

It is evident that the immutable faith of the Church teaches that to leave the Catholic Church is to leave the Church of Christ, since the Church of Christ is – exclusively – the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church does not share any ecclesiastical communion whatsoever with false churches. Indeed false churches are called “churches” by use of language, since they are thought to be a true church by misled people, just as false gods are called “gods” because they are thought and said to be true gods by misled people. But just as a false god has absolutely nothing of the true God, except this false perception in the eyes of men, so also false churches have nothing of the true Church, except this false perception in the eyes of men. But before God, and in reality, false churches are *no church at all*, they have *no ecclesiastical existence whatsoever*, they are merely a gathering of misled people. In the same way a false god is *no god at all*, but merely a creature, and the fact that this creature is wrongly considered by some to be a true god gives absolutely nothing of God’s essence to them. Quite the contrary.

False churches have no more ecclesiastical value than children deciding to “play church” for recreation. They have no more value than a theater, or a movie. They are a sham.

Contrary to what the “Novus Ordo” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has taught, therefore, outside the Catholic Church *there is* indeed a “churchless void.”

To think otherwise contradicts the solemn teaching of the 1870 Vatican Council:

The Church of Christ is one flock under one Supreme Pastor through the preservation of unity both of communion

and of profession of the same faith with the Roman Pontiff. *This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and of salvation.*¹²⁴

¹²⁴ First Vatican Council, Dogmatic constitution on the Church *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 3, July 18, 1870. Emphasis added.

SIXTH ARTICLE

ON THE HERETICAL VATICAN II DOCTRINE THAT FALSE CHURCHES ARE MEANS OF SALVATION

55. The teaching of Vatican II.

The teaching of Vatican II on this question is based on the errors presented above, and is its logical consequence:

It follows that **these separated Churches and Communities**, though we believe they suffer from defects already mentioned, **have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation** which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.¹²⁵

56. A false church is not a means of salvation, but a means of damnation.

A false church is separated from the Catholic Church. Hence membership in a false church excludes membership in the Catholic Church. But membership in the Catholic Church is necessary for salvation, by necessity of precept, as we have explained. We have said that no one can be saved by a positive refusal of membership in the Catholic Church. But, precisely, a non-Catholic church is in its very essence the embodiment of refusal of membership in the Catholic Church.

In other words, “to refuse to become a member of the Catholic Church” is included in “being a member of a non-Catholic Church.” Hence someone in a false church

¹²⁵ Vatican II, Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 3.

can only be saved if, among other things, his adherence to this false church is merely *material*, just as someone will be excused from sin if his sin is only *material*. That is: he did not realize it was a sin, he did not realize it was a false church.

To say that a false church is a means of salvation is the same as to say that adultery is a means of salvation. Indeed, this is the parallel made by St. Cyprian, and endorsed by Pope Leo XIII:

Whosoever is separated from the Church is united to an adulteress.¹²⁶

Thus, far from being a means of salvation, adherence to a false church is the same as an objective sin: the person will be excused from it only if adherence to it was only *material*, and the person actually means to become a Catholic (by at least implicit desire).

57. Comparison with the dogma “*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*.”

Just as membership is necessary for salvation, to such a point that no one can be saved unless he has at least the implicit desire to become a member of the Catholic Church; in the same way and for the same reason, it is necessary for salvation to not be a member of a false church, to the point that membership in a false church should be absolutely rejected, if not in fact, at least in desire.

¹²⁶ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis cognitum* (1896), n. 5. It is a quote of St. Cyprian (*De Cath. Eccl. Unitate*, n. 6).

What Vatican II considers a means of salvation must, according to Catholic doctrine, be actually absolutely excluded, at least in intention, for anyone to be saved.

In the first article of this chapter, and based on the 1949 Letter of the Holy Office, we have indeed explained how the dogma “*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” is developed in two principles:

(1) Membership in the Church is of *necessity of precept* for salvation.

(2) The mediation of the Catholic Church is of *necessity of means* for salvation. This is accomplished by the desire to join the Catholic Church.

The 1949 letter of the Holy Office links these two principles in the following manner:

Not only did the Saviour command that all nations should enter the Church [here is the *necessity of precept*], but He also decreed the Church to be a means of salvation, without which no one can enter the kingdom of eternal glory [here is the *necessity of means*].

Using the same terminology, and strict laws of logic, we can draw the following principles:

(1) Non-membership in a false church is of *necessity of precept* for salvation.

(2) The desire of non-membership in a false church is of *necessity of means* for salvation.

Worded yet in a different way, but entirely equivalent, we could yet again present the two following principles:

(1) Membership in a false church is a means of perdition, in virtue of a *necessity of precept*.

(2) Membership in a false church is a means of perdition, in virtue of a *necessity of*

means, with the only possible exception of invincible ignorance.

This means that **membership in a false church is condemned and forbidden under pain of eternal damnation, and can only be excused by invincible ignorance.** Certainly, no one in his right mind would call that a “means of salvation.”

In addition, to consider the false churches as possible means of salvation is the same as saying that the Catholic Church is not the unique and exclusive means of salvation.

It is therefore manifest that this Vatican II doctrine contradicts the dogma “*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” in the authentic meaning given to it by the magisterium of the Church. And since this truth is a dogma of faith, any doctrine which denies it, or modifies its meaning, must be considered as heretical.

58. The teaching of the Church is that the Catholic Church is the unique means of salvation, and that false churches are means of damnation.

The faith of the Church is very clear: no one can be saved, except through the Catholic Church. This is a dogma: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*.

Let us present here a few samples from the Church’s magisterium to illustrate our argument.

For in fact, you know as well as We do, Venerable Brother, with what constancy our fathers endeavored to inculcate this article of faith which these innovators dare to deny, namely, the necessity of Catholic faith and unity to obtain salvation. This is what was taught by one of the most famous of the disciples of the Apostles, St. Ignatius Martyr, in his

Epistle to the Philadelphians: “Do not deceive yourselves,” he wrote to them, **“he who adheres to the author of a schism will not possess the kingdom of God.”** St. Augustine and the other bishops of Africa, assembled in 412 in the Council of Cirta expressed themselves in the following terms on this subject: **“He who is separated from the body of the Catholic Church, however laudable his conduct may otherwise seem, will never enjoy eternal life,** and the anger of God remains on him by reason of the crime of which he is guilty in living separated from Christ.” (Epistle 141) And without citing here the witness of almost innumerable other ancient Fathers, We will limit Ourselves to quoting our glorious predecessor, St. Gregory the Great, who gives explicit testimony to the fact that such is the teaching of the Catholic Church on this head. **“The holy universal Church,” he says, “teaches that God cannot be truly adored except within its fold: she affirms that all those who are separated from her will not be saved.”**¹²⁷

With God’s help, your clergy will never have any more pressing anxiety than to preach the true Catholic faith: he who does not keep it whole and without error, will indubitably be lost. **They will endeavor, therefore, to favor union with the Catholic Church; for he who is separated from it will not have life.**¹²⁸

Let those who wish to be saved come to this pillar, to this foundation of the truth which is the Church, let them come to the true Church of Christ which, in her Bishops and in the Roman Pontiff, the

¹²⁷ Gregory XVI, Encyclical *Summo jugiter*, May 27, 1832. Emphasis added.

¹²⁸ Gregory XVI, Letter *Perlatum ad Nos*, July 17, 1841. Emphasis added.

supreme head of all, possesses the uninterrupted succession of apostolic authority... We will never spare either Our efforts or Our labors, to bring back, by the grace of the same Jesus Christ, to **this unique way of truth and salvation,** those in ignorance and error.¹²⁹

The Catholic Church, because she keeps the true worship, is the inviolable sanctuary of faith itself and the temple of God, **outside of which, except with the excuse of invincible ignorance, there is no hope of life or of salvation.**¹³⁰

And here, beloved Sons and Venerable Brothers, We must once more recall and condemn the very grave error into which, unfortunately, some Catholics have fallen, who embrace **the belief that persons living in error and outside the true faith and Catholic unity can reach eternal life. This is absolutely contrary to Catholic teaching.** We know and you know that those who are invincibly ignorant of our most holy religion, and who, carefully observing the natural law and its precepts placed by God in the hearts of all men, and, disposed to obey God, lead an honest and upright life, can, with the help of divine light and grace, merit eternal life... **But this Catholic dogma is equally well known: that none can be saved outside the Catholic Church** and that those who knowingly rebel against the teaching and authority of the Church cannot obtain eternal salvation, nor can those who willingly separate themselves from union with the Church and with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, to whom the Savior

¹²⁹ Pius IX, Letter *Singulari quidem*, March 17, 1856. Emphasis added.

¹³⁰ Pius IX, Letter *Quanto conficiamur mœrore*, August 10, 1863. Emphasis added.

has entrusted the safe-keeping of his vineyard.¹³¹

The Church of Christ, therefore, is one and the same forever; those who leave it depart from the will and command of Christ the Lord – **leaving the path of salvation they enter on that of perdition.**¹³²

Consequently, all those who wish to reach salvation outside the Church, are mistaken as to the way and are engaged in a vain effort.¹³³

And may God, the author and lover of peace, in whose power are the times and moments, hasten the day when the peoples of the Orient will return to Catholic unity, and, **once more united to the Apostolic See, repudiating their error, will enter the port of eternal salvation.**¹³⁴

Some say they are not bound by the doctrine, explained in Our Encyclical Letter of a few years ago, and **based on the sources of revelation, which teaches that the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing. Some reduce to a meaningless formula the necessity of belonging to the true Church in order to gain eternal salvation.**¹³⁵

Obviously, there is no possible way to reconcile the doctrine of Vatican II with the

¹³¹ Gregory XVI, Letter *Perlatum ad Nos*, July 17, 1841. Emphasis added.

¹³² Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis cognitum*, June 29, 1896. Emphasis added.

¹³³ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Tametsi*, November 1, 1900.

¹³⁴ St. Pius X, Letter *Ex quo, nono labente*, November 26, 1910. Emphasis added.

¹³⁵ Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani Generis*, August 12, 1950. Emphasis added.

teaching of the Catholic Church. One could, however, attempt to justify the text of Vatican II by saying that what it really means is that false churches may be means of salvation for the Catholic things which are found in them. We must now address this objection.

59. Objection: Means of salvation can be found in these churches, such as valid sacraments, and certain truths of the true faith.

By administering these sacraments, and by preaching these truths of the faith, are not these false churches *means of salvation*?

60. Answer: Although it is true that some false churches have some valid sacraments, and have kept certain truths of the faith, this by no means makes the false churches themselves, as churches, means of salvation.

It is important to understand that the text of Vatican II was not speaking about individuals, but of organized churches. Let us here reproduce the original text so as to properly understand its import:

It follows that **these separated Churches and Communities**, though we believe they suffer from defects already mentioned, **have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation** which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Vatican II, Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 3.

It is evident that false churches are considered to be means of salvation *inasmuch as they are churches*. This is obvious since it is *inasmuch that they are churches* that they are said to be “by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation.” This is so because false churches, *inasmuch as they are churches*, “derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.”

We have already explained how, according to Vatican II, the fullness of the Catholic Church is a sort of subsistent “churchness” of the Church of Christ, from which derives the *metaphysical participation* of “churchness” in false churches. This doctrine is utterly unacceptable. The wording of the document is very clear, it is *inasmuch as they are churches* that false churches have any “significance” of “salvation”, and have indeed the “efficacy” of means of salvation. This efficacy is said to come from the fullness of the Catholic Church, we concede, but this consideration does not save anything, just as saying that the “wifeness” which an adulterous husband finds in a harlot comes from the fullness of the wife will not excuse him in the least, but will only add insult of the wife to adultery.

Now the fact that valid sacraments, and certain truths of the faith, can sometimes be found in false churches does not make these churches means of salvation *inasmuch as they are churches*. We need to explain this step by step.

61. Individuals can be instruments of salvation.

While it is true that an individual might be the instrument of one’s salvation, the person is still saved by the means of the Catholic

Church, and not by the means of the false church.

It is possible that a baby be baptized by a member of a false church, and die soon after. Since he has never adhered to the errors of the sect in which he was baptized, he is saved, in virtue of baptism. However, baptism administered to a baby does not make him a member of the false church in which he is baptized (contrary to what is taught by the Vatican II magisterium, it must be said). On the contrary, such babies, are by the law of the Church, considered Catholics, members of the Catholic Church. When they attain the use of reason, they can forfeit this membership in the Catholic Church by adhering to their false church. If they stay in a false church, they are then presumed by law to have sincerely adhered to the false church, and are no longer counted among the members of the Catholic Church, even if by hypothesis, someone is in invincible ignorance. Such a person could now be united to the Catholic Church only by desire, as we have explained.

Similarly, it is possible, even for a heretic, to be somewhat instrumental in the salvation of someone by preaching certain truths of the faith. It is possible that such a person will be thereby led to find the true Church and become a Catholic, for example. It is also possible that someone in a false church will have a true virtue of faith, despite the ignorance of certain truths, and be in the state of grace, and thus implicitly desire to be a member of the true Church of Christ, which is the Catholic Church. By hypothesis, such a person could be saved, if he is in invincible ignorance of the true Church, and observes the moral law to the best of his knowledge.

62. False churches are not means of salvation.

We have already explained that persons in false churches, but in invincible ignorance, and observing the moral law, are saved only through the mediation of the Catholic Church, since they were united to her by at least an implicit desire.

Now, it might be observed that the person who baptized the baby did so because he was observing the law of his church. Similarly, the preacher who taught truths of the faith, and was thus instrumental in the conversion of someone, did so on account of the mission given to him by his false church. Should we not therefore say that false churches are, at least in this sense, means of salvation?

The answer is an absolute no. This is true for two reasons.

First, as we have explained earlier, false churches are *no church at all*. They do not exist *inasmuch as they are a church*. They are merely a group of people arbitrarily deciding on what to do. If any credit for the salvation of someone must be given, then it must be given to *individuals*, not to false churches *inasmuch as they are churches*, since in this respect they do not even truly exist.

Secondly, these organized groups, as an organization, cannot ever be considered to be the *cause* of anyone's salvation. At the most they are the *occasion* of someone's salvation. Even further, we may add that, *inasmuch as they are churches*, someone is saved *in spite of them*. Let us explain.

The *cause* of something is what produces this thing as its proper effect. Hence a cause of salvation properly causes salvation. This must be distinguished from an *occasion*, which does not itself produce the effect, but

might have motivated, in some way, the proper cause to do its effect.

For example, original sin has been the occasion of the Incarnation of the Word of God, and of the Redemption. According to many theologians, Christ would not have become man, if Adam had not committed original sin. Certainly the Incarnation and the Redemption are invaluable gifts of God. But this is what they are, gifts coming from God's mercy and goodness. The sin of Adam was the *occasion* for such mercy, but it would be wrong to call original sin the proper *cause* of the Incarnation. Thus we owe our gratitude for the Incarnation to God alone, and not to Adam's sin.

Hence heresies have been many times the occasion of great doctrinal pronouncements by the magisterium of the Church. No one in his right mind would give credit to heretics for the grace of a clear exposition of the Faith. If it were only for heretics, there would never be such a proposition of the Faith. It is thanks to the fact that the Church, assisted by the Holy Ghost, could not be perverted by their errors, that the Faith was defined against them.

That adherence to a false church was the occasion on account of which heretics had their baby baptized, we could concede. That adherence to a false church was the occasion on account of which heretics preach certain truths of the faith, by which preaching one might be converted and have the true virtue of faith, we could likewise concede. But in these cases the individuals were the instrumental cause of baptism, or of the knowledge of the true faith. Adherence to a false church was merely the occasion which made the heretical minister to baptize, or to preach. False churches, *inasmuch as they are*

churches, do not cause any salvation whatsoever.

The notion of cause implies a certain flow of being, from the cause to its effect. Heat, for example, is transmitted to the water boiling on a fire. Grace is transmitted to the soul by the administration of the sacraments. Sacraments are the cause of grace, they produce it; grace flows from them. It would be obviously wrong, and even blasphemous, to say that Adam's sin is the *cause* of the grace received from the sacraments. Adam's sin was the *occasion* of the Redemption and of the institution of the seven sacraments. But one cannot say that the grace of the sacraments was *caused* by Adam's sin, as if that grace were to *flow* from this sin.

Now, when one speaks of "means of salvation" it naturally refers to a *cause* of salvation, and not merely to an *occasion*. That Vatican II refers truly to the false churches as some cause of salvation is furthermore confirmed from the fact that they are granted "efficacy", "significance", and "importance" in the mystery of salvation.

Hence Vatican II considers the false churches to be some cause of salvation, and this is utterly unacceptable.

In reality, false churches are in themselves a *cause* of damnation, since if one adheres to them sincerely, one is infallibly led to damnation. In order to be saved, one has to actually reject adherence to them, at least in an implicit manner.

63. Grace always retains some relation to the true Church of Christ.

Grace is never given on account of a false church, but on the contrary, grace always has some reference to the Catholic Church. This is very well explained by Cardinal Franzelin:

Just as graces are granted outside the Church *to form members of the Church*, if men wish to cooperate with them, so all these graces can be most truly said to be given with a view to the Church. Whoever, therefore, is brought to faith and charity outside the body of the Church, and thus seems able to be saved outside the Church, actually arrives at these supernatural dispositions, and consequently to justification and salvation, only *through the word of the Church*, as the guardian of the deposit, and *through the grace of the Church*. The Church is not simply the dispenser of these graces, but is rather the proximate end for which and in view of which these graces are granted by God.¹³⁷

If any and every grace is always granted through the unique means of the Catholic Church, then for a greater reason any salvation is always granted through the Catholic Church as the unique means of salvation.

64. Pope Leo XIII talks about the administration of valid sacraments outside of the Church.

The teaching of Pope Leo XIII is very enlightening on this question. He discusses the case of the *Petite Eglise*, which was a schismatic sect which originally had valid priests, and which was later constituted only of laypeople. Pope Leo XIII is very explicit in denying the salvific efficacy of the sacraments of the Catholic Church used in false churches:

From this it follows also that **they cannot promise themselves any of the graces and fruits of the perpetual sacrifice and**

¹³⁷ Franzelin, *De Ecclesia Christi*, Rome, 1887, p. 428.

of the sacraments which, although they are sacrilegiously administered, are nonetheless valid and serve in some measure that form and appearance of piety which St. Paul mentions (I Cor. XIII: 3) and which St. Augustine speaks of at greater length: “The form of the branch,” says the latter with great precision, “may still be visible, even apart from the vine, but the invisible life of the root can be preserved only in union with the stock. **That is why the corporal sacraments, which some keep and use outside the unity of Christ, can preserve the appearance of piety. But the invisible and spiritual virtue of true piety cannot abide there any more than feeling can remain in an amputated member.**” (Serm. LXXI, *in Matth.*, 32) But since they no longer have the sacraments, with the exception of baptism, which they confer, so it is said, without ceremonies on children; **a fruitful baptism for the latter, provided that once the age of reason is reached they do not embrace the schism;** but deadly for those who administer it, for in conferring it they willfully act in schism.¹³⁸

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches similarly:

The priest, in reciting the prayers of the mass, speaks in the person of the Church, in whose unity he remains; but in consecrating the sacrament he speaks as in the person of Christ, Whose place he holds by the power of his orders. Consequently, if a priest severed from the unity of the Church celebrates Mass, not having lost the power of order, he

¹³⁸ Leo XIII, Letter *Eximia Nos letitia*, July 19, 1893, to the Bishop of Poitiers, on the subject of the schism of the “Petite Église.” Emphasis added.

consecrates Christ's true body and blood; but because he is severed from the unity of the Church, his prayers have no efficacy.¹³⁹

65. Conclusion on this section.

The teaching of the Church is clear: no salvation is to be expected from false churches. In fact, we have shown that false churches can truly be said to be a *necessary means of damnation*, to such a point that the desire (at least) to detach oneself from them is positively necessary in order to be saved.

Adherence to a false church is a profession that the Catholic Church is not the true Church of Christ, and it is tantamount to a repudiation of the Catholic Faith, according to the solemn teaching of the 1870 Vatican Council:

The Church of Christ is one flock under one Supreme Pastor through the preservation of unity both of communion and of profession of the same faith with the Roman Pontiff. *This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and of salvation.*¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ “Sacerdos in Missa in orationibus quidem loquitur in persona ecclesiae, in cuius unitate consistit. Sed in consecratione sacramenti loquitur in persona Christi, cuius vicem in hoc gerit per ordinis potestatem. Et ideo, si sacerdos ab unitate ecclesiae praecisus Missam celebret, quia potestatem ordinis non amittit, consecrat verum corpus et sanguinem Christi, sed quia est ab ecclesiae unitate separatus, orationes eius efficaciam non habent.” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 82, a. 7, ad 3^{um}).

¹⁴⁰ First Vatican Council, Dogmatic constitution on the Church *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 3, July 18, 1870. Emphasis added.

WHERE IS THE NEW ECCLESIOLOGY LEADING?**66. Do not miss the forest for the trees.**

When asked the motives of their rejection of Vatican II, many so called “traditional” Catholics will often list a number of doctrinal changes, which are very significant, such as collegiality, salvation outside the Church, ecumenism, and religious liberty. Many will also allude to the fact the Vatican II, in its entirety, is imbued with a modernist mindset. This is absolutely true. Since it is often asserted in a vague manner, however, we would like to provide here an example of that “modernist mindset”, on the topic of ecclesiology.

Indeed, those who are defending Vatican II will often focus exclusively on a few passages and quotes of Vatican II, and make their best efforts to give it some traditional spin. This is often impossible. But the Vatican II apologist usually misses the forest for the trees. Focused as they are on a few words from one document, they do not realize that Vatican II is imbued with modernism. This they reject as a vague and gratuitous attack. They are intent on reconciling Vatican II with Catholic doctrine, but they will generally concede difficulties and ambiguities in certain formulas of Vatican II, which they cannot really understand. They do not grasp the depth of the doctrinal shift operated by Vatican II, because they are not familiar enough with modernism and the new theology developed before Vatican II. All the passages which are obscure and difficult for a Catholic trying to reconcile them with Catholic doctrine become suddenly clear when one is familiar with the writings of

Congar, Ratzinger, De Lubac, Rahner, and other theological inspirations of the Council. The texts of the Council should not indeed be bent by unapproved commentators trying to make them agree with the Catholic Faith (which does not work anyway). Instead, one should look at the meaning intended by the Council Fathers, at the authentic interpretation given by the “Novus Ordo” magisterium, at the practical application done by the “Vatican II popes” of these texts, and at the interpretation given by theologians approved and praised by the same magisterium. Once this is done, the meaning of Vatican II is no longer obscure and ambiguous. But it is not the Catholic Faith.

We will therefore endeavor to show how modernism has imbued the new ecclesiology of Vatican II, and how this analysis helps us understand why Vatican II made the doctrinal changes which it made.

67. The “nouvelle théologie” leads back to modernism.

In asking *where is the new ecclesiology leading*, we were copying the title of an article written by Father Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange O.P. in 1946, and published in the *Angelicum* journal of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, in Rome, entitled *La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?*¹⁴¹, that is, *Where is the new theology going?* The answer of the eminent theologian was that the “nouvelle théologie” was leading back to the modernism

¹⁴¹ *Angelicum*, Vol. 23, No. 3-4 (Jul.-Dec. 1946), pp. 126-145.

condemned by St. Pius X at the beginning of the century.

This was principally due to its relativisation of truth and of dogmatic formulas. Indeed the new theology which appeared in the 40s and 50s was a theology which abandoned scholasticism, and embraced the values and philosophies of the modern world as an operating system of theology. Accordingly, these theologians considered that the dogmatic definitions of the Church, although true, are relative to the philosophy of the time. Claiming that the mysteries of the faith cannot ever be adequately expressed in words, these theologians argued that dogmatic formulas are only attempts at partially expressing the said mysteries at a given point of history. Hence dogmatic formulas could be sometimes opposed and contradictory, in as much as they show and express different aspects of a mystery which cannot be adequately expressed in words, and which is understood in different philosophical notions over time.

This “nouvelle théologie” thus destroys the very foundations of the faith, since it logically denies both the possibility in the believer of truly knowing the mysteries of the faith, and the ability in the Church to define the mysteries of the faith adequately and with absolute certainty. Dogmas become vague expressions of religion, fluctuating and changing with time, while the core religious experience expressed in these changing dogmatic formulas is the only thing which matters.

In this system, the very idea of symbols of faith, dogmatic definitions, and condemnation of heresy becomes absurd. We can already perceive how someone imbued with this mentality would not want a general council to

define the truths of the faith with the promulgation of new dogmas and anathemas, but would rather want such a council to express the faith, non dogmatically, in a way adapted to “modern man”, suited to modern phenomenology, agnosticism, and indifferentism. The “pastoral nature” of Vatican II is already, in that regard, a sure sign of modernism, as we have explained in its proper chapter.

Ecumenism is driven by this “nouvelle théologie” since, logically, one has to recognize that the same experience of faith can be lived differently by different people, and expressed in different ways by different churches. It follows that one would have to take into account the point of view of non-Catholics, which is actually now an obligatory part of theological formation in the “novus ordo.” One would have to even welcome this “enrichment” and recognize that mysteries of the faith could be better understood or better lived in non-Catholic religious communities. Again, this is actually admitted and imposed in official ecumenical directories, as will be shown in its proper chapter.

68. The immutability of dogma and dogmatic formulas.

We may truly say that the heart of the theological fight against this second wave of modernism known as the “nouvelle théologie” which prevailed at Vatican II, was, in the reign of Pope Pius XII, about the immutability of dogmatic formulas. Pope Pius XII himself was aware of it, and denounced it on different occasions, such as in an allocution of September 17th, 1946:

But let no one disturb or change what is immutable. Much has been said, but not

enough after due consideration, about the “New Theology”, which, since all things are always evolving, evolves along with them, forever seeking, and never achieving its goal. If such an opinion had to be embraced, what would become of Catholic dogmas, which must never change? What would happen to the unity and stability of faith?¹⁴²

The “nouvelle théologie” maintained that the notions in which the dogmas of the faith are expressed, for example, the notion of “transubstantiation”, or the notions of “person” or “nature”, or other philosophical concept such as “matter” and “form”, are all foreign to Divine Revelation, and that although the faith is expressed through these notions at some point in time, these notions can be abandoned in favor of new ones, which would be more suited to modern man.¹⁴³

As we have alluded to, the Dominican theologian Garrigou-Lagrange was valiantly fighting back this assault on the Catholic faith. He published many writings refuting the new theologians, and defending the absolute immutability of the faith and of the dogmatic expressions of the faith.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Pope Pius XII, allocution *Quamvis inquieti* (1946).

¹⁴³ Hence we have seen, in the chapter on collegiality, how the notions of “power of orders” and “power of jurisdiction” were deemed to be some sort of invention of the late middle ages, which had perhaps some advantage at the time, but which has since lost its relevance.

¹⁴⁴ See among others: *Vérité et Immutabilité du Dogme* (in *Angelicum*, Vol. 24, 1947, pp. 124-139); *Les notions consacrées par les Conciles* (in *Angelicum*, Vol. 24, 1947, pp. 217-230); *L’immutabilité des vérités définies et le surnaturel* (in *Angelicum*, Vol. 25, 1948, pp. 285-298); *L’Encyclique Humani generis et la doctrine de Saint Thomas*, (in *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica*, Vol. 43, 1951, pp. 41-48).

The American theologian Msgr. Fenton was also observing the development of these new ideas and rightly called them out:

The belief that technical terms, while not entirely unrelated to the original deposit of revelation, are primarily expressions of concepts assimilated into the body of Christian doctrine to serve as “contingent” instruments in proposing and defending that doctrine has attracted a certain amount of notoriety in our own day...

The proponents of this viewpoint hold that these philosophical concepts remain “contingent,” even after they have been integrated into the dogmatic formulae of the Church itself. Hence they believe that progress in sacred theology in our own time must involve the abandonment of those concepts which have ceased to be “vital,” and the replacement of these notions by others more in line with modern thought.¹⁴⁵

Msgr. Fenton explains what the fundamental error of this system consists in:

The assertion that these new technical expressions, as they stand in the fabric of Christian doctrine, actually express ideas objectively foreign to the original content of divine public revelation carries with it the wholly unacceptable implication that the Church’s teaching, at any given point in its history, is not actually and objectively confided to the Church by Our Lord.¹⁴⁶

In other words, in defining dogmas, the Church would not be imposing an adequate

¹⁴⁵ Msgr. Fenton, *New Concepts in Theology*, published in the *American Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. 119, 1948, pp. 56-62.

¹⁴⁶ Msgr. Fenton, *ibid.*

exposition of the mysteries of the faith, but merely an imperfect expression, bound to time and place, which expression could later be abandoned in favor of new concepts. This is utterly unacceptable since it denies the very possibility of dogmatic definitions, and by one stroke it attacks all of the dogmatic definitions of the Church. If the mystery of the Real Presence of the Holy Eucharist, for example, defined by the Council of Trent with the notion of transubstantiation, had to be henceforth expressed with different notions, then the definition of the Council of Trent has lost all its value, and is no longer true. But if it is no longer true, then it was never true to begin with, as an objective and absolute norm of belief.

This system thus destroys the objective and absolute truth of all creeds of the faith and dogmatic formulas, and asks them to be re-evaluated.

On the contrary, the Catholic notion of evolution of dogma is that although dogmas never change, they are being more and more precisely and accurately defined by the Church. Old formulas defined by former councils never become irrelevant, but it is true that the doctrine of the Church becomes more and more precise over time.

The result [of the progress of theology] is not and cannot be an addition of concepts objectively distinct from those previously contained in Catholic teaching, but a more perfect grasp of the old concepts and an accurate expression of these concepts in terms of our own day.¹⁴⁷

69. Is it possible to maintain the teaching of the ecumenical councils while abandoning the notions consecrated by them in favor of

¹⁴⁷ Msgr. Fenton, *ibid.*

new ones which are deemed to be “equivalent”?

The answer is in the negative. The notions defined in the councils are not temporary models and hypotheses such as the hypothesis of Ptolemy in astronomy. Such a hypothesis is not proposed as absolutely true, objectively, but only as a model, that is, as a means which accounts for the observable phenomena of the stars and the planets. Once an hypothesis of this kind is proven false, it is abandoned, in favor of another model. It is possible, in these experimental sciences, that different models will account for different phenomena, thus completing each other. St. Thomas says:

In astrology the theory of eccentrics and epicycles is considered as established, because thereby the sensible appearances of the heavenly movements can be explained; not, however, as if this proof were sufficient, forasmuch as some other theory might explain them.¹⁴⁸

If we were to say that dogmatic formulas are equivalent to these scientific hypotheses, we would fall into the modernism condemned by St. Pius X, since if dogmatic notions are only an explanation of phenomena, and do not adequately express the essence of a divine mystery, then the dogmatic definitions become a mere norm of behavior. This modernist idea was condemned in the 26th proposition of *Lamentabili*:

26. The dogmas of the Faith are to be held only according to their practical sense; that is to say, as preceptive norms

¹⁴⁸ I, q. 32, a. 1, ad 2^m.

of conduct and not as norms of believing.¹⁴⁹

A dogmatic formula, just as any proposition, is composed of words, which signify notions, united by the structure of the proposition. If one notion of this formula has to be abandoned, the formula itself is abandoned.

This is true not only of dogmatic formulas, it is true of any statement. For example, if I say that “my car is blue” I predicate the color blue of my car. By doing so, I say that the notion “blue” belongs to “my car.” But if the notion of “blue” were to be abandoned, either because the word “blue” does not refer to the same color anymore, or because one would have entirely abandoned the sense of sight and the notion of colors, then my statement itself is to be abandoned. If “blue” is no longer what it used to be, then I cannot anymore maintain that my car is blue, and we are once more in complete ignorance of the color of my car. For in the proposition “my car is blue” the verb “is” unites the concept “blue” to the concept of “my car.” That is the import of this statement. As a consequence, if one of these two notions (either “blue” or “my car”) is abandoned, the statement itself which unites these two notions is abandoned.

Hence, when the new theologians started to relativize the definition of sanctifying grace by the Council of Trent as the “formal cause of justification”, Father Garrigou-Lagrance made it very clear that one cannot abandon the notion of “formal cause” as contingent and not anymore meaningful without thereby also abandoning the definition itself.

¹⁴⁹ Syllabus of the errors of the modernists, Decree of the Holy Office *Lamentabili sane*, 1907, proposition 26. D. 2026.

One cannot keep the “sense of the proposition of the Council” while abandoning the notion of formal cause; for the sense of this *conciliar statement* is inseparable from this notion of formal cause, which is the predicate of the said proposition. If this notion is unstable, the conciliar statement is unstable too, since it is but the union of this notion with the subject by the verb to be...

It would be only true to say: at the time of the Council of Trent it was true to say: “grace is the formal cause of justification”, but today one must *renounce* this notion and conceive things differently...

In order to maintain the meaning of a conciliar proposition which unites two notions by the verb to be, these two notions must be themselves maintained. If one of them is replaced by a new notion, even an analogical one, then it is no longer the same judgment, and the “sense” of the Council is not maintained.¹⁵⁰

This error brings us back, once again, to the core operating principle of modernism in theology, as it has been described and condemned by Pope St. Pius X:

For, to begin with symbolism, since symbols are but symbols in regard to their objects and only instruments in regard to the believer, it is necessary first of all, according to the teachings of the Modernists, that the believer do not lay too much stress on the formula, but avail himself of it only with the scope of uniting himself to the absolute truth which the formula at once reveals and

¹⁵⁰ R.P. Garrigou-Lagrance O.P., *Les notions consacrées par les Conciles*, in *Angelicum*, Vol. 24, 1947, pp. 217-230.

conceals, that is to say, endeavors to express but without succeeding in doing so. They would also have the believer avail himself of the formulas only in as far as they are useful to him, for they are given to be a help and not a hindrance; with proper regard, however, for the social respect due to formulas which the public magisterium has deemed suitable for expressing the common consciousness until such time as the same magisterium provide otherwise.¹⁵¹

70. Vatican II: a shift from an essential definition of the nature of the Church to a plurality of ecclesiological models.

The major accomplishment of Vatican II in the field of ecclesiology is not so much the clarifications given to a particular point, such as the question of the episcopacy, but rather it is the complete change of approach to ecclesiology.

Vatican II was able to abandon the traditional scholastic method of ecclesiology to replace it with the method of the “nouvelle théologie” presented above.

The preparatory schema on the Church, which was proposed by the Holy Office, followed a traditional outline. It started, in its first chapter, entitled “*On the nature of the Church Militant*,” to describe and define the Church as it is objectively, just as the Church has defined the mysteries of the faith over the centuries.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ St. Pius X, Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, n. 19 (1907).

¹⁵² The last paragraph of this first chapter is worth quoting in its entirety: “The Holy Synod teaches and solemnly professes, therefore, that there is only one single true Church of Jesus Christ, that Church which in the Creed we proclaim to be one, holy, Catholic and apostolic, the Church which the Savior acquired for Himself on the Cross and joined to Himself as a body to

It is precisely for this reason that this schema was rejected by the Council Fathers, and replaced by an entirely new document, concocted by a commission whose majority was infected with the ideas of the “nouvelle théologie.” The first chapter of the new document, which would become *Lumen gentium*, was no longer about defining the nature of the Church, but was rather entitled “*The Mystery of the Church*.”

Certainly, the Church is a mystery of our faith, a divine institution. Yet, just as all the mysteries of the faith, the Church has been able to define her nature and her divine constitution in more and more precise terms. The Blessed Trinity is the highest mysteries of all, and the early ecumenical councils defined it with very precise dogmatic formulas. The mystery of the incarnation has also been proposed by the Church in a very detailed fashion. The Church has condemned the heresies opposed to her definitions.

What this change means, however, from a document defining the nature of the Church to a new document presenting the Church as a mystery, is the refusal to give absolute and immutable dogmatic formulas. The schema presented by the Holy Office was rejected because it proceeded to do exactly this: to define the nature of the Church, to determine

the head and as a bride to the bridegroom, the Church which, after his resurrection, He handed over to be governed to St. Peter and his successors, the Roman Pontiffs. Therefore, only the Catholic Roman Church is rightly called the Church.” (The Latin text of this schema can be found in *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, Vol. I, Pars IV, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1971, pp. 12-122.) It is shocking that Vatican II would eventually teach the exact opposite of this doctrine, by refusing an exclusive identification of the Church of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church.

who are its members, what is her hierarchy, etc. All of this was meant to be a further development of the teaching which the Catholic Church had already proposed in the past.

What the Council Fathers desired, however, was the abandonment of the model of perfect society and juridical institution, which had been used in the past by the magisterium. Cardinal Suenens thus explains:

The Holy Office had elaborated a schema imbued with an ecclesiology strongly marked by the canonical and structural aspect of the Church, without first underlining her spiritual and evangelical aspects. It was important, in our view, to change from a juridical ecclesiology to an ecclesiology of communion, centered on the very mystery of the Church in its trinitarian depths.¹⁵³

As pious as this might sound, the emphasis of the “spiritual aspects” of the Church is built on a rejection of her structural nature. This would be equivalent to a defense of Christ’s divinity based on the refusal to define that Christ had a perfect and integral human nature. Cardinal Suenens, as so many of these new theologians, establishes an opposition where there is none. When the Church is defined as a perfect society, having a juridical hierarchy, her supernatural nature and origin is not thereby denied.

In fact, the opposite is true: God is glorified in the work of the divine institution of the Church, by which a society composed of men, and having a juridical organization, is continually led and vivified by the Holy

¹⁵³ Léon Joseph Suenens, *Souvenirs et Espérances*, Paris, 1991, p. 114.

Ghost; just as the mystery of the Incarnation gives glory to God, by which mystery the human nature is assumed by a divine person. If Christ does not possess a perfect human nature, then the mystery of the Incarnation is denied, and the Redemption is made impossible. For it is precisely because a human nature was assumed by a divine Person that this man, Christ, was able to suffer and die, thereby giving infinite glory to God. So also it gives glory to God that the Church be a supernatural society, vivified by the Holy Ghost, and yet visible and composed of human elements, having all the characteristics of a perfect human society, just as Christ had all the features of an integral human nature.

Under the pretext of leaving room for mystery, therefore, the progressive Fathers of Vatican II actually denied and abandoned precisely what is most sublime in this mystery.

For what they mean by “mystery” is the operating system of the “nouvelle théologie,” namely the idea that dogmatic formulas do not provide us with an objective and absolute description of the mysteries of the faith, but are rather instruments which help the believers to describe these mysteries, in such a way, however,

that the believer do not lay too much stress on the formula, but avail himself of it only with the scope of uniting himself to the absolute truth which the formula at once reveals and conceals, that is to say, endeavors to express but without succeeding in doing so.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Description of modernism in theology by St. Pius X, in his Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, n. 19 (1907).

Hence, instead of having a systematic presentation of the mysteries of the faith, the new theologians propose different “models,” similar to what the model of Ptolemy is in astronomy. These models describe a mystery of the faith without ever defining it in an absolute way. One is supposed to coordinate different models, which express different aspects of the mystery.

The Church, like other complex structures, has a plurality of faces. Its reality exceeds its image, and even its model. This is what the Catholic Church has understood, particularly at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). On that occasion it was reminded in a most solemn manner that the reality of the Church is too rich for one formula alone. Instead of proposing a complete definition of the Church, the Fathers of the Council have formulated an initial chapter, entitled “The Mystery of the Church” (*LG 1*).¹⁵⁵

As a consequence, Vatican II has officially endorsed the “theology of communion” and the theology of the “Church as sacrament” in its teaching. This is a concession to the new theologians who had been developing before Vatican II, as an alternative to the “institutional model” (that is, the traditional doctrine that the Church is a perfect society), the “models” of “communion” and of “sacrament.” We shall briefly explain these new ecclesiological models.

¹⁵⁵ Artur Kapzrak, *Pluralité des modèles ecclésiologiques dans le catholicisme post-Vatican II*, p. 4, published in *Res-Systemica*, Vol. 5, Paris, 2005.

71. An ecclesiology of models.

Certainly one of the best exponents of this new ecclesiology is Avery Dulles,¹⁵⁶ an American theologian, who was made a cardinal by John Paul II as a reward for his contribution to theology. His book, *Models of the Church*, is read in seminaries, and recognized by all to be a reference of post-Vatican II ecclesiology. In this book, the author embraces and defends the error of the “nouvelle théologie” which we have presented above, with a disconcerting candor and simplicity. He thus explains why the new ecclesiology has recourse to models rather than to absolute formulas:

In selecting the term “models” rather than “aspects” or “dimensions,” I wish to indicate my conviction that the Church, like other theological realities, is a mystery. Mysteries are realities of which we cannot speak directly...

The peculiarity of models, as contrasted with aspects, is that we cannot integrate them into a single synthetic vision on the level of articulate, categorical thought. In order to do justice to the various aspects of the Church, as a complex reality, we must work simultaneously with different models. By a kind of mental juggling act, we have to keep several models in the air at once.¹⁵⁷

The same author then proceeds to explain the methodology of the use of models in ecclesiology, and it is evident that it

¹⁵⁶ Avery Dulles (1918-2008) was a Jesuit American theologian, indeed the first U.S. theologian to ever be made a Cardinal. He was known and read internationally, as a prominent theologian in the post-Vatican II Church.

¹⁵⁷ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded edition, New-York, 2014, p. [2].

considers it as a tool, just as the model of Ptolemy was a scientific tool:

On the explanatory level, models serve to synthesize what we already know or at least are inclined to believe. A model is accepted if it accounts for a large number of biblical and traditional data and accords with what history and experience tell us about the Christian life.¹⁵⁸

In other words, a model has no objective and absolute value, but rather it is a tool able to relate different phenomena and observations obtained from divine revelation and religious experience, just as the hypothesis of Ptolemy was a tool able to account for certain observations. Models have limits, and are meant to complement each other:

Because their correspondence with the mystery of the Church is only partial and functional, models are necessarily inadequate. They illumine certain phenomena but not others.¹⁵⁹

The more applications a given model has, the more it suggests a real isomorphism between the Church and the reality being used as the analogue. The analogy will never be perfect because the Church, as a mystery of grace, has properties not paralleled by anything knowable outside the faith.¹⁶⁰

It is important to understand this theological context when analyzing the Vatican II documents. For in them we find an endorsement of the “nouvelle théologie”, evident to someone familiar with the

¹⁵⁸ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁹ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁰ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

controversies leading to the council, but which would be very obscure to someone who had never heard of it before. Avery Dulles explains again:

Vatican Council II in its Constitution on the Church made ample use of the models of the Body of Christ and the Sacrament, but its dominant model was rather that of the People of God. This paradigm focused attention on the Church as a network of interpersonal relationships, on the Church as community. This is still the dominant model for many Roman Catholics who consider themselves progressives and invoke the teaching of Vatican II as their authority.¹⁶¹

The author will later list the “institution” (that is, the traditional doctrine that the Church is a perfect society) as one of the models. This means that the Church would be likened to a perfect society, at least in some ways, but that it is not really a perfect society, since “it is a mystery.” Equivalently, modernists could deny the reality of the humanity of Christ, or of His bodily resurrection, by reducing all the expressions of the faith to the level of “models.” It comes as no surprise that Avery Dulles calls for this methodology to be applied to all fields of theology, and not merely to ecclesiology:

The method of models is applicable to the whole of theology, and not simply to ecclesiology.¹⁶²

Now, since models are only imperfect reflections of the mystery of the Church, none of them is perfect and should be followed in all of its parts:

¹⁶¹ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁶² Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Pursued alone, any single model will lead to distortions. It will misplace the accent, and thus entail consequences that are not valid.¹⁶³

How do we then know which model to use on what particular question of ecclesiology, such as membership in the Church or ecumenism? Deduction and logic is ruled out, and religious experience is given as the compass:

Deduction is ruled out because we have no clear abstract concepts of the Church that could furnish terms for a syllogism.¹⁶⁴

Because the mystery of the Church is at work in the hearts of committed Christians, as something in which they vitally participate, they can assess the adequacy and limits of various models by consulting their own experience. A recognition of the inner and supernatural dimension of theological epistemology is one of the major breakthroughs of our time.¹⁶⁵

By this last comment, the author acknowledges that religious experience is now recognized as a criterion of doctrine, which is certainly a “major breakthrough,” since it changes from being condemned as one of the key components of the “synthesis of all heresies”¹⁶⁶ into being promoted as an official method of discerning doctrine.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁶⁴ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁵ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁶ This is indeed how St. Pius X defines modernism in the Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, n. 39 (1907).

¹⁶⁷ The 2023 “synod on synodality” of the “listening Church” is but a continuation of this “major breakthrough.”

72. The abandonment of the “institutional model.”

All of the definitions about the Church, the Papacy, and membership in the Church, given by the councils and the Roman Pontiffs describing the Church as a perfect society with a divine hierarchy, with a distinction of the power of orders and the power of jurisdiction, all these, we are told to believe, are but a “model” describing the Church. In other words, it is comparable to the Ptolemy system, and has its advantages, but should not be taken too far. The new theologians are very insistent in saying that, particularly since the time of the Council of Trent, Catholic theology and Catholic teaching has exaggerated the emphasis on the “institutional model,” by using it as if it described exactly and absolutely the nature of the Church. This, they consider, is to forget the mysterious nature of the Church. Let Avery Dulles explain it to us:

As a model succeeds in dealing with a number of different problems, it becomes an object of confidence, sometimes to such an extent that theologians almost cease to question its appropriateness for almost any problem that may arise. In the Scholasticism of the Counter Reformation period, the Church was so exclusively presented on the analogy of the secular state that this model became, for practical purposes, the only one in Roman Catholic theological currency. Even today, many middle-aged Catholics are acutely uncomfortable with any other paradigm of the Church than the *societas perfecta*. But actually this societal model has been displaced from the center of Catholic theology since about 1940.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Since about 1940, indeed, the new theologians have tried by all means to spread the abandonment of this “institutional model,” in favor of other ones, such as the model of “communion” or the model of the “Church-sacrament.”

Many saw in Pope Pius XII teaching the beginning of an official change of ecclesiological model, when he defined the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. They indeed usually consider this image of the Mystical Body of Christ as pertaining to the ecclesiology of “communion” more than to the ecclesiology of “institution.” This is false, obviously. The Church is both an institution and the Mystical Body of Christ, and it is also a communion. All these notions can be used to describe the Church in a perfectly orthodox way, and in harmonious fashion. But the new theologians establish oppositions where there is none, as we have explained, and view these different aspects of the Church as images which do not adequately express what the Church is, and which somewhat agree together while also contradicting each other in some things, because the Church’s nature is a mystery which cannot ever be categorically defined, as they say.

The “institution” model is the first one analyzed by Avery Dulles, and the reader understands very quickly that it is not his favorite. It is said to have “a comparatively meager basis in Scripture and in early Church tradition”¹⁶⁹; it “tends to exaggerate the role of human authority and thus to turn the gospel into a new law”¹⁷⁰; it “raises obstacles to a creative and fruitful

¹⁶⁹ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁷⁰ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

theology”¹⁷¹ because “it binds theology too exclusively to the defense of currently official positions”¹⁷², meaning that it binds theologians to conform to the authentic teaching of the Church’s magisterium. Avery Dulles also explains how this model cannot satisfactorily square with ecumenism:

Ecumenically, this ecclesiology is sterile. As will be seen in a later chapter, the institutional model fails to account for the spiritual vitality of non-Roman Catholic churches.¹⁷³

In chapter IX, Avery Dulles shows that he indeed perfectly understands the implications of the “institutional model” when it comes to ecumenism and non-Catholic churches:

The institutional model, taken in isolation, is the least favorable to ecumenism... If one holds, for the reasons just explained, that there is but one Church in the full theological sense of the term, and combines this with the affirmation that the Church is necessarily an organized society, then it follows that no more than one denominational body can legitimately claim to be the Church of Christ. To anyone who accepts the post-Tridentine ecclesiology, as it may be termed, this logic should be evident.¹⁷⁴

He continues further:

No other position would seem to be consistent with the teaching of *Humani generis* that the “Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing.” Adherents of this exclusivist institutionalism will have a

¹⁷¹ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁷⁴ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

distinctive understanding of the apostolate of Christian unity. This was expressed in classic form in the encyclical of Pius XI, *Mortalium animos* (1928), a vigorous condemnation of the ecumenical movement as it then appeared to Roman eyes.¹⁷⁵

The same author explains how Vatican II was able to detach itself from these clear and logical doctrine:

Holding to a perfect equation between the Mystical Body and the visibly organized society of the Church, *Mystici Corporis* taught that anyone outside the Roman Catholic Church is to that extent outside the Mystical Body... At Vatican II, the preconiliar schema *De ecclesia* would have reaffirmed the coextensiveness of the Church as a society (*ecclesia societas*) and the Mystical Body of Christ. The Council Fathers, however, complained that the schema did not do justice to the mystical dimension of the Church, but reduced it too much to the juridical.¹⁷⁶

As a consequence, the original schema was thrown away, and a new text was written, in conformity with the tenets of the new theologians. It denied the perfect coextensiveness of the society of the Church and the Mystical Body of Christ. Avery Dulles further comments on this other “major breakthrough” of Vatican II:

This view has important ramifications regarding the status of non-Roman Catholic communions. It opens up the possibility that, notwithstanding any institutional defects they may be judged to have, they may verify to a very high degree the nature of Church as

¹⁷⁵ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁷⁶ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

communion. Even if one assumes, then, that the Roman Catholic Church and it alone has the “substantials” required from an institutional point of view, one cannot legitimately infer that it alone is the Church, or that it in every respect surpasses all other churches.¹⁷⁷

The endorsement of the model of the Church as “communion” by Vatican II was therefore a tool to justify ecumenism:

On the institutional model, there could be no possibility of organic reunion, but only of conversion. There could be nothing positively Christian in other traditions that Roman Catholicism did not claim to have in a yet higher degree. Thus all the changing and all the concessions would have to come from the non-Catholic side, in the direction of alignment with the “true Church.” On the communion model, visible unity was considered unessential to the true realization of the Church or spiritual communion, although it was regarded as a desirable manifestation.¹⁷⁸

The model which is perhaps the most favorable to ecumenical gatherings and the visible manifestation of the unity which the model of “communion” proves to be already present among different churches is the model of Church as “sacrament.” By this is meant that the Church is both visible and invisible, and that the visible aspect of the Church is a means to attain its spiritual aspect. It means as well that the Church is a sign which gives Christ’s presence to the world. The Church is also conceived, in this view, as a sign of God’s gift to the world. In this model, visible unity becomes a manifestation and a means to realize the

¹⁷⁷ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

¹⁷⁸ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

communion already existing among christians:

On the sacramental view, it may be acknowledged that Christian groups not in union with Rome belong visibly to the Church; for the Church of Christ is today historically realized in many churches, some of them not in union with Rome. These many churches, by reason of their mutual division, fail to show up the unity of the one Church, and in this respect they are deficient as a sign of Christ. For the unity of the Church to be achieved in a sacramentally appropriate way, there must be reconciliation among the churches; they must re-establish visible communion with one another. Christian reunion is therefore conceived not as the return of straying sheep to the true fold (as in the first model), nor as the manifestation of something that already exists in a hidden way (as in the second), but as a restoration of visible communion among groups of Christians that need each other in order that any one of them may become less inadequately the sacrament of Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁹

73. The ecclesiological models of Vatican II.

We have, so far, principally adduced testimonies of theologians, and not the texts of Vatican II themselves, to explain how the council has shifted from traditional ecclesiology to a method more in line with the so-called “nouvelle théologie.” This was necessary, in order to understand how expressions such as “theology of communion” and the “Church as a sacrament” have to be understood in the context of the twentieth century. These expressions, used by the Vatican II magisterium, cannot but be

¹⁷⁹ Avery Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

perceived as a direct endorsement of the theological developments made by the new theologians. These theologians were gaining more and more influence before the Council; they were the leading intellectuals at the Council; they were its main commentators afterwards; and many of them were made cardinals as a token of honor and gratitude for their contribution. It comes as no surprise that the texts themselves of the Council reflect their theology, and are in perfect agreement with it.

Hence, expressions which would appear without any importance to the neophyte should now make a lot of sense to the reader.

Among the ecclesiological models used by Vatican II, we find those of the “people of God”, of “communion”, and of the “Church-sacrament”. Without studying in all of their import these different models,¹⁸⁰ it will suffice to show that the Vatican II magisterium makes reference to them. This indeed is enough to explain that, the model of an institutional Church having been put aside, the novelties of ecumenism, communion with false churches, religious liberty, and collegiality, were made possible.

74. Vatican II and the ecclesiological model of the “people of God.”

This model is the one favored by the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium*. Chapter II is indeed entitled *On the people of God*. Similarly, the second book of the 1983 Code of Canon Law is called *The People of God*, and begins with a part on “Christ’s faithful,” which includes all the baptized, whether Catholic or not. For the model of the

¹⁸⁰ These models are all presented one by one by Avery Dulles, in *Models of the Church*, Expanded edition, New-York, 2014.

“people of God” is indeed broader than the institutional Catholic Church. It consists of all those who profess to be “Christians.” This model has thus the advantage, for the new theologians, of placing the idea of the Church as a community of believers as its fundamental characteristic, prior to any reference to a hierarchy. The expression “people of God” appears no less than 41 times in *Lumen gentium*. As we have said, the first chapter describes the Church as a mystery, with the connotation that it cannot be adequately defined. Immediately after that, there is the chapter on the “people of God” before addressing the notion of hierarchy. The same pattern is seen in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. The emphasis and priority given to the Church as the “community” of the “people of God” over the hierarchical institution is a striking departure from tradition, which however is merely an implementation of the decision to relay the model of the Church as an institution to the background. It also makes clear the precedence of the “Church of Christ”, of which all christians are said to be members, over the organized institution known as the Roman Catholic Church.

In an ecumenical council, where every single word is discussed, these details are very significant, and are chosen by design.

This “people of God” image leads to the “theology of communion”, which Avery Dulles actually classifies together.¹⁸¹

75. Vatican II and the “communion” model.

A letter published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1992 actually lays out this ecclesiological model, and its

¹⁸¹ *Op. cit.*, chapter III.

understanding by Vatican II in great detail. We do not therefore feel the need to prove our point, if such an official document avows it and defends it publicly.

The first paragraph of this letter confirms indeed in a few lines that Vatican II has used new ecclesiological models:

The concept of *communion* (*koinonia*), which appears with a certain prominence in the texts of the Second Vatican Council, is very suitable for expressing the core of the Mystery of the Church, and can certainly be a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology. A deeper appreciation of the fact that the Church is a Communion is, indeed, a task of special importance, which provides ample latitude for theological reflection on the mystery of the Church, “*whose nature is such that it always admits new and deeper exploring*”. However, some approaches to ecclesiology suffer from a clearly inadequate awareness of the Church as a *mystery of communion*, especially insofar as they have not sufficiently integrated the concept of *communion* with the concepts of *People of God* and of the *Body of Christ*, and have not given due importance to the relationship between the *Church as communion* and the *Church as sacrament*.¹⁸²

This clearly proves that Vatican II does indeed use the different ecclesiological models presented above, stressing the importance to balance them between each other. The “institutional model” is notably missing from this presentation.

¹⁸² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church understood as Communion*, of May 28th, 1992, n. 1.

The references, provided by the Congregation itself, indicating where Vatican II uses the “theology of communion” are the following: Const. *Lumen gentium*, nn. 4, 8, 13-15, 18, 21, 24-25; Const. *Dei Verbum*, n. 10; Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 32; Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, nn. 2-4, 14-15, 17-19, 22.

The core of this theology of communion, which we have already analyzed, is presented in Vatican II’s decree on ecumenism:

For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect. The differences that exist in varying degrees between them and the Catholic Church - whether in doctrine and sometimes in discipline, or concerning the structure of the Church - do indeed create many obstacles, sometimes serious ones, to full ecclesiastical communion.¹⁸³

The “communion” model is the theological basis of ecumenism. It is also said to be the theological basis of collegiality.

76. Vatican II and the model of the “Church as sacrament”.

The letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on communion emphasized the importance of understanding the ecclesiology of communion together with that of the “Church as Sacrament of salvation.” This emphasis is made in order to stress the necessity of establishing a visible communion, as a *sign* or *sacrament* of the internal communion. Hence the letter explains:

¹⁸³ Vatican II, Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 3.

This link between the invisible and visible elements of ecclesial communion constitutes the Church as the *Sacrament* of salvation.¹⁸⁴

This should not be understood, however, as a necessity for all non-Catholics to return to Catholic unity and communion. This “ecumenism of return” has been officially abandoned by Vatican II. What this is about, instead, is the establishment of an ever greater visible unity between the different churches and ecclesial communities. Unity does not mean uniformity, would say Congar. The visible unity of christians, however, in the Vatican II magisterium, becomes necessary for the perfect proclamation of the gospel. In other words, the visible unity of christians becomes a sign of being disciples of Christ, and in this way the visible unity of the Church becomes a “sacrament” of Christ. This is the theme developed, for example, by John Paul II, in his 1995 Encyclical *Ut unum sint*. Ecumenism is recognized as the path to follow in order to manifest the profound unity of the Church, and thereby to effectively proclaim the gospel by being a “sacrament” of Christ:

Taking part in this movement, which is called ecumenical, are those who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. They join in not merely as individuals but also as members of the corporate groups in which they have heard the Gospel, and which each regards as his Church and, indeed, God’s. And yet almost everyone, though in different ways, longs that there

¹⁸⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church understood as Communion*, of May 28th, 1992, n. 4.

may be one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God.¹⁸⁵

It is evident that John Paul II does not consider the return of erring individuals to the Catholic Church as the path to the perfect unity of christians. Rather, he expects that there “may be a visible Church of God, a Church truly universal”, suggesting that the Catholic Church does not already perfectly fulfill this desire.

¹⁸⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995), n. 7.