

CHAPTER XI

ECUMENISM

48. Introduction.

Since the Church, as the one and unique institution of salvation, was built by Christ to be the one and only sign lifted up among the nations, nothing can ever intrinsically violate its unity.

But the separations from the Catholic Church that have occurred over the centuries do in some way obscure the manifestation of this indefectible unity before the whole world.¹

This Sacred Synod, deeply grieving over these separations, declares that nothing should be left undone which might contribute to the restoration of the full unity of all Christians, that the will of Christ by which all the members of the Church are one in him might be extended to all those who glory in his name, and that the true faith might be more effectively announced to those who are not yet Christians.

And this is all the more urgent in our times, when, by the disposition of divine Providence, the separated communities of Christians are also themselves more eagerly aspiring to the unity of all.

49. The Existing Bonds and the Unity Intended by Christ.²

The Catholic Church, acknowledging the bonds by which the separated brethren, and particularly those of the Eastern rites, are linked to it, pursues with maternal love³ all those who, reborn in baptism (see 1 Tm 3:5), along with the Church confess Christ to be both God and Savior, and bear witness to him before the world, especially if they share in the true Body and Blood of Christ.

But these bonds of mutual union, even if they are Eucharistic, cannot constitute that unity which Christ commanded to exist among all the baptized and which Holy Scripture and the Church's venerable tradition so manifestly display.

For, right from the beginning, Eucharistic worship was so intimately linked with true profession of the apostolic faith that all the faithful were said to persevere at once in the teaching of the Apostles and in fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and in prayer (see Acts 2:42).

From its beginnings, the Church has considered the Eucharist to be the consummation of its unity of faith and fellowship and as the sign and source of its unity before the whole world. That is why when schisms and heresies arose, it so affirmed the necessity of the unity of all Christians that it would only admit to eucharistic worship those who, in communion with a bishop linked to the Roman See, professed the one, true and entire faith.⁴

Only in this way is that Eucharistic communion a sign of that perfect unity of the whole Church which St. Paul commended when he said, "Because there is one bread, we, though many, are one Body, because we all eat of the same bread" (1 Cor 10:17).

50. The Relationship of the Catholic Church to Individual Separated Christians.

The Catholic Church, knowing that separated Christians are deprived of many of the means of salvation and that by their separation the manifestation of the unity of the sign lifted up

among the nations is in fact obscured, looks with maternal love upon them individually and lovingly invites them to herself.⁵

Therefore, this Holy Synod approves the initiatives of Catholics by which separated brethren are being enlightened about the teaching and life of the Church so that even individually they may be drawn towards her, and it urges that such efforts be still further promoted.

51. The Relationship of the Catholic Church to Separated Christian Communities.

It is not only as separate individuals but also as united communities that separated Christians find inducements to come to the Church's unity. For in these communities there are certain of the elements of the Church, especially the Sacred Scriptures and the sacraments, which, as efficacious means and signs of unity, can produce mutual union in Christ and by their very nature, as realities proper to Christ's Church, impel towards unity.⁶

Nevertheless, insofar as these communities retain those elements in such a way as to separate them from the fullness of revelation, they in fact constitute one of the causes of the division of Christ's heritage.

While not denying that the elements retained by these communities can be salvific there also and can produce the fruits of a Christian spiritual life, this Sacred Synod nevertheless firmly teaches that the fullness of revelation was entrusted by Christ solely to the Catholic Church, that it cannot be divided,⁷ and that, therefore, it is there that it must be acknowledged by all Christians.

Therefore, this holy Synod admonishes all the faithful more and more by word and example to show the separated brethren that the fullness of revelation is truly and purely maintained only in the Catholic Church, and to do this in such a way that when finally our brothers are again linked with us, they may with us also possess the fullness of Christ's heritage.⁸

52. The Relationship of the Catholic Church to the Ecumenical Movement outside the Church.

This holy Synod joyfully acknowledges that in many parts of the world, among many of the communities which are separated from the Chair of St. Peter, a certain ecumenical movement, as it is called, has arisen for the sake of bringing into unity all who believe in Christ the Lord. This Synod benevolently follows these attempts the more closely the more it perceives the breath of God to be present in it.⁹

But if it is to conform to Christ's will, this manifestation of unity must be strictly shaped in accordance with the same Christ's will, in unity of faith, sacramental communion, and government. Those, therefore, who seek to obey Christ's will with all their hearts and to grow in their degree of "ecumenicity," must, led by the Spirit of Christ, draw closer and closer to that Church which, although it is a single and indivisible house of God, still rejoices in its many mansions all over the world, in unity of faith, government and communion beneath the one Vicar of Christ.

This holy Synod, knowing that the path to restoring the unity of all Christians has for various reasons become very difficult, most lovingly commends to the prayers of the faithful the sincere efforts of dissident Christians to overcome the separations.

53. The Purpose of the Ecumenical Movement within the Catholic Church; Errors to be Avoided.

This holy Synod also rejoices that the ecumenical movement is also growing daily within the Catholic Church, which not only seeks to help by heartfelt prayer the separated Christians who are seeking unity, but also strives by theological and pastoral efforts that the Church may daily more clearly appear to all Christians as their paternal home¹⁰ and that the separated communities themselves may more easily find their way to true unity.

But this holy Synod warns all the faithful that there is need for great prudence in this activity lest, moved by a certain apostolic zeal but without knowledge, they be exposed to the danger of indifferentism or a so-called interconfessionalism or by an excited way of proceeding injure rather than serve the intended purpose.¹¹

For this reason, the Synod entrusts the ecumenical movement to the bishops of the world so that, under the leadership of the Apostolic See, they may skillfully promote and prudently direct it.

*54. Communion in Sacred Worship.*¹²

In communities separated from the Church, sacraments besides baptism are sometimes validly conferred, and it can happen that the children of the Church can and even must rightly request the administration of those sacraments by separated ministers. On the other hand, kindly Mother Church most greatly desires that the separated brethren, insofar as it is possible and they need it, come to share in the many goods which Christ entrusted to his Bride alone;¹³ for, as properly baptized, they too, if they are in good faith, are *per se* capable of receiving the other sacraments fruitfully.¹⁴ Finally, the Church, although reluctantly, does tolerate mixed marriages, in which the Catholic party and the baptized non-Catholic party are the ministers of the sacrament. For all these reasons, not every active participation by which dissident Christians have some effective part in Catholic liturgy, or by which Catholics take a similarly active part in the liturgy of the separated brethren, must be considered of itself intrinsically evil, even if quite often such participation must, for serious reasons, be prohibited. Therefore, the Church has the right and duty to lay down laws on communion in worship for the good both of the Church and of those who are unfortunately separated from her.

The principal obstacle to liturgical communion between Catholics and the separated brethren is the nature of the communion in worship by which the members of the Church themselves are linked with one another. For the communion of the members of the Church with one another in their sacred worship is a gift of Christ himself, given solely to his one Church, by which the union in faith and in communion under one supreme pastor is consummated and which is a sign of that unity in truth and love by which the Church is the mystical Body of Christ and already here on earth a figure and anticipation of heavenly union in Christ.

Since, therefore, in the sacred liturgy, carried out by ministers in Christ's name and with the Church's mandate, the communion of the faithful confesses the faith of the Church (see Acts 2:42), active participation in the sacred liturgy must *per se* be considered a certain profession of faith. Consequently, the active participation of dissident Christians both in the very worship of the Church in general and in particular receptions of the sacraments generally cannot be permitted, since, intrinsically, it is contrary to the unity of faith and communion and, extrinsically, it obscures the sign of the unity of the Body of Christ, and from such defects the dangers of religious indifferentism, interconfessionalism, and scandal often flow.

Therefore, it is only for serious reasons and if the dangers are removed that the active participation of separated Christians in the Church's worship can be permitted. Whether and under what conditions the Church can assist with the sacraments those who have not departed from the Church by their own act is to be determined in the first place by the seriousness of their need or of the great spiritual benefit to them.

This same inviolable teaching about the unity of the Church also generally prohibits the active participation by Catholics in the sacred rites of the separated communities.

For it is an intrinsically evil act, and therefore never to be permitted, not only when a Catholic, taking part in the worship of a separated community, inwardly approves of it, but also when, without such inward approval, in communities in which the sacraments are not validly conferred, he dares to receive the putative sacrament. Since the very rite itself offends against Catholic truth, such reception must be considered intrinsically evil and is never to be permitted. Therefore, any active participation by Catholics in such worship cannot of itself be permitted.

Furthermore, even in communities in which the sacraments are validly conferred, common worship is prohibited by the nature of the case. For the worship offered in those communities, insofar as it is separated from the worship of the Church does not effect the consummation of unity and contradicts the uniqueness of the sign which Christ gave the Church in its worship, and it is therefore not legitimately performed. Nor should it be forgotten that active participation in the sacred worship of a separated community, even if no consent at all is given to its error, of its very nature signifies assent to the faith of that community and therefore regularly provokes scandal and bears with it a danger to the faith. Even in these circumstances, therefore, any active participation by Catholics in their worship, even when the sacraments are not received, can only be permitted for serious reasons, when care has been taken to avoid scandal and the danger of perversion of faith or indifferentism, and with the permission of legitimate authority.

Where extreme spiritual necessity or at least some great advantage urges it, it can be permitted to ask for and to receive the sacraments from the minister of such a separated community, as long as the conditions mentioned are fulfilled. For it is a matter here of sacraments proper to the Church which are carried out in an objectively true worship, and therefore such reception is not necessarily linked to agreement in the error proper to this community.

Sometimes in a worship of itself objectively true, there are, nevertheless, false liturgical prayers or even incorrect preaching; and in these cases it is very difficult to remove the dangers of perversion of the faith, indifferentism, and scandal.

Finally, the conditions to be set down for licit participation vary according to the nature of each sacrament.

The mere presence of separated Christians at our sacred liturgy is entirely licit, indeed to be desired, while, on the other hand, Catholics may, for a reasonable cause and provided the dangers are removed, simply be present at the worship of a separated community.

As for the sacramentals, prayers, sacred places, funerals and other things of this sort, with regard to which the doctrine of the Church's unity does not of itself prohibit communion, the Church prescribes what is demanded for the benefit of souls, both Catholic and separated Christians, according to circumstances of time and place.

But it is not permitted at all to consider true communion in worship as a means generally to be used to bring about the restoration of the unity of Christians in the one Church of Christ. But some religious manifestation of the awareness of our many links with separated Christians is not excluded, provided that the principles given above are followed and with the approval of superiors in accordance with circumstances of time and place.

55. Cooperation between Catholics and Separated Christians.

Catholics can and sometimes must cooperate with separated Christians when it is a matter of the ways and means of defending certain principles of the Christian religion or also of the

natural law, or restoring a right social order, or of meeting the economic or cultural needs of a people.¹⁵

Such cooperation can not only be of great good to the human family, it can also be an important help in overcoming mutual suspicions and prejudices.

But for this to be done without spiritual danger, this holy Synod warns Catholics that they must always keep in mind divine revelation and the Church's teaching, particularly on social issues,¹⁶ and that all such efforts must be undertaken with the approval and under the vigilance of ecclesiastical authority.

Finally, this noble work of restoring the unity of all Christians in the one true faith and the one Church must become an ever greater part in the care of souls. Let all the faithful, together with the separated brethren, insistently pray God for this unity, and let them be convinced that the most effective means of opening a way for separated Christians to acknowledge and embrace the one Church of Christ is the faith of Catholics when it is confirmed by their honorable lives.¹⁷

NOTES

1. See Instruction of the Holy Office, *Ecclesia Catholica*, AAS 42 (1950) 144.

2. Paragraph 2 is presented in this way for the following reasons:

1) For the sake of the *dissident Eastern Orthodox*: For they make the Eucharist the center of all religion. Orthodox theologians, today, generally abandoning the idea of a democratic structure of the Church ("*sobornost*"), especially stress Catholic elements and particularly the doctrine about the Eucharist, as "*koinonia*." Led in the first place by Prof. Afanassief, many Orthodox theologians create an opposition between a universalistic ecclesiology (that is, a theology of the one and universal, hierarchically organized Church--as in the Catholic Church) and a Eucharistic ecclesiology (that is, a theology of the particular Churches, not juridically subordinated in virtue of divine law--as in the Orthodox Church). That is why it seems most useful to indicate how the Catholic Church also begins from a Eucharistic ecclesiology which is at the same time universalistic. See N. Afanassief, N. Koulomzine, J. Meyendorff, A. Schmemmann, *La primauté de Pierre dans l'Eglise Orthodoxe* (Neuchâtel, 1960).

2) For the sake of "High Church" Protestants: These all agree that Eucharistic "*koinonia*" is a sign of unity of faith and ecclesiastical communion; indeed they generally admit apostolic succession, but never unity of ecclesiastical communion under the Pope. See E. Abbot, *Catholicity: A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West*, being a Report presented to H.Gr. the Archbishop of Canterbury (London, 1947); M. Thurian, *L'Eucharistie* (Neuchâtel-Paris, 1959); H. Asmussen and W. Staehlin, *Die Katholizität der Kirche* (Stuttgart, 1957).

3) For the sake of Lutherans of a pure reforming type: They generally consider worship, especially the Eucharist, to be a sign of the unity of the Church, requiring unity in the confession of faith, but not ecclesiastical communion. See W. Elert, *Abendmahl und Kirchengemeinschaft in der alten Kirche, hauptsächlich des Ostens* (Berlin, 1954); P. Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, Gütersloh, 1952, pp. 507-27.

4) In the "World Council of Churches" unity is lacking with regard to doctrine and a practical mode of acting with respect to intercommunion, a difference of opinion which is closely connected with the question of the unity of the Church. That is why it will be useful to indicate the dogmatic and biblical basis for the sign of unity displayed in worship itself.

5) Nor do all Catholics have a clear view of the essential relation between ecclesiastical and Eucharistic communion, and this is the source of some less than praiseworthy views both of the unity and of the uniqueness of the Church and of the unity and uniqueness of worship.

3. See John XXIII, *Ad Petri cathedram*, AAS 51 (1959) 515.

4. See L. Hertling, "Communio und Primat," in *Miscellanea Hist. Pontif.*, VII (Rome, 1943) 1-48, esp. 27-34; see also G. Bardy, *La théologie de l'Eglise de S. Clément de Rome à S. Irénée* (Paris 1945), and, from the Protestant side, W. Elert, l.c., pp. 113-21.

5. See John XXIII, *Ad Petri cathedram*, l.c., pp. 515 and 517.

6. With regard to the dissident Oriental communities, see John XXIII, *Ad Petri cathedram*, l.c., p. 515; see also J. Gribomont, "Du Sacrement de l'Eglise et de ses réalisations imparfaites," *Irénikon*, 22 (1949) 356-57. Whatever the nature of such a separated community may be, it is certain that in the tradition the name "Church" is *often* and *constantly* attributed to the separated Oriental communities. See the following documents of the Church:

1074-1075: Gregory VII speaks of "the Church of Constantinople" (PL 148, 385-87) and of "the Oriental Church" (PL 148, 399-400);

1095: Urban II listed among the goals of the Crusade "the liberation of the Oriental Churches" (Villey, *La Croisade*, p. 81);

1215: the Fourth Lateran Council speaks of "the Church of the Greeks" (Mansi, 22, 989), as does Gregroy IX (Mansi, 23, 58 A,C.E and 59, B and C);

1274: the Second Council of Lyon: "Even if it does not refer to the Oriental Churches still separated, the conclusion of the profession of faith of Michael Paleologus still has its value: "The fullness of authority consists in this: that it admits other churches into a share in its solicitude; of them many and particularly the patriarchal churches have been honored by the same Roman Church with various privileges, while maintaining its prerogatives both in the general Councils and in some other matters" (Mansi, 24, 70Af);

1439: Council of Florence: In the Bull, *Laetentur caeli*, 6 July 1439, it is written: "The wall that divided the western and the eastern church has been removed;"

1848: Pius IX, *In Suprema*: "whether this unity of the Holy and Apostolic Church can be found in so great a division of their Churches" (*Pii IX P.M. Acta*, I, p. 85);

1867: Pius IX, Consistorial Address about the Patriarchate of Armenians in Cilicia, 12 July 1867, *ASS* 3 (1867), 345, notes that the eastern schism "long ago unfortunately separated those Churches from Catholic unity... Although some of those Churches have returned to Catholic unity...;"

1868: Pius IX, Apostolic Letter *Arcano divinae Providentiae*, *ASS* 4 (1868), 129-31, has as its title: "The Apostolic Letter of Pius IX to all the bishops of the Churches of the Oriental Church not in communion with the Apostolic See." At times in this letter those separated communities are called "Churches."

1894: Leo XIII, Enc. *Praeclara gratulationis* (*Leonis XIII P.M. Acta*, 14 [1894], 202), speaks of the "eastern Churches" and says, "when communion with us was restored, what great dignity, what glory came by divine grace to your Churches;"

1898: Leo XIII, Apostolic Letter, *Cum divini Pastoris* (*Ibid.*, 18 [1898], 49), has the following title: "Apostolic Letters on the erection of the Archsodality of Prayers and Pious Works for the Return of the Dissident Churches to Catholic unity;"

1907: the Sacred Congregation for Indulgences speaks of "praying for the desired union

between the Catholic Church and the Churches dissenting from it;"

1912: St. Pius X, Apostolic Constitution *Tradita ab antiquis*, AAS 4 (1912), 610: "peace between the Greek Church and the Latin;"

1920: Benedict XV, Enc. *Spiritus Paraclitus*, AAS 12 (1920), 421: "And would that the eastern Churches, which have been too long distant from the Chair of Peter, especially would obey these warnings;"

1924: Pius XI, AAS 16 (1924), 491: "the doctrines and practices of the Churches of the East;"

1928: Pius XI, Enc. *Mortalium animos*, AAS 20 (1928), 9: speaks of the efforts of non-Catholics "to associate the Christian Churches" (but here "Church" seems to be used in a sociological sense);

1944: Pius XII, Enc. *Orientalis Ecclesiae decus*, AAS 36 (1944), 129ff, several times calls the separated eastern communities "eastern Churches;"

1945, Pius XII, Enc. *Orientalis omnes Ecclesias*, AAS 38 (1946), 35, 36, 42, 45-48, is speaking of the separated communities (p. 33) which are sometimes called "societies" (p. 59) and sometimes "Churches" (e.g., p. 56);

1953: Pius XII, Enc. *Orientalis Ecclesias*, AAS 45 (1953), 5, speaking of the separated communities.

For the material in this note, see Congar, *Chrétien désunis*, pp. 381-82, complemented by *Irénikon*, 23 (1950), 22-24.

7. John XXIII, *Ad Petri cathedram*, l.c., p. 511; see also the Allocution of the same Supreme Pontiff on the occasion of a "Holy Hour" in the Vatican Basilica, *L'Osserv. Rom.*, June 7, 1959; another Allocution of his to the diocesan directors of Italian Catholic Action, *L'Osserv. Rom.*, August 10-11, 1959; and his Encyclical, *Grata recordatio*, AAS, 51 (1959) 677-78.

8. See St. Augustine, *Miscellanea Agostiniana, t. I, Sermones* (Morin), p. 575: "I don't say to him, 'Lord, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me;' I say, 'Lord, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.'" Also, *Sermo ad Caesareensis Ecclesiae plebem*, n. 5 (PL 43, 694): "Come to the inheritance, especially since that inheritance is not the land given to the sons of Jacob. The land was given to the sons of Israel, and the more who took possession of it, the smaller it got. Our inheritance is called peace. I read the will: "My peace I give to you; my peace I leave to you" (Jn 14:27). Let us possess together what cannot be divided. Many possessors, no matter how many come, do not make peace smaller."

9. Instruction of the Holy Office, *Ecclesia Catholica*, l.c., p. 142.

10. John XXIII, *Ad Petri cathedram*, l.c., pp. 510-11.

11. Instruction of the Holy Office, *Ecclesia Catholica*, l.c., p. 144.

12. See Martin V, *Ad evitanda scandala*, Mansi 27, 1192-93; on this constitution see Suarez, *Disput., De Censuris*, disp. IX, sect. II, ed. Vives, Paris, 1866, t. XXIII, pp. 262-70; F. Cappello, *De Censuris*, ed. 4, Rome, 1950, p. 133. For almost all the past documents see, "Verballi delle Conferenze Patriarcali sullo stato delle Chiese Orientali e delle adunanze della Commissione Cardinalizia per promuovere la riunione delle Chiese dissidenti, tenute alla presenza del S.P. Leone XIII (1894-1902) con note illustrative e documenti (manuscript)," Vatican Press, 1945, pp. 537-637 (*de Communicatione in Sacris*); also Marco della Pietra, *Collectio Rescriptorum praesertim S.S. Congreg. S. Officii et de Prop. Fide*, 1933, preserved in the Sacred Congregation

for the Eastern Churches, prot. 38/29. To these documents should especially be added the "Decree of the Holy Office on giving the sacraments under certain conditions to children of the 'Orthodox' studying in Catholic schools," issued in 1957. The following canons of the Code of Canon Law are also pertinent: 731:2; 1258:1; 2259-2263; 2267; 2238:2; 2316 and 2314:1,n.1.

A revision of the prescriptions of the Roman Curia on relations with non-Catholics and especially a relaxation with regard to communion in worship with the Eastern "Orthodox" is requested by more than sixty Bishops from oriental regions and by two Superiors general of religious orders. Six Armenian Bishops and some others spoke against a false and dangerous "ecumenical irenicism." But Cardinal Agagianian and his eight Armenian Bishops made no statement about communion in worship (See *Acta et Documenta Conc. Vat. II apparando*, Ser. I, Vol. II, Pars IV, pp. 394-400 and Pars IV passim).

A relaxation of the prescriptions on communion in worship was also requested by the Pontifical Institute for Oriental Studies (see *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, Pars I, pp. 158ff.)

13. See Leo XIII, *Satis cognitum*, ASS 28 (1895-95) 712.

14. See P. Gasparri, *Tract. canonicus de SS. Eucharistia*, t. II, Paris, 1897, p. 354: "Baptized wayfarers in virtue of the divine law are capable of receiving Holy Communion. But...the Church...forbids that Holy Communion be given to some people, even though capable of it by divine law."

15. Instruction of the Holy Office, *Ecclesia Catholica*, l.c., p. 145.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.