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The New Catechism and Christian Unity

Richard John Neuhaus

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The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the authoritative reference or baseline for understanding Catholic faith, sacramental practice, moral doctrine, and prayer. As the title suggests, the chief purpose is catechetical, to provide a doctrinal framework from which the church in various parts of the world might develop regional catechisms and other educational materials. Much to almost everybody's surprise, however, the *Catechism* itself became an immediate best- seller, with more than forty million copies sold to date, and thus it has established itself as the text consulted by clergy and laity alike for a reliable word on questions of Catholic faith and life.

While one suspects that few Catholics and even fewer non- Catholics have read all eight hundred pages, the *Catechism* has also established itself as an ecumenical reference of great importance. This is strikingly evident, for instance, in current discussions between Catholics and evangelical Protestants. The 1994 declaration that Charles Colson and I initiated on rapprochement between Evangelicals and Catholics has provoked numerous articles and several books from the evangelical side, both sympathetic and hostile to the initiative. In those responses and in the 1995 book of essays *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, it is obvious that the *Catechism* has provided a common ground on which agreements and disagreements can be engaged.[1]

For thinking about Christian unity, the *Catechism* is an indispensable baseline, but other texts necessarily come into play. There is, for example, the very impressive product of the several theological dialogues of the last quarter century, especially with Anglicans and Lutherans. While the dialogue volumes are not authoritative in that p. 156 they have not been formally 'received' by the several parties, they do suggest points of convergence and consensus that can be tested by reference to texts such as the *Catechism*. The authoritative source of Catholic ecumenism, of course, is the Second Vatican Council, notably *Lumen Gentium* ('Dogmatic Constitution on the Church') and *Unitatis Redintegratio* ('Decree on Ecumenism'). This entire body of teaching is further developed in the 1995 encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint* ('That They May All Be One'). So, all these points of reference in a continuing clarification and development of doctrine are encompassed in this brief reflection on 'The Catechism and Christian Unity'.

Orthodoxy, both upper case and lower case, is at the heart of Catholic teaching on Christian unity. The reader of the *Catechism* will note the numerous references to the Orthodox Church and the absence of direct reference to the churches and communions derived from the sixteenth- century Reformation in the West. The careful reader will recognize that the classic concerns of the Reformation, although not mentioned, are very much taken into account. These historic disputes are not addressed directly because the *Catechism* intends to be a positive setting forth of Catholic teaching, as is explained by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Christoph Schönborn (the chief editor of the *Catechism*) in *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.[2]

The priority of East- West relations in the Catholic Church's view of the ecumenical imperative is longstanding. *Ut Unum Sint* repeatedly emphasizes that Catholics can settle for nothing less than the restoration of the full communion that was formally broken in 1054. In the *Catechism* and elsewhere, this pontificate has underscored that, as the second millennium has been the millennium of Christian divisions, so we should look forward to the third millennium as the millennium of Christian unity. This necessarily involves healing the breach of the sixteenth century between Rome and the Reformation. Here, too,

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[1] Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Waco: Word, 1995).

[2] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Christoph Schönborn, *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994).

orthodoxy (lower case) is the key, for the only unity that can be trusted is unity in the truth.

With the churches that comprise the Orthodox Church, it is suggested that there are no church- dividing disagreements on the constituting truths of apostolic Christianity. It is not too much to say, somewhat paradoxically, that the chief obstacle to full communion between East and West is the absence of full communion between East and West. Of course, there are long- standing differences regarding jurisdiction, especially when it comes to what the Catholic Church has claimed for the universal and immediate jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter. But the *Catechism* implies and *Ut Unum Sint* makes explicit a bold initiative in suggesting that the Catholic Church is ready, indeed eager, to join with others in rethinking how p. 157 the Petrine ministry can be exercised in a way that more effectively serves the unity of all Christians.

The dogmatic claims regarding the papacy cannot be compromised. No room for doubt is left on that score. It is precisely the uncompromised and uncompromisable strength of those dogmatic claims that makes it imperative that the ministry of Peter be exercised in a way that better secures the unity of all Christians. The Anglican and Lutheran dialogues have strongly affirmed a 'Petrine ministry' as part of Christ's intention for his church. Of course, it is not self- evident how one gets from Petrine ministry to papal primacy. It is therefore of great significance that Rome lifts up the first millennium, before the separation of East and West, as a period that may provide models for the exercise of the papal office in the future. The argument is that the Petrine ministry belongs to all Christians, that for reasons historical and functional, that ministry is exercised by the Bishop of Rome, that it has sometimes been exercised in a way that has served disunity rather than unity, and that all Christians should be part of thinking through how it might be better exercised in the future.

I am confident that we would not go wrong in understanding the Holy Father to be saying that unity is more important than jurisdiction. Christians in the East have been waiting a thousand years to hear a Bishop of Rome say that, and now it is being said. What exactly that might mean for the governance of the churches of the East, and what implications it might have for the way in which papal jurisdiction is exercised in the West—these are questions to be worked out in the years ahead. The historic breakthrough of this pontificate is that it has put these questions on the table.

Some Orthodox who have been reading the *Catechism* and related documents have been taken aback by the urgency and scope of Rome's proposals for reconciliation. Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, like his immediate predecessors, has been responsive to the bold initiatives of Rome. But he is not the 'Pope of the East' in a manner comparable to the role of the Bishop of Rome in the West. The jurisdictional dynamics in Orthodoxy are famously, some would say notoriously, fissiparous, and it is almost impossible to overestimate the deep- seated suspicions that many Orthodox have of Rome. The Catholic Church is viewed as the nine- hundred- pound gorilla on the ecclesiastical stage, and the Orthodox have nurtured for centuries memories of what they believe to be their abuse and betrayal at the hands of Rome. The situation is not helped by the current insecurities of Orthodox churches, notably of the Russian Church, still emerging from decades of persecution and of morally compromising accommodation under Communist regimes.

In restoring full communion with the West, the Ecumenical Patriarch and other Orthodox leaders cannot get out too far ahead without risking new conflicts, even schisms, within Orthodoxy. In the last two years, the monks of Mount Athos—who have no canonical authority but possess p. 158 enormous moral influence—have taken the lead in opposing the rapprochement that has been achieved to date. In very blunt language, they

have made statements putting Bartholomew on notice and have come close to suggesting that he and others are selling out Orthodoxy to its traditional enemy. Nonetheless, the *Catechism* and, most particularly, *Ut Unum Sint* support the perception that this pope has no higher hope than that his pontificate will witness, if not the restoration of full communion with the East, the irrevocable setting of the Church's course toward that end.

The Catholic commitment to Christian unity is, it is repeatedly said, 'irrevocable'. Ecumenism is not something optional; it belongs to the very nature of the Catholic Church. This is a truth too little appreciated by conservative Catholics, also in this country. That the ecumenical movement is viewed with a measure of suspicion is understandable. The modern ecumenical movement began with the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910 as an essentially Protestant affair and later gave birth to institutions such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and National Council of Churches (NCC). While the Faith and Order wing of the WCC made important theological contributions over the years—contributions that are generously recognized by Rome—those institutions sometimes promoted a theological liberalism and left- leaning political activism that alarmed conservative Catholics.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that many Catholics watched with anxiety as the Church, following the Second Vatican Council, seemed to be 'joining' the ecumenical movement. The reality, of course, is that the Catholic Church has not joined the ecumenical movement. It has reconstituted the ecumenical movement. It is not too much to say that the Catholic Church is the centre of the movement toward Christian unity in our time. This is in part because of sheer size. Of the 1.8 billion Christians in the world (approximately one third of the world's population), more than a billion are Roman Catholic, more than 200 million are Orthodox, and most of the others are part of the maddeningly diverse Protestant world of 'evangelicalism'. The 'classical' Reformation traditions (for example, Lutheran, Anglican, Calvinist), commonly referred to as mainline Protestantism, and which make up the core constituency of the WCC, constitute perhaps 100 million Christians in the world, and are generally in decline. There is no way in which the World Council of Churches could have absorbed the Catholic Church; and the Catholic Church's understanding of itself would have made it difficult, if not impossible, to join as a member church among other member churches.

The last point engages the theological reason why it is more accurate to say that the Catholic Church, in its turn toward the quest for Christian unity, has reconstituted rather than joined the ecumenical movement. The ecclesiology of Vatican II is that the church of Jesus Christ 'subsists' in the Catholic Church in a singular way. The Catholic Church is not simply a church among the churches—it is not even p. 159 the biggest or the best or the oldest or the grandest of the churches. Rather, it is, quite simply, the church of Jesus Christ fully and rightly ordered. That may sound arrogant to non-Catholics and even to some Catholics, but the pertinent question is whether it is true. It may also sound exclusivist and profoundly anti- ecumenical, but in fact it is not. Just the opposite is the case.

The additional teaching of Vatican II, reiterated in the *Catechism*, is that all who are Christians are 'truly but imperfectly' in communion with the Catholic Church. All those who are, as the New Testament puts it, 'in Christ' are necessarily, however imperfectly, in communion with the body of Christ that is the church. Christ the head and the church that is his body cannot be separated. Where Christ is, there, however imperfectly expressed, is the church. Christ and the church are coterminous. The goal of ecumenism is not to create a unity that does not exist but to bring to fulfilment a unity that is the gift of God already given. In *Lumen Gentium*, the Council readily acknowledges that the saving and sanctifying grace of God is present outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church. At the

same time, it emphasizes that these gifts of God have built into them a gravitational pull toward unity with the Catholic Church.

Ecumenism does not relativize or diminish the unique claims of the Catholic Church. On the contrary, it is the unique status of the Catholic Church that makes ecumenism mandatory. Ecumenism is not a programme of the Catholic Church; ecumenism is in the nature of being the Catholic Church. The Church cannot be true to itself unless it is ecumenical. It follows that to be an orthodox Catholic is to be an ecumenical Catholic. The Extraordinary Synod of the Council, held in 1985, made clear that the ecumenical mandate is indelibly imprinted on the Church's mind and mission.

The same message is driven home in *Ut Unum Sint*: 'At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself *irrevocably* to following the path of the ecumenical venture, thus heeding the Spirit of the Lord.' And again: 'This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ's mission. Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community…. To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer: "*Ut Unum Sint*".' Finally: 'Thus it is absolutely clear that ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, *is not just some sort of 'appendix'* which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does.' Most Catholics, to put it gently, have not internalized this commitment to ecumenism. Non-Catholics can hold Catholics to their ecumenical obligation by appealing p. 160 to the ecclesiology of the *Catechism*.

A sense of imminence marks Catholic thinking about the healing of the breach between East and West. Not so with respect to healing the breach between Rome and the Reformation. While the Magisterium (teaching authority) recognizes that much progress has been made in theological dialogues, especially with Lutherans and Anglicans the *Catechism* reflects the understanding that it cannot be assumed with Protestants, as it can be assumed with the Orthodox, that there is already a secure foundation for full communion. *Ut Unum Sint*, for instance, lists five areas where much work is needed 'before a true consensus of faith can be achieved'. They are (1) the relationship between Scripture and sacred tradition, (2) the eucharist as real presence and sacrifice, (3) the sacrament of ordination and the meaning of apostolic ministry, (4) the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Church, and (5) Mary as mother of God and icon of the Church.

Some may be discouraged by that list, since these are issues that have been in dispute between Protestants and Catholics for almost five centuries. The difference at the edge of the third millennium is that they are now the subject of a common exploration as 'we look at one another in the light of the Apostolic Tradition'. The difference now is that the exploration begins from the premise that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The difference now is that we mutually ask forgiveness for sins against unity in the past and encourage one another, above all, to conversion to Christ, which of necessity is conversion to the unity of his body, the church. The difference now is that a reconstituted ecumenical movement seeks no unity other than unity in the fullness of truth revealed by God. The difference now is the irrevocable pledge of the Catholic Church to join with all Christians in striving for the fulfilment of the prayer of our Lord that they may be one.

There is no denying that the high hopes of Edinburgh in 1910 have met with many and bitter disappointments. More recently, decisions in the Anglican communion regarding ordered ministry have cast a deep shadow over hopes for ecclesial reconciliation between Rome and Canterbury. It may be said that, in the West, ours is a moment of diminished

ecumenical expectations. Precisely in such a moment of diminished expectations, the Catholic Church pledges, and asks others to pledge, a redoubled devotion to Christian unity. For Catholics, it is not a matter of choice, as is made unmistakably clear in the ecclesiology of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

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Changing Patterns in the Church's Ministry in the Age of the Reformation

Richard B. Norton

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Preface: The purpose of an historical paper in the Hayama Seminar is to open up an area of church history which will have a direct bearing on the conference theme. Of several possibilities I have chosen the age of the Protestant Reformation, but with this choice I realize that I am tackling an area which in no wise can be adequately treated within the time limits set for this presentation.

Basically I shall develop this essay by, first, taking a look at the concept of ministry in the so-called 'classical Reformers' (by which I mean Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, etc.,) and then, secondly, looking at the concept of ministry in the so-called 'Radical Reformation' (by which I mean the scattered groups on the left which rejected the mainstream reformation attempts). To set the stage, by way of introduction, I shall try to draw a simple picture of the Medieval Church, and to draw the essay to a conclusion, I will try to raise some points relevant to our discussion today.

INTRODUCTION

Ministry in the Medieval Church

A traveller crossing Europe, say in 1517, would have found himself at almost any point in his journey within sight of the spire of a great cathedral, a monastery chapel, or a village church. In a word, as the church dominated architecturally all the buildings clustered about it, so the church dominated all medieval life. But what was this church of which we speak? Medieval theologians would most likely have defined it simply as 'the community of the faithful'. But in using the term 'faithful' the emphasis would have fallen on 'obedience' rather than on 'faith', though to be sure, it was not without reason that the Medieval Age has been called 'the Age of Faith'. To get immediately to the heart of the matter, the church on the eve of the Reformation was the clergy. Without the properly