

# True Ecumenism

## The One True Church + Christian Ecumenism + Goodwill with Other Religions

**POPE BENEDICT XVI** is showing us the real meaning of ecumenism with special initiatives to provide new and conciliatory disciplines for:-

- the Society of St Pius X to end an irregular situation;
- Reunion of the Byzantine Orthodox Churches;
- Anglican Ordinariates for corporate conversions.

### HOLINESS

The **sanctification of all Catholics** was the first of three aims set by Blessed John XXIII for the Second Vatican Council. Note that chapter 5 in VCII's *Dogmatic Constitution 'Lumen Gentium' on the Church* is *The Call to Holiness* for all members of the Church.

Pope Benedict is working for this particularly through liturgical reforms of the present Roman Rite. Foremost are new translations of the English liturgy ordered by Pope John Paul II. Yet to come is the "Reform of the Reform" of the *Novus Ordo* liturgy.

Pope Benedict regards personal sanctity as the true measure of "active participation in the liturgy" (HO 71).

### ECUMENISM

Sanctification is the essential underpinning for ecumenical activity, i.e. working for re-unification of all the baptized, second of the three aims set for VCII.

In Australia, we tend to think of ecumenism with the Anglicans and other Protestant denominations. But we must not neglect the big picture: ecumenism with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, Greek and Russian etc.

### NEW EVANGELIZATION

Through sanctification and ecumenism the third aim of VCII is to be achieved — the conversion of the world to Our Lord and His Gospel.

Pope Benedict is developing Pope John Paul II's **New Evangelization** — first towards lapsed Catholics, lapsed from Mass or into paganism, then non-Catholic Christians, non-Christians and the pagans. *Pagans* is not derogatory but accurate in our secular society for those without religion. Our Lord is loving them all towards repentance and conversion: so must we.

A vital step in this regard is **the rebuilding of Christendom** in Europe and England. The Pope's visit to England 16th-19th September is a vigorous "wake-up" call, as also is his newly set up Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.

### MANY A TRUE WORD spoken in pronouns...

In the late 1960s Cardinal Gilroy of Sydney used meet regularly for private prayers for Christian Unity with the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney.

The latter expressed his idea of ecumenism: "How wonderful! we both minister to the One Flock of Christ."

It is alleged that the Cardinal's response was (don't spoil a good story asking if he really said it), "Yes, you and yours — and I and His."

### THE "ONE TRUE CHURCH" in VCII:-

**The one<sup>1</sup> mediator, Christ**, established and ever sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible organization through which He communicates truth and grace to all men. But the society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical Body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complete reality which comes together from a human and a divine element...

**This is the sole<sup>2</sup> Church of Christ** which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after His resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care (Jn. 21:17), commissioning him and the other Apostles to extend and rule it (cf. Matt. 28:18, etc.), and which He raised up for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, **subsists<sup>3</sup> in the Catholic Church**, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless, **many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines<sup>4</sup>**. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards catholic unity.

*Dogmatic Constitution 'Lumen Gentium' on the Church §8*  
Throughout this Handouts, nouns have capitals as in the Latin text.

Notes on the superscripts:-

1. **One**: Latin *unicus* = one and only, alone.
2. **Sole**: Latin *unica* = one and only, alone. The same adjective is used for the **uniqueness of Christ and of His Church; further, the latter is a visible organization, *compaginem visibilem***.
3. **Subsists**: English: to exist, continue in existence;  
Latin *subsistit* - to remain standing.
4. **Many elements... outside**: this declaration is welcoming to the Separated Brethren, and implies that every truth, no matter who says it, and every good deed, no matter who does it, is of the Holy Spirit.

### "Outside the Church there is No Salvation"

**HOW are we to understand** this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Re-formulated positively, it means all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is His Body.

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; He is present to us in His body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church §846*

This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and His Church: "Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience — those too may achieve eternal salvation."

*ibid.* §847; cf. §848: the Old Green Catechism had "invincible ignorance"

In 1870, Vatican 1 upheld there is no salvation without Catholic faith and the state of grace. However, a former atheist might accept an extraordinary interior illumination close to death of which even bystanders would not be aware.

# Non-Catholics — "The cup's half full" as well as "half empty."

**SALVATION is possible for non-Catholic Christians, non-Christians, last-moment believers, but not automatic for anyone — VCII neither said nor meant that all are actually saved.**

## THE FAITHFUL of the Catholic Church

- necessity of being a Catholic and persevering in love
- ignorance will excuse if it is without personal fault

**THIS HOLY COUNCIL** first of all turns its attention to the Catholic faithful. Basing itself on scripture and tradition, it teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; He is present to us in His Body which is the Church. He Himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:5), and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through baptism as through a door. **Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it.**

Fully incorporated into the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who — by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion — are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the Bishops. **Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not** however persevere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but "in body" not "in heart." All children of the Church should nevertheless remember that their exalted condition results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond in thought, word and deed to that grace, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be the more severely judged.

Catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, desire with an explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church, are by that very intention joined to her. With love and solicitude mother Church already embraces them as her own.

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* §14.

## NON-CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS: ecumenism

- Ecumenism concerns the baptized Separated Brethren
- Non-Christian religions involve a separate apostolate

**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. For there are many who hold sacred Scripture in honour as a rule of faith and of life, who have a sincere religious zeal, who lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and the Saviour, who are sealed by baptism which unites them to Christ, and who indeed recognize and receive other sacraments in their own Churches or ecclesiastical communities. Many of them possess the episcopate, celebrate the holy Eucharist and cultivate devotion of the Virgin Mother of God. There is furthermore a sharing in prayer and spiritual benefits; these Christians are indeed in some real way joined to us in the Holy 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. And so the Spirit stirs up desires and actions in all of Christ's disciples in order that all may be peaceably united, as Christ ordained, in one flock under one shepherd. Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope and work that this may be achieved, and she exhorts her children to purification and renewal so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the Church.

*ibid.*§15

## NON-CHRISTIANS

**FINALLY**, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways.

### The Jews

**THERE IS**, first, that people to which the covenants and promises were made and from which Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom. 9:4-5): in view of the divine choice, they are a people most dear for the sake of the fathers, for the gifts of God are without repentance (cf. Rom. 11:28-29).

### The Moslems

**BUT THE PLAN** of salvation acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Moslems: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day.

### Other religions

**NOR IS GOD** remote from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, since He gives to all men life and breath and all things (cf. Acts 17:25-28), and since the Saviour wills all men to be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience — those too may achieve eternal salvation.

### Agnostics and Atheists

**NOR SHALL** divine Providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by Him Who enlightens all men that they may at length have life. But very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and served the world rather than the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:21, 25). Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair. Hence to procure the glory of God and the salvation of all these, the Church, mindful of the Lord's command, "preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:16) takes zealous care to foster the missions.

*ibid.*§16.

## MISUNDERSTANDINGS on Ecumenism

Muddled Catholics hold the Protestant idea of ecumenism, like their Uniting Church, 'averaging' the beliefs of Methodists, Congregationalists and some Presbyterians. But the Catholic Church teaches we *are*, already the one true Church, yet the mis-takes and sins of churchmen led some Christians to break away.

Earlier, there was another sort of misunderstanding at the Malines Conversations 1921 -1925. Lord Halifax, an Anglican, gave Cardinal Mercier the impression that all Anglicans were High Church and ready for corporate reunion. It was not so.

## GOODWILL to non-Catholics/non-Christians

- First, be virtuous — grow in grace and wisdom
- "Be ready listeners, slow to speak, slow to take offence"
- Answer queries — "clear, brief and easily assimilated by all"
- Be ready to give "a reason for the hope which is in you"
- Know your Bible and Catechism and Apologetics
- Don't be pushy or argumentative — it's counter-productive
- Pray for a Providential time to speak out — watch/listen