

“An Exchange of Gifts:” Benedict XVI’s Eucharistic Ecclesiology as an Approach to Ecumenism

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Abstract: Christian unity, or the “ecumenical movement,” is one of Joseph Ratzinger’s (turn Benedict XVI) most apparent apostolates during his Pontificate. His thought on the matter is a development of the theologies developed in the Second Vatican Council’s *Lumen Gentium* and John Paul II’s *Ut Unum Sint*, borrowing the words “exchange of gifts,” which affirms elements of sanctification present in churches “separated” from Rome. This work will expand on how Benedict XVI’s teachings about the Eucharist as the Sacrament of Unity gained merit in the Church’s ecumenical movement. This theology can be described as a “Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” and it has earlier codification made formal through the thought of Henri de Lubac. It will be done firstly through an exposition of de Lubac’s commentary in *Mystici Corporis*, which confirms the origins of Eucharistic Ecclesiology through Patristic and Pauline theology. Next is a look at Pope Benedict XVI’s interjection of this theology into his ecumenical thought with a particular emphasis on the essentialities of the ontological reality of the Church, the shared Christian traditions, and “spiritual ecumenism.” In the final discussions, we shall include a quick run through his Pontificate’s ecumenical initiatives where the teachings about Eucharistic Ecclesiology are dispersed in various circumstances.

Keywords: Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger, Henri de Lubac, Ecumenism, Eucharistic Ecclesiology

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Introduction

Ecumenism is one of the more recent trends that have bothered theology. The hint of connectedness between Christian Churches has more so been deliberated by the World Council of Churches, founded about early to half of the 20th century (1948). It is important to note that this was not started by the clergy in the Roman Catholic Church; the first General Secretary of WCC was W.A Visser't Hooft, a reformed minister who saw the need for the religion and Church of Jesus Christ to cooperate within a turbulent time in history.¹ However, this movement to Christian unity is said to be generally dated way back to 1910, upon the commencement of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. Although primarily comprised of the efforts of Protestant pastors, Catholic involvement was present by the beginning of the 20th century.² It was clear by then among Christian Churches and communities that relationships among them should take on visible manifestations without theological compromise.³ This new ecumenical theology assumed that every tradition - although distinct and separated by historical wounds - had something to contribute to the overall understanding of the nature of the Church.⁴

This was not shunned as well by the Catholic perspective of the Second Vatican Council, which produced documents and statements that support the cooperation among distinct Christian groups, even declaring that one must not impose a burden on other parties if not for things that are of utmost necessity.⁵ In brief, its decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, said restoring unity among Christians is duly a primary concern. Without erasing the unique history of each Church, the document emphasized cooperation among ecclesiastical units through charity. Another document, *Lumen Gentium*, says that the values and emphasis on other traditions should also be praised, recognizing that this is the effort of a body joined by a typical baptism. Other churches, not only particular to the Roman Catholic Church, may consist of elements of truth and salvation. This position is highly deliberated among

¹ World Council of Churches, "History," *Oikoumene: World Council of Churches*, (Accessed November 26, 2021, URL: <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/history>).

² Wood, S., "Ecumenism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II, Cambridge Companions to Religion*. Edited by Richard R. Gaillardetz. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), (DOI:10.1017/9781108698610.016), 282. Hereafter shall be cited as "Ecumenism."

³ Hunsinger, G., "Introduction: Ecumenical Theology." In *The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let Us Keep the Feast*. In *Current Issues in Theology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), (DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511817687.001), 10. Hereafter shall be cited as "Introduction: Ecumenical Theology."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ Lennan, R., "Ecclesiology and Ecumenism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, edited by Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, (Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), (DOI:10.1017/CCOL0521832888.009), 130. Hereafter shall be cited as "Ecclesiology and Ecumenism in Rahner."

theological circles and yet shows the positive attitude of the Roman Catholic towards her separated brothers and sisters. In other words, the idea of the Mystical Body of Christ may develop even outside the visible and ecclesiastical walls of the Vatican See, indicating that the Catholic Church, although consisting of the “fullness” of the Gospel, cannot shut itself exclusively from Christian traditions outside of it.

Another central Catholic principle regarding her teachings on ecumenism is the idea that ecumenism is made possible through the model of the central mystery of Christian theology: the Trinitarian God. As the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united, the Church should always strive to show that unity. Nevertheless, this may not be very clear in aspects of concrete visibility. As an example, insofar as Protestant churches may be concerned, how can they reconcile the mystical body of Christ in regards to the sacraments - whereas Catholics remain faithful to their position that the sacraments were not only thoroughly instituted by Christ Himself, but the sacraments also signify the unity within the Church of Christ.⁶ Karl Rahner, a Catholic theologian, sought to give a background regarding our enlightenment of this question. By popularizing the language of “the church as a mystery,” he hoped that this mystery included the adoption of the Bible and the Sacraments as a possibility for ecumenical cooperation. According to the Jesuit, for the Church to become a visible and concrete sign, and thus becoming a hope for the world, we must recognize that the Church is not just an organization between people who believe in the same religion - but that by her very nature, she is the abiding presence of Christ, Christ who is the “sacramental word of definitive grace.” In other words, as Christ took on flesh, this “fleshly” logic must also concern ecumenical principles - the Church must visibly and concretely be one, just as the sacraments show the real covenant between God and man.⁷

This insistence on the “real” connection between sacraments and our ecumenical possibilities was also traversed by his contemporary theologian. Joseph Ratzinger (known now as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) made it, in fact, one of the primary concerns of his Pontificate and pastoral ministry the effort to make dialogue and unity with the “separated” brothers and sisters of the Roman Catholic Church - this act, also known as ecumenical dialogue or simply “ecumenism.” In his ecumenical meeting during the 20th World Youth Day in Cologne, he says we ought to look at this relationship between particular christian churches as an opportunity to “exchange gifts.” He also adds in this address that he dislikes the approach that we merely do ecumenical dialogue to debate and exchange ideas between different “traditions” in the sense that christian churches come from their own “distinct” traditions. Rather than this, he would like to focus on the “presence of the Word” in the world, i.e., the Word of God given to the world - animating the distinct “expressions of theology,

⁶ Wood, S., *Ecumenism*, 284 – 288, 291.

⁷ Lennan, R., *Ecclesiology and Ecumenism in Rahner*, 130-131.

through liturgical forms and by discipline,” which is brought forth by many Christians seeking a joint ecumenical effort. For him, there is “unity in multiplicity” and the possibility of co-existence between Christian Churches despite the various historical wounds affecting each other. In this somewhat “liberal” approach, he considers the diversity of Christian expressions still to be a positive outlook on the church “in which the Churches and Ecclesial Communities can make available their riches” - considering this to become an opportunity for churches to have a “holy envy” among themselves.⁸

In the forthcoming sections of this paper, we will describe how the development of Pope Benedict XVI’s “Eucharistic Ecclesiology” came to be. This will be done firstly through an exposition of de Lubac’s commentary in *Mystici Corporis*, which confirms the origins of Eucharistic Ecclesiology through Patristic and Pauline theology. Next is a look at Pope Benedict XVI’s interjection of this theology into his ecumenical thought with a particular emphasis on the essentialities of the ontological reality of the Church, the shared Christian traditions, and “spiritual ecumenism.” In the final discussions, we shall include a quick run through his Pontificate’s ecumenical initiatives where the teachings about Eucharistic Ecclesiology are dispersed in various circumstances.

Origins of Eucharistic Ecclesiology: The Church as the “Mystical Body” and De Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum*

The past archetype of the Church was ‘hierarchical,’ as Yves Conger would say. The Church became a visible society whose members each constituted a function to follow. There was the bishop, the lay faithful, the domestic Church, and the power structures essential to govern it. By the time the liturgical movement started its influence, a renewed understanding of the presence of Christ within His Church began to flourish. The concept of the “mystical body” was born, balancing the rigidity which the former ecclesiology tended towards by emphasizing the authority of the bishops and clergy. It is said that Moehler, a contemporary of Hegel, influenced this shift towards the mystical body by finding resources in the Patristic’s emphasis on the Church being animated by the living Spirit of Christ. This view, however, received criticism for looking overly Protestant. This new perspective came alongside the ushering of Romanticism, which probably gave the communities of the Church an impetus to find a new norm for Ecclesiology.⁹

⁸ Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey to Cologne on the occasion of the XX World Youth Day*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, August 19, 2005). Hereafter to be cited as “BXVI XX WYD.”

⁹ Mcnamara, K., “The Idea of the Church: Modern Developments in Ecclesiology” in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 2, (1966), 101–3. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002114006603300201>).

Henri de Lubac finds this collective impulse especially true approaching the twentieth century. It seems as though the liturgical, sociological, and ecumenical movements of the Church developed side by side as a response to the echoing need of the times: to recover a “sense” of what the Church is once again—with the widespread errors of Protestantism and the weakening of conscience, de Lubac recourse to the Patristics to recover the Church’s old-age answer to a contemporary issue.¹⁰ For de Lubac, the Church is a *mystery*. It means that borrowing from Aquinas, the Church is the “giant organism” which covers the membership of men today and the cosmic membership of the entirety of time with the hosts of angels and souls. As we say, three church groups enter each other’s reality: the Church Militant, Church Suffering, and Church Triumphant. As a mystery, the Church’s origin comes all the way even before the world began, as Origen, St Paul, and the Psalmist would say. The Church now bears the promise of the eternal kingdom yet to come. Her (the Church’s) temporal form will soon pass in preparation for the “new Creation,” which Christ promises to usher in.¹¹ Moreover, until that day comes, the Church is gradually converted into the spotless bride present in the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The Church is a mystery “impregnated by the presence of God.” The Church experiences Christ in her concrete day-to-day situations, not merely limited to theological presuppositions. Through her, the Incarnate Word of God reveals the same plan and essence of life. Furthermore, that is also why her mystery derivates from the Lord she serves. Christ is described as the Sun, while the Church is the Moon. She is also the extension of the Triune God on earth; the “Incarnation continued.” As the spouse of Christ, the body is spiritually linked to the spouse who is Christ. Herself a sign, she does not conceal what is signified but reveals it in temporally understandable ways.

Nevertheless, although she is the mystery on earth, she does not exhaust this mystery, for there is something more than this current existence. Her reach goes through all the dirt and cosmos, even transcending the visible bounds of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church is an instrument for the world’s salvation, to lead all into life with the Triune God.¹²

The inexhaustible mystery of the Church is extended to her ecclesial structures and dogma. Christ, the revelation *par excellence*, communicates His plan of salvation through the Church. For de Lubac, the mysteries of faith also

¹⁰ De Lubac, H., “The Church as a Mystery” in *Splendor of the Church*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

¹¹ De Lubac, H., “The Dimensions of the Mystery” in *Splendor of the Church*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

¹² De Lubac, H., “How is the Church a Mystery” in *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, (Paris: Ecclesia Press, 1967), 13–29.

contain a certain kind of “paradox:” they can be reasonably understood but not comprehensible. For de Lubac, this paradox is not a “riddle” that the Church espouses. Still, it also characterizes the “demand” for the faith of those who submit themselves to the authority of Christ through His Church. The Church, therefore, is visibly constituted, but we must pass into faith certain matters which we know are working, albeit invisible. For Protestants who think of theological presuppositions in “either-or,” de Lubac explains that the Catholic realizes that the apparent “duality” of a paradox can be overcome through faith. For example, it is neither just Scripture nor authority, but Scripture *and* authority simultaneously.¹³

With this in mind, de Lubac overcomes any attempt to rationalize the Church as merely a volunteer society that men emptily run by their efforts. The Church does not “navel-gaze” on her doctrines, as if they are mere expressions of human sentiments, totally raptured from Divine intervention. She is not supposed to mistake herself for the light which she is merely to reflect. She is the “mystical body,” a unity of human and divine elements. Furthermore, de Lubac never separates the Church from Mary. For him, the Virgin Mary is the Church. Mary makes visible the importance of cooperating with the salvific plan of God. As Karl Barth would also say, Mary is the “prototype” by which souls aspire to become. Mary is the “type of the Church” which details the essence of Christian vocation.

Discussion of the Church as the “Mystical Body” later developed significantly in response to the “Berengar Controversy.” We remember very briefly how the theologian sparked a controversy in the Church by claiming that bread and wine merely represented the Body and Blood of Christ and did not change it. It caused the Church to respond with a theology that heavily emphasized the doctrine of the “Real Presence.” Unfortunately, a distinction between two kinds of “Corpus Christi” was made: the Eucharist was called the *Corpus Christi verum*, and the Church became the *Corpus Christi mysticum*, with the latter being overshadowed by the then controversy. De Lubac tries to recover the original unity of these two concepts through his *Corpus Mysticum*. As a result, he coins an expression often repeated at the Second Vatican Council: “The Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church.”¹⁴ It would later become an emphasis on the Church as the Mystical Body and gradually into what we call a “Eucharistic Ecclesiology.”

Eucharistic Ecclesiology unites the sacramental reality of the Eucharist towards the ecclesial community. De Lubac calls the Eucharist the “sacrament of unity,” in which the Church receives the Body and Blood of Our Lord and the

¹³ Voderholzer, R., “Paradox and Mystery” in *Meet Henri de Lubac: His Life and Work*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Voderholzer, R., “The Church: Sacrament and Mother” in *De Lubac: Life and Work*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008).

inescapable call of being united to the Church. This concept conveys the exact truth of our earlier discussion regarding Paul’s insistence for the Corinthian Church to abstain from eating food offered to the idols. The act of eating has a liturgical meaning. However, under de Lubac’s undertaking, he recovers that eating (the communion of the Eucharistic species) has both liturgical and ecclesial significance. In a sense, the Eucharist cannot be said only to be “symbolic” of our ecclesial unity, but it is what enables us to live together. This inseparable unity is even lamented by Joseph Ratzinger, who says it was about the eleventh and twelfth century onwards when the medieval Church started to lose the original sense of what *Corpus Christi* - the Eucharistic body - means in the twofold.¹⁵

As we have said earlier, de Lubac recovered that one of the reasons for a gradual loss of conscious understanding that the Church is Christ’s “mystical body” is the early medieval emphasis on the Doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Initially, what we refer to as the “true body of Christ” (i.e., historically, temporally, and visibly “true”) or *Corpus Christi verum* was supposed to be the Church. While the body of Christ, in its “spiritual nature,” or *Corpus Christi mysticum*, was supposed to be the Eucharist. The adjectives then interchanged throughout history, causing the lack of a fundamental ecclesiological understanding within the Church. Now, the actual body of Christ is the Eucharist, while the spiritual, and unfortunately, more “loose” body of Christ, is the Church.¹⁶ However, this was not supposed to be the case, as de Lubac traces the original use of the term *Corpus Christi* through the Patristics.

For de Lubac, Augustine’s interlinking of the Eucharist and the Church heavily influenced Christian antiquity of the seventh to the ninth century. According to Augustine, to remain in the *actual body of Christ* (the Church), we must participate in the spiritual reality of the Eucharist. De Lubac cites many instances of the Church’s use of this theological formula. The bread is the material used in the Sacrament since bread bears a “likeness” to the Church. The Eucharistic bread is called the “Last Supper” because it necessitates the faithful’s communal participation. Therefore, the bread of the Sacrament leads to the one body which the Church becomes. The one bread signifies the one body of the Church. Sacramental communion must always be, at the same time, an ecclesial communion. To receive the Eucharistic species unites the whole temporal Church with the saints and hosts of angels.¹⁷ The Eucharistic feast is a feast of the threefold Church: militant, suffering, and triumphant. It is a unifying

¹⁵ Le, L., “The Eucharist and the Church in the Thought of Henri de Lubac” in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No, 3–4, (2006), 339–43. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140006075752>).

¹⁶ Voderholzer, R., “Professor in Lyons” in *De Lubac: Life and Work*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008).

¹⁷ De Lubac, H., “The Eucharist as Mystical Body” in *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages Historical Survey*, (Notre Dame and Press: Indiana, 2006).

feast. The Eucharist then becomes what we call the “sacrament of unity.” Again, this reaffirms our understanding of why Paul had to warn the Corinthian Church. The liturgical norm of the Church becomes its ecclesiology. To partake in the liturgy for the idols turns the Church into a haven for foreign gods.

De Lubac admits that this understanding of the “mystery of the Church” can be found as a motif within the Pauline corpus. The approach laid out in his *Corpus Mysticum*, he describes, tried to synthesize the “mystical” and institutional aspects of the Church. The Mass draws the entire community into a single body, hence the phrase we hear, “The Eucharist makes the Church.” The Augustinian distinction of understanding the Eucharist as the *Corpus Christi mysticism* became the key to understanding the dimension of “mystery” in the reality of the Church. The source, the Eucharist, is the mystery, and the true body of Christ (the Church) is drawn from that mystery. The Church is not the one that changes Christ. Instead, Christ draws the Church into His divine mystery through the Eucharist. The former approach was what de Lubac considered the “secularizing” view of the Church, i.e., an organism taken away from its Divine origin. De Lubac establishes the spiritual interdependence of the Church to the Eucharist, about which, without the proper relationship between the two, they cannot function. The static understanding of the Real Presence is challenged by the dynamic movement of how de Lubac proposes the relationship of the Church to the Eucharist should be: the Eucharist is the source of all the Church’s activity and apostolate. At the same time, the Church makes it possible to minister the Sacrament. In Johannine theology, it is understood that the Eucharistic species of bread and wine nourish the members of the Church so that each may fulfill their role. Hence, as Augustine puts it, the truth of the relationship between -Sacrament and ecclesial community is a “single intuition” comprising one movement of the same reality, which we mention as *Corpus Christi*. By the Eucharist, what de Lubac also called the *mysterium Christi par excellence*, its sound effect is to change each soul into “another Christ.” By *altering Christus* through Eucharistic communion, each soul then departs towards their contribution to building up the Church - the true body of Christ.¹⁸

We can call this de Lubac’s “sacramental ontology” in play versus an “immanentism” that plans to infiltrate and destroy the Church. The loss of the Church’s mystery dimension will result in a utilitarian and bureaucratic Church - a Church made by men and for men. By being faithful to her mystery, she becomes a sacrament, “the sacrament of Christ,” that becomes the focal point of all other sacraments initially disposed of for her use. As a sacrament, she is present in the

¹⁸ Moloney, R., “Henri de Lubac on Church and Eucharist” in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4, (2005), 331–4, 339–342. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002114000507000402>).

temporal world, waiting to give grace to anyone who wishes to be part of her. It is now through only her that the transcendent Christ enters into history, and therefore, by this logic, the *via* which souls of the earth can enter into heaven. Furthermore, the bishops and clergy can only get their authority through the Tabernacle. The hierarchy exists to make the sacraments present and widely available in the lives of the faithful.¹⁹

De Lubac insists on the necessity of sacraments because of his theological position regarding grace and nature. Whereas the Neo-Thomists have argued that nature is not dependent on grace for its preservation, de Lubac saw it otherwise. We can see how this “sacramental dependence” plays out in his insistence on a “Eucharistic Ecclesiology” rather than any purely immanent model.²⁰ Fortunately, a former encyclical released by Pius XII during the events of World War II, entitled *Mystic Corporis Christi*, made clear the perspectives regarding the invisible and visible reality of the Church, as well as the Eucharist’s role in perfectly unifying the body of Christ.²¹ According to Bluett, this encyclical marked the transition from the Church’s struggle to establish itself as the visible kingdom of God towards an era where the supernatural origin and mission of the Church are emphasized. As the encyclical says, the “Mystical Body of Jesus Christ” is the best definition of the Church. The Church is sacramental and social, meaning each Sacrament has a social function.²² It is not hard to see why this motif easily supports what de Lubac has been trying to say regarding communion.

This *communion ecclesiology* is with support, especially during and post-conciliar times. It finds advocacy from Walter Kasper and Joseph Ratzinger (who would later become Pope Benedict XVI). As we have said, the “mystical body” model took the impetus to combat institutionalism and even the individualism of Enlightenment thinking. The surrounding circumstances “re-awakened” among souls a necessity to see the Church from Divine origin. Later on, “communion” considered the Church the “people of God,” an idea serving as a hermeneutic for interpreting the documents of Vatican II. In line with this, a small group of theologians informally met during the 1969 International Theological Commission and discussed concerns

¹⁹ Boersma, H., “Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac” in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 88, No. 10115, (2007), 245, 250-1, 262-5. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2007.00160.x>).

²⁰ Grumett, D., “Eucharist, Matter and the Supernatural: Why de Lubac needs Teilhard” in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (2008), 166–7. (DOI: [10.1111/j.1468-2400.2007.00295.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2007.00295.x)).

²¹ New World Encyclopedia, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, (Accessed May 25, 2023, URL: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mystici_Corporis_Christi#:~:text=Mystici%20Corporis%20Christi%20is%20a,visible%20and%20an%20invisible%20dimension.).

²² Bluett, J., “The Theological Significance of the Encyclical ‘Mystici Corporis’” in *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 1, (2012), 47–50.

that caused disillusionment in the following events after the Council. It is the *Communio movement*, whose esteemed members include Joseph Ratzinger, Henri de Lubac, Bouyer, Balthasar, Medina, and Le Guillou. They sought to re-establish the necessity of Church tradition and proper use of clerical authority, mainly when a too sociological and narrow understanding of a “democratic Church” emerged. The movement thought the post-conciliar reforms had been applied to a mere man-made and secularized extent, forgetting the interiority of spiritual life. These figures sought to re-establish an “unruptured” understanding of the Council, coherent with the Patristics.²³

Pope Benedict XVI’s Eucharistic Ecclesiology and Ecumenism

In his Papacy, perhaps there is no better way to encapsulate Benedict XVI’s “eucharistic ecclesiology” than through his *Sacramentum Caritatis*. In paragraphs 35-40 alone, the Pontiff details how each celebration of the Eucharistic mystery leads to ecclesial communion, even within ecumenism.²⁴ In an article published in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, the then theologian Ratzinger details the missionary necessity of the Eucharist. According to scholars, the Upper Room of the Pentecost was the same room used for the Last Supper. The apparent theological emphasis here is that the Eucharist always calls for cooperation with the plan of God. Although mission itself, Ratzinger says, is not the sole purpose of the Eucharist, a soul that is nourished with the Divine bread can extend the divine mission. He also coherently admits in this article that *the Church is Eucharist*, recognizing that Paul’s instruction in First Corinthians designates the essential link between the Church and the Eucharist. The author also warns readers of the tendency to characterize the Church’s mission as merely an effect of human persuasion. He places St. Therese of Lisieux’s life as an example of missionary activity. The “little flower,” although being unable to step on missionary ground, can contribute to the Church’s apostolate because she can celebrate the Eucharist in the “upper room” well. The Eucharist is, therefore, always the “well-spring” of the Christian mission.²⁵

Dalzell discusses that Ratzinger’s theology characterizes the balance between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis*. In other words, right action (including the pursuit of peace and social justice) comes from the fitting celebration of the Eucharist. This “vertical

²³ Hahnenberg, E., “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels” in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 1, (2005), 3, 10, 20–3. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002114000507000101>).

²⁴ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), (Accessed May 25, 2023, URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html).

²⁵ Ratzinger, J., “Eucharist, and Mission” in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 3, (2000), 246–7, 52, 63–4, (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002114000006500303>).

insistence” also includes Ratzinger’s expressions about the theology of liturgy. In the orientation of *Ad Orientem* in the Mass, for example, the congregation is led to face the “new heaven and earth,” where the Church is set to meet Christ’s return. It is contrasted to *versus populum*, where the orientation surfaces a tendency for encasement of self-sufficiency. Indeed, the liturgy is a communion between God and humanity, not just between the local and universal churches. He warns us that the liturgy is not a place designated solely for the local community’s self-understanding. It is supposed to be an “outward” experience where a man reaches out to God. Therefore, the Eucharist’s primary intention is vertical, not horizontal. This insistence leads him to critique any “missionary” attempt to evangelize the world through merely historical constructs, including the Marxist view of history and liberation theology. The horizontal or “missionary” insistence of the Eucharist remains, but it must first grip itself with the reality that the vertical relationship comes first. As Guardini, the author of the first *Spirit of the Liturgy*, said, *logos* must take precedence over *ethos*.²⁶

The disunity of Eucharistic worship disrupts the bond between communities. It is why “free Christian Churches” may find it hard to establish ecclesial participation and security. This historical truth has been examined and remains a central Catholic belief.²⁷ It also explains why well-disposed liturgy participation can contribute to a renewed understanding of fraternity. As in the case of Catholic Small Christian Communities (SCC) of Africa, the Church there has enjoyed the reconciliation of different tribes due to the participation of the Eucharist. As Pope Benedict XVI says, the bond built on Eucharistic communion is a fraternity stronger than that of independent tribes.²⁸

However, apart from its unity, sacramental communion may bring out the visible disunity between Christian Churches. As in the case of St. Pope John Paul II’s *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, he affirms the teaching that Catholics should refrain from partaking in the Eucharistic celebration of the Orthodox churches. It is because ecclesial communion has to be *visible*. In other words, we can only say that we are partaking of the same sense of the Eucharist when churches are visibly united in sacramental and ecclesial governance.²⁹ Here, we mainly see that the Church’s

²⁶ Dalzell, T., “Eucharist, Communion, and Orthopraxis in the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger” in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 2, (2013), 104–9, 16–19. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140012472627>).

²⁷ Devine, P., “Eucharistic Hospitality and Interchurch Families” in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 2, (1980), 142–3. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002114008004700204>).

²⁸ Carney, J., “The People Bonded Together by Love: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and Small Christian Communities in Africa” in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (2014), 311–3. (DOI: 10.1111/moth.12097).

²⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), Nos. 30, 38–9. (Accessed May 25, 2023, URL: https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html).

understanding of liturgy is connected with her ecclesiology. A disfigured liturgy only results in the disfigured Church. Furthermore, as Koch argues, perhaps there is no other area wherein the Church finds disunity among her members other than the liturgy, to which he suggests that our next steps for liturgical reform must also be done within the Spirit of ecumenism.³⁰ Fortunately, Pope Benedict XVI took the toil of extending his Papacy towards this specific area to reconcile with our non-Catholic brethren.

Thus, at this point, we now glimpse how Ratzinger invites us to take his version of “Eucharistic Ecclesiology” more meritoriously, especially regarding ecumenism. In his view, the Eucharist is the defining factor for the unity and dialogue between distinct Christian churches.³¹ This Sacrament gives the whole Church her whole reason for ministry and existence, being made alive by the sacrifice of Christ, uniting us truly in His person. Where the Eucharist is, there the Church will be.³² Furthermore, because the Eucharist and communion seem present in other churches, the Roman Catholic Church still has a semblance of unity with them. The power of this Sacrament is that it continually renews the Church with the fire of Divine love.³³ From the Eucharist, in the words of Ratzinger, “the church grows from within and moves outwards.”³⁴ In her spiritual conversion and faithfulness to the “sacrament of unity,” she finds the vigor to overcome ecclesial barriers which divert herself from the “separated” brethren.

Our shared history makes it easy to distinguish the Eucharist as the vital habitat for Christian teaching and dogma to flourish. He adds that if we had to go on a search today to prove the historical significance of the Eucharist, we would be surprised how we can anchor our “hermeneutics of unity” from this common liturgy.³⁵ For example, between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church, the Eucharist continues to be the stronghold of their bond and collaboration. Although widely considered derogatory, when the Roman Catholics call their Eastern counterparts “Uniate churches,” it simply means that their celebration of the Eucharist

³⁰ Koch, K., “Liturgical Reform and the Unity of the Christian Churches” in *Studio Liturgica*, Vol. 44, No. 1-2, (2014), 55, 64–5. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00393207140441-206>).

³¹ McPartlan, P., *A Service of Love: Papal Primacy, the Eucharist and Church Unity* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 100.

³² Nichols, A., *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI, New Edition: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, (New York: Continuum Books, 2007), 174. Hereafter to be cited as “The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI.”

³³ Thornton, J., & Varenne, S., (Ed.), *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, (HarperOne, 2008), 90. Hereafter shall be cited as “The Essential BXVI.”

³⁴ Rowland, T., *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 84. Hereafter shall be cited as “Ratzinger’s Faith.”

³⁵ Ratzinger, J., *Church, Ecumenism, & Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 183–5. Hereafter to be cited as “Church, Ecumenism, & Politics.”

lacks substantial integrity regarding apostolic succession.³⁶ However, this does not all indicate that the Eucharist loses its saving grace - for salvation only comes from Christ. The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* signed between Roman Catholics and the Lutherans attest that we are saved by the unconditional Divine love extended through the grace of God. The fruit of this grace is good works and, consequentially, cooperation in ecumenical effort. Nevertheless, among all ecumenical gestures, Ratzinger says that the Eucharist has the most powerful role of all.

The Pontiff insists that God’s plan to gather “all things” through the mystical body of Christ is perfectly embodied in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is an ecclesiological model of *communion*. “Communion Ecclesiology” finds its sacramental signpost through it, and it is from this liturgical reality that our ecumenical efforts consequently take its pattern and shape.³⁷ Hunsinger says that all churches can learn from the Eucharist. Along with it, Christian churches can start talking about ideas like Real Presence, papal authority and collegiality, and other ministerial offices.³⁸ The Catholic Church herself begins from this point as well. The Lord, who gathers the disciples, tribes, and particular “churches” under His lordship, gives us the Sacrament of the Eucharist not only to bestow His real presence among us but also to unite Himself to the “one Church” in a more profound and renewed way.³⁹

We can highlight two points in Pope Benedict XVI’s Eucharistic Ecclesiology. First and foremost, the Sacrament of the Eucharist was the initiative of our Lord Himself. It means the plan to unite the Church comes from Him, as echoed in words *ut unum sint*. We must therefore pray to have this unity in our Church today.⁴⁰ The second theme of this Eucharistic ecclesiology is the thought that in the Church, there is the dimension of the invisible and ontological “oneness” of the Church and the dimension of her visible unity through the teaching of the Apostles, the sacraments, scriptures, and all external ministries devoted to the preaching of the Word. In this sense, the inherent unity within our constituted tradition expresses this singleness of the Catholic Church - which herself is called the “universal sacrament.”⁴¹ This structure of the Church is expressed not only “optically” (which is in the spiritual sense), but we must also strive to describe this “juridically” (through the hierarchy

³⁶ Wood, S., *Ecumenism*, 293, S, 300.

³⁷ Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: Continuum Books, 2010), 143–4. Hereafter shall be cited as “BXVI: A Guide.”

³⁸ Hunsinger, G., “Eucharistic Ministry: An Impending Impasse?” In *The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let Us Keep the Feast, Current Issues in Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), (DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511817687.007), 241.

³⁹ Thornton, J., & Varenne, S., *The Essential BXVI*, 98.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴¹ Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide*, 144.

and structure of the Church).⁴² Therefore, it should be said that in the case of the relationship between the universal and local churches and between the Roman Catholic and particular churches, we are the one Church of Christ. Christ prays for us all altogether.⁴³

Through this Eucharistic Ecclesiology, we can understand a less harsh critique of the tradition of our separated brothers and sisters. Underlying Paul VI's *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* is the depiction that Eastern Churches also have merit in preserving their spiritual practice. In cooperation with them, the Pope called for a joint effort between the Roman and Eastern Churches to promote ecumenical understanding.⁴⁴ In *Verbum Domini*, Benedict XVI adds that the ecumenical study of the Scriptures can help advance the understanding between Christian churches with the help of spiritual conversion and respect for each other.⁴⁵ He also adds that, in some cases, this ecumenical unity may mean something other than uniformity in traditions. Instead, those cases could highly benefit from first appreciating the commonality of each Church's Christian roots. Finally, these efforts should be extended to the most local peripheries of the Church. As the *Ecumenical Directory* explains, this can be promoted in parishes, monasteries, convents, seminaries, and schools. A humble disposition must accompany these efforts with firm commitment throughout the personal and community levels.⁴⁶

The Role of the Church's Ontological Reality in Ecumenism

Another essential tenet from Ratzinger's teachings which can be influential to ecumenical thought, is this concept of the "ontological reality" of the Church, more specifically, the ontological *precedence* of the universal Church over the local and particular churches. It means that according to the church fathers, the Church is one, unique, preceding the whole of Creation. Therefore, particular churches also arise in the world's Creation, but who have come from the universal Church herself. As the Church always transcends herself, she gathers people into the

⁴² Rowland, T., *Ratzinger's Faith*, 85.

⁴³ Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide*, 145.

⁴⁴ Paul VI, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), (Accessed May 25 2023, URL: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_orientalium-ecclesiarum_en.html).

⁴⁵ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), (Accessed May 25, 2023, URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html).

⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), (Accessed May 25, 2023, URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20120914_ecclesia-in-medio-oriente.html).

kingdom of God, facilitating the breaking-in of the Kingdom of God for the world.⁴⁷ The critical point to consider here is the universal relationship to the particular churches: the ontological reality of the universal Church ontological “exists” prior to every particular and individual Church.⁴⁸ It means that the Church, which is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, has had practical realizations throughout history. Nevertheless, these specific realizations are challenging to facilitate in the continuing course of human history. This consequentially means that even throughout Creation, the Church Christ established is essentially being played out in history. As part of this fallen human history, it is difficult to reconcile herself with the different “temporal realizations” that have come forth.

Furthermore, let us emphasize that this Church truly has a “temporal realization,” a concrete subject that is spiritually and physically present today. The Catholic Church is truly the Church that Christ has established, along with its physical components of tradition, ministries for Scripture and preaching, and the sacraments.⁴⁹ As the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith leader, Ratzinger reiterated that the single Church of Christ “subsists” in the Catholic Church.⁵⁰ Moreover, this Church is true “corporeally” present, and this Church can never be separated from Christ: every kind of relationship with Jesus Christ, therefore, must be of somewhat a relationship with the Church, which is His body. This body, which has been subjected to the different adversarial forces of history, continues to persist as a real visible church, and she is the dwelling place of God among men.⁵¹ Ratzinger also says that the Catholic Church indeed contains within herself, by the movement of the Triune God, the complete picture of truth with all its shades and perspectives, but affirms that other elements of sanctification are present in albeit “separated churches.” It extends far to say that even to those religious and cultic communities outsiders herself (suppose not only separated Christian Churches but in other religions as well), there exists “rays” of the truth and paths to salvation and holiness.⁵² However, be careful not to render this an “ecclesiological relativism,” for this is far from what the Second Vatican Council aimed to maintain. Even when the Church is frail and vulnerable with the attacks on humanity, the Holy Spirit guides her and renews her to a deeper understanding of her identity. Ultimately, the Church herself is “Catholic” and still welcomes everyone. She is the same but without losing sight of her essence and mission.⁵³

⁴⁷ Thornton, J., & Varenne, S., *The Essential BXVI*, 91, 5.

⁴⁸ Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide*, 145.

⁴⁹ Thornton J., & Varenne S., *The Essential BXVI*, 92, 9.

⁵⁰ Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide*, 149.

⁵¹ Rowland, T., *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 97-8.

⁵² Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide*, 149.

⁵³ Thornton, J., & Varenne, S., *The Essential BXVI*, 96-9.

Nevertheless, as we have maintained the importance of the Church's physical, visible, and concrete reality in history, Ratzinger argues that addressing these "temporal realities" remains more challenging than the spiritual ones. Moreover, that is why finally, we discuss his practical approach to ecumenism - by focusing on cultivating the spiritual growth between christian churches.

Mystici Corporis has established that there is only one Church of Christ, and nothing can be found outside the Catholic Church. According to Ratzinger, although it was not explicitly said, Pius XII shared the sentiment that the Orthodox churches separated from Rome are still "true local churches." Hence, the impetus for an ecumenical approach to ecclesiology is developed. It extends toward the Second Vatican Council's declaration that the true Church of Christ *subsists in* the Roman Catholic Church; in other words, the Council recognizes that other local churches may be visibly excluded from the ecclesiastical governance of Rome, but yet, they are still part of the same ontological reality of the Church. It is what we mean when we say the Church is "One." There is no duplicity in the Catholic Church, and there cannot be "many" Churches. Conversely, it also means that the Catholic Church subsists *ex parte* in other Ecclesial communities outside of Rome.

The Possibility of "Exchanging Gifts" Through a Shared Christian Tradition

Ut Unum Sint says that there is an extent the One Church of Christ is effectively present in these Christian Communities and that communion with them is still possible, albeit imperfect. Thus, they still independently exist, but we can say that they are not "fully" churches until they submit to the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁴ These churches may seem visibly separated, but they all possess an "inner dynamism" towards Catholicity. They are "linked" to the Catholic Church, albeit imperfect, since the Roman Catholic Church, ever since its foundation, has been preserved in unity through the work of the Triune God. What we call "ecumenism" is the charity we extend to them by turning their "partial" or "imperfect" communion into a "full communion" where the bishops of each Church are finally visibly united.

The ecumenical movement, apart from just being an exchange of ideas, is an "exchange of gifts."⁵⁵ It is one of the Council's primary concerns to heal the wounds between Christian communities. Hence, *Unitatis Redintegratio* reminds the faithful to avoid expressions that may cause further division with our separated brethren. The bishops and the rest of the faithful are enjoined in fixing a "scandalizing" fact

⁵⁴ Gamberini, P., "Substitut' in Ecumenical Ecclesiology: J. Ratzinger and E. Jünger" in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 1, (2007), 62–3. 70–3. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140007079136>).

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, (1995), Accessed May 25, 2023, (URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html).

that the One Church of Christ is visibly divided. Furthermore, the document stresses the need for conversion, self-denial, and renewal, without which the burden of ecumenical dialogue will come to nothing. It is coined as “spiritual ecumenism,” the heart of the ecumenical movement.

The document also descriptively appreciates the spiritual traditions of the East, including its liturgy and sacraments.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, it is tragic that the Christian religions cannot quickly agree on these matters, specifically with the “Sacrament of Unity” - the Eucharist. Rausch argues that Protestants and Anglicans look at communion from a perspective of hospitality and unity. At the same time, the Roman Catholics and Orthodox brethren insist that communion must be done as a sign of a pre-existing unity of life.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Lennon argues that the sacraments remain a potent force for ecumenical effort, as described in *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Even Karl Rahner, the Jesuit theologian, stressed this sacramental identity as an indispensable part of the nature of the Church, extending to her apostolate and eschatological mission of building Christ’s Kingdom in the world.⁵⁸ Furthermore, we can affirm that we must try to use the sacraments to unite the particular Christian Churches whenever we can - but not only within Baptism but, more importantly, in the Eucharist. For example, the churches in the East have been said to possess “true sacraments,” showing that this “sacramental bond” and liturgical life can serve as unitive elements for pursuing visible unity.

However, in Ratzinger’s view, the deep bond between churches cannot be narrowed down with issues addressing the “validity” of the sacraments. As in the case of his response to the Bavarian Lutheran Bishop Johannes Hanselmann, he says that Catholics and the Orthodox Church need not deny that there is a salvation-granting presence even within the Eucharistic celebration of the Lutheran Church.⁵⁹ On the other hand, there are other deep wounds between traditions that ecumenical dialogue can try to address, wounds that do not negate the truth that because of our shared history, all these particular churches still have many similarities - a lot to learn from and share. Even George Hunsinger stressed that the Reformed Church could look at this Eucharistic tradition and find benefit in it as the Roman Catholics do, for even it was dispersed throughout the writings of Calvin and Luther.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, (1964), Accessed May 25 2023, (URL: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html).

⁵⁷ Rausch, T., “Unity and Diversity in New Testament Ecclesiology: Twenty-Five Years After Käsemann and Brown” in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 2, (1988), 135. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002114008805400205>).

⁵⁸ Lennon, R., *Ecclesiology and Ecumenism in Rahner*, 141.

⁵⁹ Wood, S., *Ecumenism*, 296-9.

⁶⁰ Hunsinger, G. *Introduction: Ecumenical Theology*, 11, 13.

On another note, much can be said about the differences in traditions between particular Christian Churches. However, we may also ask, “Is this distinction the defining factor of what opposes particular churches?” On a positive note, while there are, of course, historical wounds existing as a result of Christian-to-Christian persecution, Ratzinger highlights in his thought that there is a possibility of “exchanging of gifts” between Christian traditions (a term which his predecessor John Paul II also used). They speak of the same narrative - the same Christian story.

In his Augustinian approach, Ratzinger looks at the *civitas Dei* - the city of God (as Augustine would conceptualize it), as a necessary element by which the Church integrates into the political realm. It means that for Ratzinger, a particular polis cannot function without recognizing the Divine. Indeed, this idea can be seen back to Plato’s thinking, who asserted that political justice cannot exist outside the realms of man’s full integration. To be human is to participate within society and perceive the basic standards of Being, including religious understanding and man’s capacity for the divine. The truth is that which binds human beings together, consisting of the cooperation between distinct persons in a particular polis. Because of this common perception of truth, people can now work together, deliberating what is only inherent and just for each person to pursue. Furthermore, this Platonic concept stresses that a community is binding and truly genuine if it is held by a common perception of what is divine. This exciting thought builds towards Augustine’s understanding of the *polis* and that which builds towards Ratzinger’s political thought on the Church. The Roman *civitas*, or what we would call the “city of God,” is distinct from what we call the *civitas Dei*, or the “city of God.”⁶¹ Moreover, it is this concept from which we can initially grasp what Ratzinger is trying to emphasize by the Church as not only a historical - but also a societal and cultural necessity. Therefore, the ecclesiology of Ratzinger, first and foremost, consists of the understanding that unity in belief can result in unity in the polis - or at least in ecumenical terms: distinct traditions need to take unto themselves the task of dialogue because it can not only unite the Church but also bring into fruition the *civitas Dei* on earth by this significant cooperation.

Perhaps as a Catholic himself, too, Ratzinger readily argues for the significance of tradition in ecumenical dialogue. In his exchanges with the Anglican Church, it is essential to note that he, in fact, places authority and dogma in the central role.⁶² From here, he does not single out the issue of apostolic authority/succession away from the issue of the lived Christian tradition - for they are partly consistent in the

⁶¹ Burns, Daniel E. “Augustine, and Platonic Political Philosophy: The Contribution of Joseph Ratzinger.” In *Augustine’s Political Thought*, edited by Richard J. Dougherty, Boydell & Brewer, 2019. (DOI:10.1017/9781787444522.012)., 255, 7.

⁶² Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, & Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 198. Hereafter to be cited as *Church, Ecumenism, & Politics*.

same sense of faith. For him, these are aspects of the same lived experience of the Christian religion and spirituality.

The first thing we observe here is his understanding of Sacred Scripture. For him, the Word of God has come to be animated in the world, and it is with this fact that he also asserts that all of the teachings within the Church are an exposition of Sacred Scriptures.⁶³ The Word and the witness always ought to come together, at least to understand the constitution of tradition.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, for this reason, we can clearly say that the Scriptures, which have been the source of similarity between Christian Churches, is the same Scripture animating the tradition of apostolic succession alive. The Word of God, which, when lived out, constitutes the traditions we live as Christians, has placed into fruition the beginnings of the authority of the bishops and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Now the Church, which has placed itself even before the reality of the written Scripture, is the “locus” of the Bible - a point that renders the church primary to the writing of the Bible and serves as the authority that interprets it.

This Church, which comes before the written scriptures, has also, in history, appointed “bishops” or representatives to “particular churches.” Now this is not a superficial authority. Ratzinger argues that a bishop is ordained to function in ministerial functions and serve as the “universal voice of the church” for local churches.⁶⁵ The bishop has authority because it serves as a sacramental confirmation for the Spirit’s guidance and care for the Church. They are more than just the Pope’s *subalterns* but a *real representative* of the universal Church’s extension to a particular community. This authoritative role is extended to every bishop as part of his calling and vocation by being consistent within the collegiality of bishops. Ratzinger adds that only in this authoritative assertiveness can a bishop represent a particular part of the universal Church, thereby genuinely representing the fact that the Spirit exists within that particular Church.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, how about the leaders and collegiality within other churches - that is, those who are outside the institutional line of the Roman Catholic Church? Cardinal Walter Kasper says that they are still, in a sense - *sacramental* - but yet, their lack of the fullness of the apostolic succession constitutes a *defect*. It does not mean that they are once and for all void from any authority - for this distinction only functions within the level of signs and instruments by which grace extends itself - not on the level of *res* which the grace of salvation completes itself. In other

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 155–156.

⁶⁴ Benedict XVI, *BXVI XX WYD*.

⁶⁵ Ratzinger, J., *Church, Ecumenism, & Politics*. 157, 162.

⁶⁶ Lennan, R., *Ecclesiology and Ecumenism in Rahner*, 137 - 138.

words, they are only *defects* in the sense that they “lack” a particular element in their authority, and yet, by that same authority, they can still extend the grace of salvation (a theme consistent with the pronouncement of *Lumen Gentium*). Indeed, Christ is greater than the Church, showing that the visible disunity in this matter shows how far the Church still has to go. Even with Ratzinger’s thought, Kasper also maintains that the role of the bishop has a very sacramental role - a matter the Church should take seriously if ecumenism is to progress. A certain fullness subsists in the person called to be a bishop, and that, as with the Pope, plays a role mandated by a “higher order” - a divine order. This Roman Catholic imagination is a sacramental thought - emphasizing signs’ true and real relationships with the Church. It is a gift for the Christians and an obstacle for many protestant and reformed churches. The emphasis on this episcopacy should not only be one of mere representation but one which peers deep into how Christ wants to institute the ecclesiological elements of His Church divinely. Without this sacramentality, the Church is always tempted to disintegrate.⁶⁷

All in all, apostolic succession unifies or mediates the whole history and tradition of the Church. It extends the particular teachings of the Church and, in a sense, its “nature.” Because of this, Ratzinger says that the authority, or the primatial office of the universal Church, should not be weakened, the point which consists of the difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church. The issue of apostolic succession and primacy is not just a Roman problem; it is the issue that Anglicans should consider looking into in terms of unifying their tradition. Nevertheless, this is not just an issue of differences in tradition but also a perspective on the communion between churches, regardless of Catholic or Anglican. Leadership, therefore, has a place in understanding our tradition, and Ratzinger invites us to take a second look at it.

The problem with omitting this recognition extends to living out our tradition and faith. Thus, in suggesting this approach, Ratzinger provides a basis for the historical continuity of apostolic succession, and in a way, we avoid reducing ecumenical dialogue into rigid debates and fact-checking between so-called Christian “traditions.” The problem with this approach is that it reduces the dialogue between traditions (customs) into an ecumenical debate, completely excluding our intentions to search for the truth. Ecumenical dialogue cannot be reduced in this way, in a mere manner that is diplomatic and political, but instead, these efforts should only bring about a more profound sense of recognition between Christian Churches. Instead of testing against our interpretations of Scripture, Ratzinger invites

⁶⁷ Hunsinger, G., “Eucharistic Ministry: Controversies.” In *The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let Us Keep the Feast, Current Issues in Theology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), (DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511817687.006), 193-195, 203-205, 217-219.

us to recognize our common tradition through a “hermeneutic of unity.” Ecumenical dialogue advances not by dismissing one tradition to another but by looking at the other from a perspective of similarity: our faith expressions as played out in our respective communities may show different strands of spiritualities and theological perspectives, but this diversity is, in fact, necessary for our healthy growth in unity - our hermeneutic of “unity” consists somewhat an aspect of receptivity.” However, we should not consider this fact, which is the very sense of constitution running in the “conciliarity” of the Anglican Church, as the weight that defends the multiplicity of authorities between Christian Churches. Not at all, since Ratzinger says that even though there is a place for fact-checking and referencing between local and particular churches, we must accept that Jesus did not establish a debating society.⁶⁸ If that were to happen, we should constantly be checking our respective theologies, as if the truth is relative enough for different particular churches to keep on being at each other’s throats. It is far from the truth: Ratzinger argues an excellent case for the unity between churches - as they may look to be diversified, we still know that Jesus established One Church, to which he even promised the fullness of the truth.

It may be simple to look at this point that Ratzinger understands more keenly what it means to become “Catholic.” He believes that in ecumenical dialogue, there is a space for diversity, with careful consideration of the historical wounds which have truly transpired between Christian Churches. Without doing violence to each other’s side, we must engage in a manner sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences. In this way, we can also account for the fact that there can be a possibility of *plurality* in theologies, but only in the sense that they can articulate in their unique ways the common revelation that has been handed on to the Church, becoming sensitive to the different subjective ways we can pastor souls. Truth can never be monotonous, he says, for we can only behold fragments of it as subjectively as we can - but this special power unites us in the single truth: *pluralism* and unity can go together.⁶⁹ For Ratzinger, we can only take the fullness of revelation as a single body, but this singleness also accounts for the diversified ways a harmonious performance can be played - according to his preferred metaphor.⁷⁰ This ecumenical dialogue is possible, but only if both parties unite themselves with the joint effort to understand each other honestly, seek the truth, and impose nothing on the other side.⁷¹ This effort should be constantly renewed, detoxified, and receptive to what the other has genuinely to offer without at all hastening the process, which will eradicate the whole effort.⁷²

⁶⁸ Ratzinger, J., *Church, Ecumenism, & Politics*, 162-212.

⁶⁹ Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide*, 148-151.

⁷⁰ Nichols, A., *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 173.

⁷¹ Ratzinger, J., *Church, Ecumenism, & Politics*, 189-190.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 291.

However, as we have maintained the importance of the Church's physical, visible, and concrete reality in history, Ratzinger argues that addressing these "temporal realities" remains more challenging than the spiritual ones. Moreover, that is why finally, we discuss his practical approach to ecumenism - by focusing on cultivating the spiritual growth between christian churches.

Spiritual Ecumenism

In the ecumenical dialogue between Christian Churches, Ratzinger speaks about the importance of "spiritual ecumenism," i.e.,, an approach that focuses on a joint effort to search for the truth within Christian brotherhood and prayer.⁷³ It aligns with the second chapter of the document *Unitatis Redintegratio*, calling Christians to be united in dialogue and fostering our common spirituality through personal reform and conversion.⁷⁴ This dialogue can only be developed within a sincere commitment to growing in spirituality with our "separated" Christian siblings, a unity which one party cannot bring about themselves but only through the workings of the Holy Spirit. A Christian must devote himself to prayer, examination of one's life, openness to service and love, and ongoing conversion. With help from on high and with a commitment to spiritually mature with the influence of the words of Our Lord "that all may be one" (Jn 17:21), this effort between Christians will be rewarded with practical solutions to resolve their differences.⁷⁵ This unity, therefore, Ratzinger emphasizes, can only be a gift from above, and the common prayer that we do between ecclesiastical communities is what he calls the "royal door of ecumenism." Without hiding the fact of historical wounds, facing our challenges together with a humble and contrite heart devoted to prayer will instill in us a more profound sense of communion. Ratzinger adds that this authentic life of communion can only be possible if we constantly let the Holy Spirit guide us in our efforts.⁷⁶

Ratzinger also adds that while we are concerned with reconciling our ideas and theologies, let us remember that an essential move in ecumenism is to treat each other with love. He noted that whereas our dialogue can aim at the reconciliation of knowledge, a true gift to the other consists in the act of charity - two essential elements in ecumenical dialogue.⁷⁷ Christians ought to recognize themselves as siblings, "full truth is part of full love," he says, and we cannot expect other churches to practically and immediately be fully incorporated back into the Catholic Church.

⁷³ Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide*, 138.

⁷⁴ Wood, S., *Ecumenism*, 291-292.

⁷⁵ Benedict XVI, *BXVI XX WYD*.

⁷⁶ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to an Ecumenical Delegation from Finland on the Occasion of the Feast of Saint. Henrik*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 18, 2008).

⁷⁷ Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide*, 140.

As a gentle move, the Roman Catholic Church must still recognize their respective identities and understand the cultures and localities they have come.⁷⁸ We can, he says, be reunited with them without fully absorbing them.⁷⁹ Even in the case of the separation between the Western and Eastern Catholic Church, Ratzinger believes that it is impractically impossible to immediately expect a full absorption - for he says that the Roman Catholic Church is “not ready” for that kind of hour yet, pastorally speaking.⁸⁰ In this sense, he says that it is pretty well to leave God with His timing and business while leaving us with everything that we can do on our part; the Spirit moves in a particular way that we have to respect, and anyone who hastens the process is at the expense of ruining the whole relationship altogether. However, we cannot just stay and wait - we have to be active with the tasks that we have discerned to be genuinely our part of fulfilling - we can be one, Ratzinger says, even when separated. This unity that we seek should be done in a way that does not threaten the core Christian identity of the other party - especially if they have yet to be ready to accept specific truths.⁸¹ Nevertheless, we must recognize that our differences have a place in our Christian constitution, albeit we have been separated throughout history because of particular wounds. Finally, he adds, our commitment to our ecumenical efforts should constantly be purified and renewed; it ought to mature into more than just an academic exercise - within our differences is the opportunity for distinct Christian communities to “exchange their gifts” with one another.⁸²

Finally, Pope Benedict XVI exhibited these thoughts in the many instances of his pontificate. We shall briefly list here some:

Apostolic Journeys and Pilgrimages

In his visit to Warsaw, Poland, the Pontiff stressed the need for Christians to work in a united voice, especially for the sake of defenseless people.⁸³ In an ecumenical visit to America, it is said that preaching should not only be doctrinal but that it was supposed to be based on apostolic norms.⁸⁴ In Australia, he urges that a common Eucharistic life should be sought along with a renewed look at Scriptures, Patristics, and the long history of Christian documents, despite the many hindrances between

⁷⁸ Rowland, T., *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 98-99.

⁷⁹ Rowland, T., *Benedict XVI: A Guide*, 140.

⁸⁰ Rowland, T., *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 100.

⁸¹ Ratzinger, J., *Church, Ecumenism, & Politics*, 293-7.

⁸² Benedict XVI, *BXVI XX WYD*.

⁸³ Benedict XVI, *Pastoral Visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in Poland*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2006).

⁸⁴ Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Organization Headquarters*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2008).

Christian churches.⁸⁵ To the Holy Land, it is reminded that Christ desires to bring the unification of all people towards Himself.⁸⁶ To the Czech Republic, reconciliation was solemnly urged, a task that should be common to all Christians concerned with evangelization.⁸⁷ To Cyprus, it became evident that the message of shared heritage between East and Western Churches can be responsibly accepted as the Father's task to strengthen the Gospel's witness in our world.⁸⁸ Forward to the United Kingdom, the Pontiff explains that each Christian's mission is to share Christ's hope, which is based on non-other than a common faith initiated during Baptism.⁸⁹ Finally, to his home country, Germany, the Trinity is the source of unity as efforts to resolve divisions and separations are called upon while giving thanks for the many instances where the elements of unity remain intact.⁹⁰

General Audiences

In a General Audience during his pastoral visit to Turkey, the meeting stresses three circles of relationships that a Pontiff is always concerned with, as described in *Lumen Gentium's* vision of the Church. The first is the "innermost circle," or the relationship with practicing Catholics. The second circle is the relationship with other non-Catholic Christians. The last circle is with those people of other religions.⁹¹ There are two ways of achieving this: prayer and acknowledgment of shared tradition. During the 2008 Feast of Pentecost, it is said that prayer is how each Christian becomes docile to the will of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is, therefore, the soul of ecumenical dialogue.⁹² In the Apostolic Journey to Cyprus, the Pontiff reassures that the distinct traditions between the Eastern and Western Churches should not become a hindrance to ecumenical dialogue since it is from these elements that both Churches can start seeking visible communion.⁹³ The Vatican has extended its apostolate to a "Week of Prayer of Christian Unity" every January. In the 2006 event, the Pontiff recalls his most recent predecessor's (John Paul II) efforts to promote Christian unity through prayer, juxtaposing similar themes about God's love for

⁸⁵ Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to Sydney (Australia) on the Occasion of the 23rd World Youth Day* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2008).

⁸⁶ Benedict XVI, *Pilgrimage of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Holy Land*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2009).

⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Visit of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Czech Republic* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2009).

⁸⁸ Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey to Cyprus*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2010).

⁸⁹ Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey to the United Kingdom*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2010).

⁹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey to Germany*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 2011).

⁹¹ Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Apostolic Journey to Turkey*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, December 6, 2006).

⁹² Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Pentecost*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 7 2008).

⁹³ Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Apostolic Journey to Cyprus*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, June 9, 2010).

the ecumenical cause in *Ut Unum Sint* and his coming *Deus Caritas Est*.⁹⁴ Common prayer is so important that the Vatican’s *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* and the non-Catholic allegiance *World Council of Churches* prepared common prayer booklets for participants in 2008.⁹⁵ In the approach to the 2010 installment of the same event, the Pope takes the opportunity to cite the Catechism and the importance of the *Nicene Creed*. He emphasized that coming to faith in Christ is not only an intellectual event but an existential event that requires Christians to become open to the other members of the Body of Christ.⁹⁶ In 2011 attention was drawn meditating toward the first Christian community of Jerusalem. The Pontiff stresses three critical elements about this account of St. Luke: i. the disciples were united in listening to the Apostles’ instruction; ii. the essentiality of fraternal communion; iii. the breaking of the bread. In this last point, he cites the necessity of the Eucharist to achieve communion, as it was emphasized in John Paul II’s *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*.⁹⁷ Finally, in the 2012 gathering, an open call for conversion was heeded. Longing for visible communion can only happen when those working for the ecumenical cause are transformed more interiorly into the image of Christ.⁹⁸

Letters and Addresses

To the 2005 delegates of the Patriarch of Constantinople, it was made mentioned how important it is to see the charity between Eastern and Western Churches, especially recognizing how the East suffered historical toils for the sake of the faith. In this regard, it was befitting that the ecumenical councils of Nicea and Constantinople were recommended for their formularization of the profession of faith.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the same delegates received another Papal recognition in 2007, being asked to resolve tensions in matters of Eucharistic concelebration and teaching Sacred theology through a more ecumenical perspective.¹⁰⁰ In 2011 during the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this same group of people would again gather but with an encouragement from the Pontiff to continue their

⁹⁴ Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 18, 2006).

⁹⁵ Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 23, 2008).

⁹⁶ Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 20, 2010).

⁹⁷ Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 19, 2011).

⁹⁸ Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 18, 2012).

⁹⁹ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to a Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007).

work despite great difficulty in theological dialogue.¹⁰¹ In a 2005 Inter-Christian Symposium held in Assisi, the Pope sent regards to the President of the Vatican's ecumenical initiatives, Cardinal Walter Kasper, about the message prescribed in *Unitatis Redintegratio* regarding the love for Eastern Liturgy and how their Churches' priesthood and Eucharist are still "intimately joined" to the West.¹⁰² On the Western side, the Pope also extends his efforts towards the Third European Ecumenical Assembly, insisting on authentic listening in dialogue and encounters with the other person. This dialogue and processes of encounter should be characterized by a deepening of our Christian character, an element of "spiritual ecumenism," if he may add.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the preservation of the communal character of the Church is a manifestation of Christian charity. In line with this, the Pope reminded seminarians to give attention to ecumenical theologies and Canon law since the law is concerned with love, specifically, the preservation of ecclesial unity as a consequence of law and common authority.¹⁰⁴ Considering that the Church's "movement" is relatively new, it is required that unswerving perseverance is coupled with prayer and penance. The Pontiff reminds Catholics that there is no exact time to see the fruits of this effort since only God knows the proper time for His Church's visible unity.¹⁰⁵ However, the Church is reassured, for example, through Benedict XVI's 2012 address to the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, that there is a coherence between the ecumenical endeavor and the pastoral directives of the Second Vatican Council. It is just that the Church must constantly be wary of a "false irenism and of indifferentism" surrounding the discussion's air.¹⁰⁶ With this impetus, during his Papacy, some ecumenical fruits contributed to visible communion with Christian groups. One instance is the granting of full communion to the Maronite Church.¹⁰⁷ Another, in the "inner circles" of the Church, is the casting away of excommunications to the

¹⁰¹ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to a Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople on the Occasion of the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011).

¹⁰² Benedict XVI, *Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Card. Walter Kasper on the Occasion of the Inter-Christian Symposium Organized by the Spiritual Institute of the Pontifical University of Antonianum of Rome and the Theological Faculty of the Aristotle University of Thessalonica*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005).

¹⁰³ Benedict XVI, *Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Third European Ecumenical Assembly Organized by the Council of European Episcopal Conferences and the Conference of European Churches* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007).

¹⁰⁴ Benedict XVI, *Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Seminarians*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in the Plenary Meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Benedict XVI, *Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to His Beatitude Bechara Boutros Rai, Patriarch of Antioch for Maronites Accepting His Request for Ecclesiastical Communion*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011).

bishops consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre, the founder of the Society of St. Pius X, after a long suspected controversy of schism.¹⁰⁸

Vespers Homily

In the 2006 Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul (also the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity), the Pope reinstates the wonderful coincidence of the event with the publication of his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. According to him, love always coincides with communion, such as the mystery of communion between a man and woman in matrimony and the fraternal communion of Christian brethren.¹⁰⁹ This communion is related to the *koinonia* (where we get the term “ecumenism”) of the Trinity, whose love communicated to the Church inspires her to create communion among peoples, perfectly embodied in what the Eucharist confers.¹¹⁰ Listening to God through prayer naturally turns to dialogue between Churches and Ecclesial communities.¹¹¹ Praying the prayers of unity which the annual Week provides, these prayers must animate into our souls, turning us into “aristans of reconciliation and unity in every historical period,” the kind of prayer which inspired the opening of the whole ecumenical movement.¹¹² This active promotion of Christian unity is genuinely part of God’s plan, whose hope is inspired by the Resurrection of Our Lord. As we wait for His coming, the Pope assures us that we should strive all the more to make every possibility of reconciliation happen.¹¹³ This call to unity is inseparable from the profession of our faith received at Baptism, as the 2013 homily cites St. Paul’s instruction to the Ephesians; “There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4: 4-6).¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Benedict XVI, *Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Concerning the Remission of the Excommunication of the Four Bishops Consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ Benedict XVI, *Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Liturgy of Vespers on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul for the Conclusion of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 25, 2006).

¹¹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Homily of the Holy Father: Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Munchen, Altotting, and Regensburg*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, September 12, 2006).

¹¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Liturgy of Vespers on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul for the Conclusion of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 25, 2007).

¹¹² Benedict XVI, *Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Liturgy of Vespers on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul for the Conclusion of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 25, 2008).

¹¹³ Benedict XVI, *Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Celebration of Vespers For the Conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 25, 2012).

¹¹⁴ Benedict XVI, *Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Celebration of Vespers For the Conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 25, 2013).

Angelus & Regina Caeli

Prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement and will always be why Christians continue to undertake the endeavor despite many difficulties.¹¹⁵ The call to include this in our prayers and undertakings as Catholics, according to the Pope, is even more urgent caused of the insurmountable conflicts of the past.¹¹⁶ It is incumbent that Christians be in communion, regardless of whether coming from Eastern or Western patrimony, as it is part of the commands of love conferred to us by the central and unifying role of the Eucharist.¹¹⁷ Our evangelization will merit more fruits if we, together, finally reconcile, primarily through Eucharistic celebrations.¹¹⁸

Conclusion: A New Ecumenism?

In this work, we have described Joseph Ratzinger's approach to ecumenism as building upon de Lubac's findings in *Mystici Corporis* and understanding the Church as *communion*. We have called this approach a Eucharistic Ecclesiology, a veering away from the hierarchical Church towards the Mystical Body of Christ. However, we must consider Benedict XVI's post-conciliar project, namely, re-reading Vatican II with the claim that the Council had elements that coincided with pre-conciliar tradition. Although the 1960s and onwards project seems too novel, there are instances where the Pontiff affirms the ecumenical movement as the true development of the Church's doctrine. Commentators certainly have a say in whether or not the ecumenical innovation of Vatican II is still consistent with pre-conciliar-held theologies. As such, we can only take a look at Pius XI's *Mortalium Animos* and his strong condemnation of the ecumenical initiative, explicating that the only true way to reconcile with the non-Catholics is through a "return to the one true Church."¹¹⁹ This proposition is reversed in the thought of Benedict XVI, who deeply encouraged Christian churches to affirm their distinct traditions as an opportunity to "exchange gifts." We know that even despite a short pontificate, he tried to teach the faithful to try and read Vatican II from the lens of a "hermeneutic of continuity," and hence, a recognition of the universal call of holiness to those even outside the ecclesiastical bounds of the Roman Catholic Church (as stated in *Lumen Gentium*).¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 22 2006).

¹¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 18 2009).

¹¹⁷ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI: Regina Caeli Prayer with the Ordinaries of the Holy Land*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 12, 2009).

¹¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January 17 2010).

¹¹⁹ Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1928). (Accessed June 12, 2023, URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos.html). Cf. Ferrara C. & Woods, T., "Chapter 3: Viruses in the Body of Christ" in *The Great Facade: The Regime of Novelty in the Catholic Church from Vatican II to the Francis Revolution*, (Kettering, Ohio, USA: Angelico Press, 2015).

¹²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering Them His*

For Benedict XVI, the Eucharist is the central force of unity when it comes to appealing to non-Catholic Christians. Glancing at our shared traditions is enough to state the underpinning relevance of Christ’s words *ut unum sint*. Although the term “ecumenism” (derived from the Greek *oikumene*) is contemporarily used to describe the relationships with non-Catholics, the Pontiff has shown how important it is also to practice this by reconciling with Catholics who have been hurt by past divisions (e.g., the Society of St. Pius X). Therefore, the Church must exercise its generosity towards those with the same heritage, Catholic or non-Catholic alike, and finally have the Eucharist as their starting point (as emphasized in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*). In this way, Benedict XVI can be described as the “Eucharistic Pontiff” who was utterly concerned with reconciling the relationships of past hurts. We see this fact, for example, as he mitigated the many pre-conciliar to post-conciliar controversies, urging Catholics to take seriously both what the Council said and where the Council was supposed to come from. In *Summorum Pontificum*, he attempts a peaceful dialogue between the Tridentine Liturgy (*Usus Antiquior*) and Paul VI’s Mass (*Novus Ordo Missae*), calling both of them unique expressions of the same Roman Rite, the former being “extraordinary” and the latter “ordinary.”¹²¹ Both masses can strive to be “mutually enriching,” just as Benedict XVI sees in different Christian heritages the possibility of “exchanging gifts.”

As a precursor of his thought, we get the impression that he is indeed a son of a particular Christian tradition - of the Roman Catholic tradition - who aims to unite the different sources of tradition scattered among separated Christian communities. Perhaps running deep in his Roman Catholic theology is a keener understanding of ecclesiology: that the Church - as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic - though played out in history amidst difficulties of temporal realities, draws source from the same and living Word of God, which can be seen in its most fundamental sense in the Eucharist (the *Corpus Christi Mysticum*), and subsisting truly as a single church (*Corpus Christi Verum*) in the Roman Catholic Church. In his view, the Eucharist has a powerful ecumenical potential, as we draw sources even from our historical commonality within the Christian Religion and the Roman Catholic’s relationship with their Orthodox counterparts. The Eucharist, as a model of communion, teaches all Christian parties to undergo spiritual conversion, to become a bread

Christmas Greetings, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, December 22, 2005). (Accessed June 12, 2023, URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html). Cf. Word on Fire Institute, “Part V: The Second Vatican Council” in *The Pope Benedict XVI Reader*, (United States of America: Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, 2021).

¹²¹ Benedict XVI, *Summorum Pontificum: On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007). (Accessed June 12 2023, URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20070707_summorum-pontificum.html).

broken for the sake of others, and to become a neighbor that loves. Finally, Benedict XVI's ecumenism can look novel since his predecessors strongly condemned this position. There is, however, a certain confidence in his outlook as a theologian. From his experience as a *peritus* in Vatican II to his headship of the Inquisition and even becoming the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, how far can we still deliberate whether his ecumenical thought has a real connection with the Church's Eucharistic and Ecclesiological doctrines? Was he trying to interject conciliar theology to the Church's old-age condemnation of ecumenism? One thing is for sure, and it was just as de Lubac described: the Eucharist is a *unifying sacrament*, i.e., it affects the single unity of the body of Christ.^{PS}

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