

DISCERNING OUR UNITY, EMBRACING OUR DIVERSITY¹

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PROLOGUE

During its brief history the Ecumenical Catholic Communion has founded congregations, received a number of additional communities into membership, entered into intercommunion agreements with other Catholic communions, and is developing agreements to incorporate other ecclesial bodies. It is likely that our Communion will attract an increasing number of communities and ecclesial bodies in the future. It is time for us to think seriously about how best to experience and express our commitment to both ecumenical outreach and fidelity to Catholic tradition. The purpose of this essay is to invite the clergy and laity of the ECC to enter into prayerful, thoughtful and informed discussion about being the Body of Christ, discerning the unity within the Communion, with others in the Catholic tradition, with all of our sisters and brothers in Christ, and with people of good will in other religious and spiritual traditions. And while discerning that unity we should also celebrate the diversity we encounter within this Communion and those with whom we are engaged in ecumenical dialogue. As we do these things, let us stand fast in our faith tradition while simultaneously moving forward in the world to which we have been called to proclaim the Gospel in both word and deed. Let us never let tradition inhibit innovation as we carry out our mission, and let us never let innovation obscure tradition.²

In order to start this discussion I will be presenting *a* perspective, not *the* perspective. Indeed, in all that follows it should become clear that if we are to honor our diversity there are Catholic perspectives and not a singular Catholic perspective. That is true whether we are talking about the Church Catholic writ large, the Ecumenical

¹ Notes in this essay will be used for side comments, citations of direct quotes or references, and a few recommendations for further reading. I am working with colleagues in the Bishop's Theological Advisory Commission to develop a more comprehensive annotated bibliography on a variety of theological topics, including ecclesiology. It will be posted to the ECC website later this year. Rather than make this piece even more cumbersome, I will refer readers to that forthcoming resource.

² Some of what follows is original material written specifically for the Ecumenical Catholic Communion at this moment in our history. Some of what follows is adapted from material I originally wrote over the last four decades for Anglicans, North American Old Roman Catholics, and Lutherans. It is instructive that arguments once advanced in other ecclesial traditions in other times can be so easily adapted to this time and place in this communion. There is, as *Ecclesiastes* tells us, nothing new under the sun. It reminds us of the value of the old adage, *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, the Church is always reforming. It does not mean that we are always getting better. It does mean that we always need to get back to basics.

Catholic Communion, or a given congregation. Lest anyone think that the plurality of perspectives indicates that “anything goes,” I hasten to add that if we are to honor our unity we need also keep in mind that although there is no singular Catholic perspective, we do acknowledge that some perspectives are Catholic and others are not. As we go forward in this discussion, we will consider methods of discerning our unity that can also embrace and our diversity. As we consider these in prayerful conversation, it is my hope that we will develop a consciousness that will deepen our individual and collective experiences of the complex integrity of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, and indeed of the Church Catholic.

A necessary starting place is to deal with some terminology that has been, is, and will continue to be crucial to any sustained conversation about ecclesiology (our theological reflection on the Church itself).

TERMINOLOGY

Let’s deal with a cluster of interrelated terms first, because all that follows depends on our understanding of these: Church / Ecclesia / Body of Christ / Royal Priesthood / People of God

“Church” and “Ecclesia” need to be discussed in tandem. In English and American usage, “Church” is the term most commonly encountered, but it is also the most problematic. The most probable etymology I have found traces the origin to the Greek *κῆριακον* (kyriakon) or “Lord’s house.” In most Germanic languages (including English) some variation of the word for the physical structure (*kierke, kirche, kirk, Church, etc.*) became the accepted translation of *ἐκκλησία* (ecclesia) or “assembly.” The word *κῆριακον* does not appear in the Christian scriptures. The word *ἐκκλησία* appears over one-hundred times. Furthermore, Eusebius, who used *κῆριακον* to refer exclusively to physical structures, clearly used *ἐκκλησία* to refer to those assemblies formed of those called into communion with Christ. *Ἐκκλησία* survives in most Celtic and Romance languages (*ecclesia, eglais, eglise, iglesia, etc.*). The problem, then, for us Anglophones is the conflation in one term of the assembly and the building, and potentially between those gathered by Christ and the institutional arrangements which facilitate those gathered as God’s people. The problem became particularly acute with the advent of various sectarian movements in England and the North American colonies. It was not uncommon for such a structure to be called “Meeting House” and/or “House of Prayer.” Thus, the emphasis was on location and physical artifact rather than on *ἐκκλησία*, that assembly defined by the multiple dynamic interactions between God, the gathered people, the received tradition, and the realities of the world into which the gathered are sent to minister.

There are several terms in the Christian scriptures that are used in similar ways—perhaps interchangeably-- with *ἐκκλησία*:

σῶμα Χριστοῦ (Soma Crhistou) or “Body of Christ” an example of which is *I Corinthians* 12:27, “You are the body of Christ and members in particular;”

ἱεράτευμα (Ierateuma) or “Royal Priesthood” an example of which is *I Peter* 2:9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light;”

λαός Θεοῦ (Laos Theou) or “God’s People” an example of which is *I Peter* 2:10, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

If we continue to use the word “Church,” let us make the primary definition synonymous with *Ecclesia*, the assembly of the baptized, the Body of Christ, the Royal Priesthood, and the People of God. All of these refer to an identity we share in the creation that has been made new by the Risen One. And as we contemplate these synonyms, let us pay particular attention to our identity as the People of God, the *λαός Θεοῦ*. I think it is impossible to overstate the importance of this phrase. *Λαός Θεοῦ* is the Greek origin of the term “laity,” which never in the New Testament is used to designate the un-ordained. It refers to the people of God collectively. This has enormous implications for both ecclesiology and the way in which we conceive of ministry as the work of all of the Church.

Whichever term we use from Christian Scripture, it is clear that these terms of our mutual identity are both plural and corporate. They are plural because we find no mention of singular Christians, and it is corporate because the emphasis is on a whole that is far greater than a collection of individuals who compose the assembly, or constitute the Body of Christ, or participate in the Royal Priesthood, or comprise the People of God. It is greater because each of our individual identities is remarkably changed through our relationship with the Triune God. Through our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier we have a new and everlasting relationship to one another. It is no longer the individuals who speak, but it is the corporate reality we have become as we put on Christ. Thus, we must begin our discernment of the Church by perceiving a matrix of relationships in our own experience of *Ecclesia* both here and now and in the past. If we spend too much time contemplating the institutional housing in which those relationships are expressed,

we will mistake the scaffolding that may *facilitate* the Church for the living organic reality that *is truly* the Church.

Let me be more specific. By “*truly* the Church,” I mean the relationship between God and those who, by God’s grace, have been led by the Holy Spirit to say yes to God. In the Church we are brought by God’s gracious love into relationship with each other--through Christ and as the Body of Christ--for the purpose of proclaiming the Word of God, sharing in the sacraments, and serving a broken and suffering world. We are called from that world. After formation and initiation we are sent back into that world as new beings in Christ to proclaim the Good News of the New Creation.

We are in the world, but not of it, and we must take that very seriously. When we don’t take it seriously there is a great deal of confusion and tension both within the Church and between the church and the world. The Church exists at the intersection of history and eternity, and we will never find it by looking at either realm to the exclusion of the other. We will never grasp what it is to be the Church unless we understand the constant tension in that intersection. The terrain created by that tension, therefore, will differ from time to time and place to place. The principles (in large part what we really mean when we say “tradition”) are the same in all times and in all places, but how those principles are expressed as issues in the here and now is variable. Just as we have to find the Church in both the realm of the this world *and* the realm of God’s Kingdom, and just as we have to find the Church in both the realm of time *and* the realm of eternity, so we also must find the Church expressed in both the realm of the immutable principles *and* the realm of specific issues which have emerged in the here and now.

More often than not, I would argue, the Church has reconfigured tradition to conform to the world, and that is dangerous because tradition belongs to eternity. The tradition of the Church is the faith first received from the Saints, adapted to ministerial needs in here and now—*adapted*, not re-invented and not abandoned. It is not, or should not be, the encrustation of accommodations to the world for the political and financial aggrandizement of the Church.

It may help our discernment to realize that Christian Scriptures speak of the assembly of the faithful, the Ecclesia, facing different challenges in different places and at different times and giving different expression of the one shared faith within Ecclesia writ large. This brings us to a consideration of a pair of terms, Unity and Diversity, that are often the source of tension within the Church. They are also often the cause of division. The problem is that there is a tendency to confuse and conflate tension and division. Division is something we should try to avoid and we should work to resolve and reconcile. Tension is something we should neither shun nor fear. A great deal of our

faith can be tension producing: Law *and* Gospel, Sin *and* Grace, Spirit *and* Structure, Received Tradition *and* Challenging Prophetic Insight. Tension can be a source of growth and maturation. But these pairs do not always exist in tension. Just as Grace can be found in both the Law and Gospel, and just as the Spirit can move both within and independent of Structure, and just as Prophetic Insight can illuminate and underscore Received Tradition, so Unity can provide the structure within which Diversity can thrive and Diversity can help to achieve Unity across a wide variety of cultural expressions of our one faith. We will take up Unity and Diversity more fully in due course, but at this point suffice it to say that we need to perceive and appreciate both in the Church. This point is well summarized in Hans Küng’s description of one of his Professors. “Unity is one of his central themes: unity of theology, of the mysteries of faith, and of the church; not, however, as uniformity, but as the interconnection of different things.”³

And now let us take up the potentially most unifying, yet often most divisive term used in our ecclesial culture--Catholic:

THREE LEVELS OF UNIVERSALITY

In our Constitution and Canons, and in the creed we recite each Sunday and Feast Day we affirm that we believe in the Holy Catholic Church or (when using the Nicene Creed) the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Of these modifiers of the word “Church,” “Catholic” is the most commonly used, and like the word “Church,” is often problematic. The problem in this case is not linguistic and etymological. It is ironic. Indeed, one of the greatest ironies in the History of Christianity is that the term “Catholic,” literally meaning “universal,” has become for some a synonym for exclusivity. Most of us in the ECC pride ourselves on being inclusive, and properly so. Our faith teaches us that Jesus, conquering sin and death, made the *whole* creation new—all of it, every bit of it, universally. Some of the most fruitful trends in recent theology take us in the direction of both a present and eschatological union with Christ.⁴ To whom

³ Hans Küng, *My Struggle for Freedom: Memoirs* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), p. 180.

⁴ The basic idea of union with Christ is deeply embedded in Byzantine Christianity and has received renewed attention in our own time by such proponents of Eastern Christianity as: Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985); Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism on Becoming Like Christ* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004). Eastern Orthodoxy has influenced recent Finnish Lutheran theology: Veli-Matti Käkkäinen, *One With God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). While not unknown in the west, the idea of union with Christ was not at the center of our own theological tradition until the publication of Pierre Tielhard de Chardin’s *Le Phénomène Humain* in 1955 (although written in 1938-48). An excellent English translation appeared as *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959; reprinted by Harper in 2008). Combining his theological insights with his training as a paleontologist, Tielhard presented an evolutionary Christian cosmology and eschatology.

do we reach out? The answer is, “To all.” That does not mean, however, that we reach out to everyone in precisely the same way.

In order to see how universal our perspective should be, we need to think about the opening words of both creeds:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth. . .

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We do not affirm a belief in a tribal God upon whom we have a special claim, nor a totem God that is limited to a specific place or realm of effective deity. We worship the God of all. As a Royal Priesthood with a mandate to minister to all of God’s creation, we have an obligation to find what is of God in as wide an array of people and cultures as possible. Thus, the universal perspective of Catholic Christianity requires that we be involved in inter-faith dialogue. As children of God and siblings of all, we reach out to all in fellowship. There ought to be no part of “all” that we do not understand.

Following the opening words of the creeds we affirm something more specific, yet still universal:

. . .and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead;

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ . . . Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Both creeds offer a summary of the Gospel message and place it within the context of Biblical “Salvation History.” Thus, when we recite these creeds a portion is given over to a statement of solidarity by all who acclaim, albeit in a variety of different ways, that: 1) Jesus is of God, son of God, God enfleshed—specifics will vary; 2) Jesus lived, died, and rose again for us; 3) Jesus will come again. Thus, the universal perspective of Catholic Christianity requires that we be involved in ecumenical dialogue with the wide

variety of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, whether within a Catholic tradition or not. Called and Baptized in the name of our Triune God, we reach out in fellowship and by admitting all who are in Christ to share the sacred meal with us.

While the final sections of the two creeds contain elements of “Salvation History,” they also contain elements that express an even more specific statement of our relationship to others within the Catholic tradition.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints. .

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

There is a tradition within the Church that we can identify as Catholic. That tradition is consistent with, but not identical to, the Primitive or New-Testament Church.⁵ For the last two centuries this is one of the few propositions that most Church historians of every stripe can agree upon, and no one stated it more clearly and succinctly than the late Jaroslav Pelikan.⁶ The most salient characteristics of that tradition as it emerged in Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval Period are:

- The Triumph of scripturally grounded theology over speculative philosophy;
- The Doctrine of the Trinity;
- Sacramental life as a participation in the Grace of God and not merely as ritual;
- *Ecclesia* as an article of faith and a repository of that which is sacramental and not merely as an organizational form;

⁵ See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) and the essays in Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999). These studies do not make the argument about the distinction between “compatibility” and “identity,” but a careful reading of this scholarship in tandem with reading a well conceived history of the Early Church will make a good case for this claim. An older, but still useful, brief treatment is Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church: Pelican History of the Church, Volume 1* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968). A more comprehensive treatment is the 1022 page analysis by W. H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984).

⁶Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine: 1 The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). Other works useful for further reading on the Catholic traditions are: Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*; James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and diversity in the New Testament : an inquiry into the character of earliest Christianity*, 3rd edition (London: SCM Press, 2006), especially Ch. 16; Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), especially Part II; Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How it Died* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), and James J. O’Donnell, *The Ruin of the Roman Empire* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), *passim*.

- An Apostolic tradition found in both the collective and local expressions of *ecclesia* as the relationship between that tradition and specific communities, and the relationship between the specific communities through the collegial conversation of bishops, other clergy, and the People of God;
- A structure of authority based on the Apostolic tradition and expressed historically in conciliar collegiality (for example, agreements on Christology).

Thus, as Catholic Christians we reach out in fellowship, the sharing of the Sacrament of the Altar, and in the participation in the continuation of this tradition in conciliar collegiality—or at least we should. The problem is that we—not just those of us in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, but Catholic Christians in general—have far greater difficulty with this most intimate level of unity and reaching-out than we do with inter-faith and ecumenical relations. That oxymoronic reality we can call “Catholic exclusivism” is often as large a problem within communions as between communions in the Catholic tradition. We need to explore this more fully.

“Catholic” is an Adjective, Not a Noun

Of course, I have overstated the case, but only slightly. The first set of definitions for the word “Catholic” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is:

Catholic [late L. *catholic-us*, a. Gr. *general, universal, on the whole, in general, as a whole, generally, universally*] *adj.* 1. *gen. Universal.* 2. *In specific uses: a. Universally prevalent: said e.g. of substances, actions, laws, principles, customs, conditions, etc. Obs.* 3. *In current use: a. Of universal human interest or use; touching the needs, interests, or sympathies of all men.* 4. *Catholic Epistle: a name originally given to the 'general' epistles of James, Peter, and Jude, and the first of John, as not being addressed to particular churches or persons. The second and third epistles of John are now conventionally included among the number.* 5. *Catholic Church, Church Catholic: the Church universal, the whole body of Christians.*

At this point, the reader may understandably ask, “So what?” Allow me an illustrative anecdote. In a recent conversation with a young brother in Christ (and given my advanced years, that could any be male under the age of 60), I spoke of myself as a Christian in the Catholic tradition. My young friend was adamant that he is *a* Catholic and wondered why I do not identify myself as such. I explained that I understand the word “Catholic” as an adjective, a modifier of the word “Church.” I don’t theologically understand the word “Catholic” as a noun (although I do understand the word as a noun in Popular Culture). The Nicene Creed gives us four adjectives accompanying the article on the Church: “One,” “Holy,” “Catholic,” and “Apostolic.” I have never heard anyone

claim to be a “One,” or a “Holy,” or an “Apostolic.” I recite that Creed every Sunday and major feast day. In doing so, I claim to be a part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I do not, however, claim to be *a* Catholic. I am incapable of the universality implied by the word, as is every individual I know. However, joined together in and through Christ under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, *we* as the Church are indeed capable of being universal.

Catholicity is—or should be—a characteristic of the Church. As the Body of Christ, the Church exists in union with—in identity with—the Incarnate One, existing from before time and beyond time, yet also in time. The Church, then, is—or should be—universal in time and space. Through Baptism we are reconciled to God, to one another, and to the new creation through Christ, and are enfolded into Christ. We partake of his death and his resurrection, and become a part of Christ's temporal and spatial universality. The operant word in the above paragraph is “*we*.” The indispensable phrase is “*through Christ*.” From this perspective, it is both bad grammar and bad theology to use “Catholic” as a noun in reference to any specific individual. The word is properly a modifier for the entire Body of Christ as a collectivity. The individual use of the term “Catholic” has become divisive and partisan both by those who use it as a badge of identity and those use it as a term of opprobrium. To restate the obvious, that is ironic in the extreme, given that “catholic” means “universal.”

Catholic is an Adjective, Not a Noun Denoting a Tribal Unit or Totem Group

This brings us to one of the lesser definitions found in the *OED*:

7. As applied (since the Reformation) to the Church of Rome (*Ecclesia apostolica catholica Romana*) = ROMAN CATHOLIC, *q.v.* (Opposed to Protestant, Reformed, Evangelical, Lutheran, Calvinistic, etc.)

Wide spread usage, however, does not necessarily make good ecclesiology. I am aware, of course, that the assumption of a singular institutional identity of the Catholic tradition runs deep in our culture, resulting in the use of “Catholic” as a noun as an indicator of tribal and/or totem affiliation. In spite of Andrew Greeley’s incantation that Ghetto Catholicism has disappeared from the American scene, one can find ample evidence that it is alive and well—not for all Roman Catholics to be sure—but alive and well none the less.⁷ I still regularly encounter people (Christians in general and

⁷ For Greeley’s view of contemporary Roman Catholicism in the United States, see *The American Catholic: A Social Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). *The Catholic Revolution and the Second Vatican Council: New Wine, Old Wineskins*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). One of the most insightful treatments of tribal and totem American Catholicism is Gary Wills, *Bare Ruined Choirs: Doubt, {Prophecy and Radical Religion}* (Garden City, NY:

secularists, as well as Roman Catholics) who scratch their heads at my insistence that some Anglicans and some Lutherans are in the Catholic tradition. These same folk are even more confused when I include some Methodists and some Presbyterians.⁸ Confusion turns to flabbergast when I mention a Baptist pastor in Australia who—with good reason—styles himself a "Bapto-Catholic."⁹ When I refer to myself (or anyone else) as a being in the Catholic Tradition, I am drawing attention to a consciousness of the collective nature of us who have been called, baptized, and enfolded into Christ and express our unity in the perpetuation of practices derived from the Apostolic period and the Early Church. To underscore the previous sentence, when I use the term “the Catholic Tradition” I am suggesting an awareness of an essential unity with all those who have gone before and will come after. I am also asserting that over centuries and wide geographical distribution we have some common symbols and practices that speak to that unity.

Discerning Our Unity

In a previous essay, I have argued, “If we wish to live in a Church that is truly one, we must start perceiving a Church that is truly one.”¹⁰ One could write a lengthy article about the Biblical foundations for claiming that unity does in fact define the Church, *ecclesia*, the Body of Christ, the Royal Priesthood, and the People of God. In the interest

Doubleday & Company, 1972). A telling artifact is Mary Jane Frances Cavolina Meara, Jeffrey Allen Joseph Stone, Maureen Anne Teresa Kelly, and Richard Glen Michael Davis’ best selling *Growing Up Catholic: An Infinitely Funny Guide for the Faithful, the Fallen, and Everyone In-Between* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1985).

⁸ The case of the Anglicans and Lutherans, both in terms of Episcopal succession (for all Anglicans and for Lutherans in Sweden, Africa, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and ritual practice, is obvious. I would argue that The Methodist Order of St. Luke is clearly Catholic. It invites the membership of any Christians who wish to recapture the daily office as a model for prayer life and the centrality of the Sacrament of the Altar to Christian life and action. (For more information on The Order of St. Luke, visit the following web site: <http://www.Saint-Luke.org/>). Furthermore, one of the finest Catholic liturgical scholars presently active is Don E. Sailors, a Methodist theologian at Emory University. A look at his *Worship As Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1994) will be an eye-opener to those who have far too easily dismissed the Methodists in discussions of *grosse Katholische*. For a look at the strong Catholic basis of modern Presbyterian thought and practice, see *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Know Press, 1993). The Catholic ecclesiology and sacramental theology explicit in the liturgical texts are unmistakable. The Presbyterians put this together after the Romans, Lutherans, and Anglicans had significantly revised their liturgies. Thus they were able to draw upon the experience of early liturgical revision. Hence, the *Book of Common Worship* is one of the finest worship resources available. Also instructive is an excellent appreciative commentary on John Calvin’s ecclesiology and sacramental theology from a Roman Catholic perspective: Killian McDonnell, OSB, *John Calvin, The Church and the Eucharist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967)

⁹ The congregation is South Yarra Community Baptist Church, near Melbourne. See <http://www.laughingbird.net/SouthYarraBaptist.html#The%20Weekly%20Eucharist> and <http://www.laughingbird.net/html/home.php>

¹⁰ “A Tale of Two Councils: And Their Significance for the Ecumenical Catholic Communion,” http://www.ecumenical-catholic-communion.org/eccpdf/two_councils.pdf

of relative brevity I will cite only a brief passage from Christ's High Priestly Prayer, *John 17:21*.

...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

We will never see unity in the Church unless we first, in faith, believe that our unity in Christ is stronger than matters of variation in local custom in which the tradition of the Apostles is expressed. Put a slightly different way, we must be *willing* to discern our unity before we *can* discern our unity.

And how do we go about this discernment?

There are many resources available to us, perhaps too many and certainly some that are mutually exclusive. I will briefly mention only four resources that might be fruitful as the ECC continues to define itself, its Catholicity, its Ecumenical mission, its inter-faith mission, and its commitment to diversity.

The collegial and conciliar history of the Early Church (which actually persisted for the first millennium of Christianity), helped to bring the Catholic Tradition into being and provides a useful resource, but one that is a bit murky. While we have a fair amount of documentation on this period, it is not as detailed and complete as we would like. For obvious reasons, both the New Testament period and the Early Church are of enormous importance to Christian polemicists of all sorts, and the murkiness of the evidence has led to plenty of speculation, often wild to the point of leaving the murky data behind. A commonplace saying among specialists in Church History is that the period prior to 1000 A.D. is far less uniform than traditionalists would like and far more uniform than revisionists would like. This is borne out by the work of the most responsible historians and ecclesiologists across a broad range of confessional bodies and a broad spectrum of ideologies. For example, a close comparative reading of the recent work of Judith Herrin and Philip Jenkins reveals how compatible the *cultus* and praxis of Byzantine Christians and Oriental Christians was.¹¹ The work of J.N.D. Kelly, Jaroslav Pelikan, W. H. C. Frend, R. A. Marcus, and Peter Brown all demonstrate similar contours in the history of the Western Churches during this time.¹² This work runs parallel to and in agreement

¹¹ Herrin, *Byzantium*, Chs. 4-6, 9-10, 12 and 18; Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, especially Ch. 2.

¹²J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958); J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Harlow, England: Longman, 1972, 3rd edition); Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), Chs. 1-6; Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*; Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, Chs. 7-24; R. A. Marcus, *The End of*

with the work of two contemporary prophetic Roman Catholic theologians, the ecclesiologist Richard McBrien and the ecumenist Hans Küng.¹³

This scholarship provides a fascinating mosaic, rather than a photograph with the resolution of a 25 megapixel sensor. The pattern that develops is one that suggests that the Early Church experienced remarkable compatibility (rather than uniformity) over a considerable expanse of time and space. Scripture was a constant touchstone for creedal and doctrinal development, even before the general adoption of the present canon in the late fourth century. Liturgical practice took place within a commonly shared “shape” of the liturgy with a great deal of local variation.¹⁴ Communication between local churches was through the bishops or their designees, and there was a widespread assumption that both informal communication and councils, when needed, established a collegial base for authority for regions and for the Church Catholic globally. This configuration, I would argue, is replicated by the ECC in principle, and should continue to be a guide. This resource gives us a structure that is both episcopal and synodical within which our discerning deliberations can best take place.

The second resource I would commend for further reflection is embedded in the *Commonitorium*¹⁵ which was written in the 430s under the pseudonym “Peregrinus” but was ascribed to Vincent of Lérins by Gennadius of Marseilles sixty years later (the academic jury is still out on that ascription). Sadly, this thirty page treatise is known today primarily because of a brief phrase in second chapter:

“. . . in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all [*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*]. For that is truly and in the strictest sense Catholic, which, as the name itself and the reason of the

Ancient Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), Parts I and II.

¹³ McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism*, pp. 61-73; Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Image Books, 1976; First German and English editions, 1967); Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (New York: Continuum, 1995; German edition 1994).

¹⁴ See Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), Chs. I-XII; Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), Chs. Two- Twelve; Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), Part I. That this diversity within the common “shape” continued well into the Medieval period is copiously documented in Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1986, revised and translated by William G. Storey and Niels Krogh Rasmussen, O.P.; originally published as *Introduction aux sources de l’histoire du culte chrétien au moyen âge* by Centro Italiano di Studi Sull’alto Medioevo).

¹⁵ The best English translation I have found of this document is by C. A. Heurtley in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.) *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Volume II* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1894; available in a facsimile edition from Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), pp.123-159

thing declare, comprehends all universality. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent.”¹⁶

This is the famous “Vincentian Canon” or as it is sometimes called “The Formula of St. Vincent.” It takes only a blink of the eye to determine that the brief phrase is problematic for at least two reasons, which present contradictory propositions.

First, it would lead to endless historical relativism and an epistemological nightmare. No one can responsibly claim that we have all of the documentation we need in order to determine what has been universally, always, and everywhere believed. Every new dig in Christian antiquity, every newly discovered codex would of necessity require us to re-conceptualize the Catholic faith, leading to a protean and perhaps even chameleon-like religion that has no continuity at all.

Second, the implication of the formula is that the universality, antiquity and full consensus of the faith must be able to be traced back to an original point at which we can say the Catholic faith existed at its earliest at this moment. There can be no nuances added to the faith, leading to stagnation and obsolescence.

Why, given these two contradictory extremes in the implications of the “Canon”, do I recommend the *Commonitorium* as a resource? There is far more to this document than that brief phrase that often summarizes the popular conception of this document. Indeed, just prior to the “*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*” clause, the author notes the centrality and foundational status of scripture, and the variety of interpretations. How then are we to determine what is “. . .the standard of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation”?¹⁷ Note that the author is looking for the *standard* of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation, not *the* interpretation. There is no denial of a plurality of interpretations within the tradition. Indeed, the author lived in the midst of such plurality. Rather, there is the assertion that there are some interpretations that are Catholic and some that are not. The author then introduces the famous phrase, but not as a conclusion or precise formula—it is found in the second of thirty-three chapters—but as a general guideline.

It is in the next thirty-one chapters that we are given a far more nuanced and fluid approach to discerning that which is Catholic. The author gave a series of examples of controversies within the Church over interpretation and commends the conciliar approach

¹⁶ Schaff and Wace (eds.), p. 132.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

to resolution (Chs. IV, XI, XII, and XVI). In several other chapters, the author offers interesting commentaries on Paul—specifically *Galatians 1:8* (Chs. VIII-IX) and *I Timothy 6:20* (Chs. XXI-XXII). In spite of some of the bombastic language in some portions of the *Commonitorium*, (including some language that is reminiscent of the more exclusivist and condemnatory passages of the Athanasian Creed and a section condemning the theology of St. Augustine) there are moments of pure grace in this document.¹⁸ It is as if the author were inviting us into Talmudic discussion of scripture and how it relates to Catholic tradition—a discussion in which we engage the authors of the books of the New Testament, the Early Church writers, the theologians of the past, and one another, in a conversation meant to be carried on in future generations. Thus, it is the method of the *Commonitorium*, and not a brief phrase from it, that is a useful resource for us in our discernment. It underscores the virtue of both episcopal and synodical discourse, and it asserts the centrality and foundational authority of scripture. Thus it seems that this can be quite useful as we in the ECC try to navigate a road attempting to avoid veering off into either of the dual ditches of monarchical episcopacy and populist congregationalism.

The third resource is the 1530 “Augsburg Confession,” written by Philip Melanchthon and approved by Martin Luther.¹⁹ Those unfamiliar with this set of propositions (and perhaps unfamiliar with the nature of the Lutheran Reformation) may find it a bit strange to bring this document forward in this discussion. But it is appropriate. Melanchthon sought to bring unity to a divided Christianity in Central Europe by demonstrating that the reforms in Saxony, Brandenburg, Hesse, Lünenburg, Anhalt, Nuremberg, and Reutlingen were not only consistent with Catholic tradition, but indeed articulated the faith of that tradition. This is a proposition that has received renewed attention from Lutheran scholars in recent years, and has been endorsed by several Roman Catholic Scholars.²⁰ It is instructive that after almost four decades of

¹⁸ The language reminiscent of the Athanasian Creed is in *ibid.*, Ch. XVI p.143 (also see the editor’s “Appendix I,” p. 157). The language casting doubt of Augustine’s orthodoxy is in *ibid.*, XXVI p. 151 (see also the editor’s “Appendix II,” p. 158). Neither the self-contradictory passage referred to as “The Vincentian Canon” nor the bombastic language should detract from the value of the document as a whole. We Christians for centuries have had to contend with similar problems in the sacred writings of St. Paul who was sometimes wrote as a first-class curmudgeon manifesting many of the prejudices of this time and place, and sometimes St. Paul wrote as an exegete of the Gospel filled with immeasurable Grace.

¹⁹ The best English translation of both the Latin and German texts (placed on adjacent pages) is found in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds.), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) pp. 27-105.

²⁰ Statements of the Lutheran movement as an “Evangelical Catholicism” that is a reforming movement within the Church Catholic can be found in Carl E. Braaten, *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) and the essays in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996). Examples of Appreciative Roman Catholic assessments of the Catholicity of the Augsburg Confession and Lutheranism generally are found in Joseph Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1939-40, 2 vols.); Johannes Jessen, *Luther in katholischer Sicht: Grundlegung eines ökumenischen Gespräches* (Bonn: L.

dialogue, representatives of the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation signed a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification on October 31, 1999, in Augsburg, Germany.²¹

The section of this long document that is of most immediate interest to us as we seek resources to help us discern our unity (both as the ECC and as part of the Church Catholic) is Article VII, “Concerning the Church”:

“It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. For it is enough for the true unity of the church that there the gospel is preached with one accord according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. As Paul says in Ephesians [4:4-5], ‘There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, on baptism.’”²²

One might argue that this is not useful for Catholic discernment because “the sacraments” refer only to two and not seven. However, among the Churches of the Reformation it is only the Reformed and the Anglicans who drafted confessional statements that actually enumerated the sacraments. Though certainly a popular idea as far back as the twelfth century, the seven sacraments do not receive doctrinal status until the Seventh Session of the Council of Trent, Canon I (1545-7). The Lutheran position is far closer to that of Eastern Orthodoxy, in which the Church is considered an agency of that which is sacramental and leaves the enumeration to those more taken with the precision of Aristotelian thought. Though it does not enumerate the sacraments, The Augsburg Confession clearly gives sacramental status to Baptism (Article IX), the Eucharist—including real presence (Articles X and XXIV), and Penance (Articles XI, XII, and XXV).²³ “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession” (composed by Philip Melancthon in 1531 as a response to the criticisms of the Papal authorities), while explicitly refusing to enumerate sacraments, clearly gives sacramental status to

Roßhrscheid, 1949); Louis Bouyer, *Erasmus and His Times* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959); Louis Bouyer, *The Word, Church and Sacraments in Protestantism and Catholicism* (New York: Desclee, 1961); Yves Congar, *Ecumenism and the Future of the Church* (Chicago: Priory Press, 1967); Joseph Lortz, *et al.*, *Catholic Scholars Dialogue With Luther* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970).

²¹ Alas, the common agreement did not inhibit the Supreme Pontiff from issuing a new indulgence within a month.

²² *The Book of Concord*, pp. 42-43. The translation is mine and slightly differs from that of the text cited. I have used the German text, which is more fully developed.

²³ *The Book of Concord*, pp. 43-47, 68-75.

Ordination and Matrimony.²⁴ I cite these examples for two reasons. The first, and most important, is that the way in which these propositions are argued are useful illustrations of discernment in action, and I commend them for further study. The second, which is both serious and frivolous, is to underscore my long-standing contention that the word “Protestant” is about as precise, descriptive and useless as the word, “things.”

“The Augsburg Confession” and the “Apology” taken together yield a strange combination that can best be ironically characterized as “irenic combativeness,” perhaps reflecting the influences of the passionate and often hyperbolic Luther as well as the conciliatory and understated Melancthon. This combination may well be salutary as a reminder that our fallen human natures will lead us from time to time to less than conciliatory language even as we seek unity and peace in the Church, but if we can get past those moments we can, indeed, find unity and peace with the eyes given us as part of the new creation. But the greatest value of these documents as resources for discernment is that it forces us to consider the essence of *what* we and others proclaim as the Gospel and *how* we and others live in and through the sacramental nature of the Church. Furthermore, these documents were deliberately constructed as ecumenical invitations to further conversation and thus should be of particular interest to those of us in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion.

The fourth and last resource is neither from the example of Church History, nor from a theologian. This resource is not from Christian Antiquity, nor the High Middle Ages, nor the Sixteenth-Century Reformation. It is from a book written in the early Twentieth Century by an American secular philosopher with a great interest in the Church. Josiah Royce (1855-1916) is not a household name, and thus a little background may help here. He is perhaps the most admired American philosopher among European intellectuals and, sadly, the least known of our native-born philosophers among Americans.²⁵

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-221.

²⁵ One of the earliest works by the celebrated French Existentialist Gabriel Marcel was *La métaphysique de Royce*, first published in 1919 and only four decades later made available in English translation as *Royce's Metaphysics* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1956) and reprinted in 1975 by Greenwood Press. Rarely referenced at all by American philosophers, Royce is mentioned only briefly (a passing reference of no real substance) in Cornell West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 139, even though Royce was Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Harvard during the period when Pragmatism was developed in that very department, and was a close colleague and friend of William James who gave “Pragmatism” its name and early definition. Fortunately, Royce gained the attention of one specialist in American Literature—John Clendenning, *The Life and Thought of Josiah Royce* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985)—and one specialist in American History—Robert V. Hine, *Josiah Royce: From Grass Valley to Harvard* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992). Both have written insightful and nuanced studies.

Royce was obsessed with community. Perhaps this was the result of a somewhat unsettled life: born in a newly founded California mining town with a constantly shifting demography during his childhood, off to Berkeley at the age of 15 to obtain his B.A. degree, off for a year of graduate study in Germany, then to Johns Hopkins University where he was one of the first four recipients of the Ph.D. from that institution, back to Berkeley to join the faculty in 1878, and then on to Harvard from 1882 until his death in 1916. The theme of community is found in most of his works in technical philosophy as well as a History of California and a novel.²⁶

Royce's interest in religion nearly matched his obsession with community. In his first scholarly work published after his arrival at Harvard, Royce introduced his analysis with the following words:

*"The religious problems have been chosen for the present study because they first drove the author to philosophy, and because they, of all human interests, deserve our best efforts and our utmost loyalty."*²⁷

His concerns about both religion and community come together in his most carefully crafted and well argued book, *The Problem of Christianity*.²⁸ The problem, as Royce sees it, is that refinements in scientific thought led to a Christian retreat from the realm of cosmology, as if scientific descriptions of how the universe operates obsolesced questions of ultimate meaning. Thus, in his view, Christianity was removed from the center of the quest for meaning in life in the western world, and moved to the periphery as a set of institutions exclusively devoted to sociability and service. It is the move from

²⁶ Josiah Royce, *California: A Study of American Character, From the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco* (Santa Barbara, CA: Peregrine Press, 1970; originally published in Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1886); Josiah Royce, *The Feud of Oakfield Creek: A Novel of California Life* (New York, Johnson Reprint Corp., 1970; originally published in Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1887).

²⁷ Josiah Royce, *The Religious Aspects of Philosophy: A Critique of the Bases of Conduct and of Faith* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965; a facsimile reprint of the original edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913). See also Royce's *The Conception of God: A Philosophical Discussion Concerning the Nature of the Divine Idea as a Demonstrable Reality* (St. Clair Shores, MI: Scholarly Press, 1976; facsimile reprint of the original edition, New York: Macmillan, 1897), *Studies of Good and Evil* (New York: D. Appleton, 1898), and *The Sources of Religious Insight: Lectures Delivered Before Lake Forest College on the Foundation of the Late William Bross* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2001; originally published in New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1912).

²⁸ Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1968; originally published in New York: MacMillan, 1913). Although Royce's mother was a devout member of the Disciples of Christ, and Royce undoubtedly was exposed to that religious influence as a child, there is no evidence of his affiliation with any ecclesial body in his adult years, which makes the passion with which he argues the case presented in this book all the more poignant.

what he calls “Beloved Community” to “mere institution” that is at the heart of the problem for Royce:

*“All experience must be **at least** individual experience; but unless it is **also** social experience, and unless the whole religious community which is in questions unites to share it, this experience is but as a sounding brass. . . This is the essence of Christianity. If indeed I myself must cry ‘out of the depths’ before the light can come to me, it must be my Community that, in the end, saves me.”²⁹*

Royce then traces the Beloved Community (the Church) back through the Holy Spirit, and then on to Jesus Christ.³⁰ He argues that the structure of both the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds are narratives of Salvation History from Creation to “the life of the world to come.” Just as the Nicene Creed explicitly teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (and, for us westerners, the Son), so the structure of the creed implicitly teaches that the Church proceeds from and is constantly fueled by the Holy Spirit. Thus, his claim that “it must be my Community that. . . saves me” is a communitarian, a pneumatological, and a Christocentric statement in the face of the increasingly secular atomistic individualism he perceived replacing the living reality of Christ present among us embodied in the Church. At a critical point relatively early in his argument, he makes a bold ecclesiastical statement in the face of a religious culture that was increasingly indifferent to ecclesiology:

“As a fact, the idea and the doctrine of the Christian Church constitute indeed a vital and permanent part of Christianity; and a study of this idea is a necessary, and may properly be the first, part of our inquiry into the problem of Christianity.”³¹

In the process of unpacking and adding nuance to his announced agenda, Royce spent no time with polity and structure. Rather, he discussed essence, process, and above all the relational characteristics through which the Beloved Community develops and evolves. Some of his chapter titles are useful in summarizing his approach: “The Idea of the Universal Community,” “The Realm of Grace,” “Atonement,” “The Body and the Members,” “Perception, Conception, and Interpretation,” “The World of Interpretation,” “The Historical and the Essential.”

For Royce, the Beloved Community exists a constant and progressive interpretive conversation. That conversation is characterized by both continuity and change. The

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-249 is the crucial center of this argument.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

essence is continuous. The change is our progressive realization of that essence through the ongoing interpretive conversation. Indeed, Royce comes close to defining the Church as that conversation in phrases such as “a progressively realized community of interpretation” and “the process of the life of the Spirit and the Community.”³² If we study Royce’s metaphysical ecclesiology in tandem with Robert Jenson’s more recent *Systematic Theology*³³ we can consider the possibility that the Church is our response to and our participation in the Divine Conversation (Jenson’s term) that exists in all eternity between the persons of the Trinity, through which all that is has its being and without which nothing exists (see especially Jenson’s Chapters Thirteen, “The Being of the One God,” and Fourteen, “Our Place in God”). To this I would add that for both Royce and Jenson, the Church is defined by relationships and the ongoing interpretive conversation under the new mandate of love, more than by structure, concordats, edicts and encyclicals.

Royce gives us a sense of ultimacy, eternity, and universality as we go about our discernment. While it does not give us a structure, method, or marks of the Church as the other three resources attempt to do, Royce (with an able assist from Jenson) provides us with a rootedness in and connectedness to the foundation, source and destiny of our very being. It is this perspective that will keep us looking for unity—with all those who share in the Catholic tradition, with all those who share baptism in the name of the Trinity, and with all those who participate in God’s creation.

I sincerely hope no reader is anticipating a blending of these resources into a single template or formula. We need to keep in mind that our task is discernment, and discernment is a process that best takes place through prayer and conversation. Definitions can be useful if we avoid using them as templates that are either too precise or too imprecise. Templates usually lead to the reliance on formulas that can make us vulnerable to extreme exclusion or extreme inclusion. In short, we are not attempting to construct an ecclesiastical equivalent of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. We must, as the Body of Christ, discern by feeling, intuiting, studying, thinking, discussing praying our way through issues and situations. Please note there is no “or” in the previous sentence. Our affect, studious skills, intellect, honest conversation, and constant reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit are all needed as we go forward.

Our most simple task will be discerning our unity with God’s creation and all of God’s children. That is a given—it is simply a matter of our being open to it.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 323, 342.

³³ Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1, The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Only slightly less simple is the task of discerning our unity with all of the baptized. We need to constantly recall the words of Jesus from Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven,” but we also need not let that inhibit our dialogue with those who are in Christ.

SEGUE TO EMBRACING OUR DIVERSITY

If I were Joan Rivers, I would give this section the title, “Can We Talk?” We are not quite finished with considering how we discern our unity, but we need to combine that with a discussion of how we embrace our diversity. First, we need to clearly distinguish between three “D” words: Diversity, Difference, Division. Alas, most often in the history of Christianity (and most likely the history of our species), diversity and difference quickly resolve into perceived division.

By “diversity” I mean many ways of expressing an agreed upon essence. An example of this is the plurality of expressions of the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. For example, within the Catholic tradition some may express this essential belief as “Real Presence” and others as “Transubstantiation.”

By “difference” I mean distinctions that indicate remarkably distinct conceptualizations rather than simply alternative modes of expression. An example of this is the plurality of meanings attached to the Lord’s Supper. Thus, for those of us in the Catholic tradition it is the presence of Christ in the very elements of communion, for some in the Reformed tradition it is the spiritual presence of Christ with us as we celebrate the feast, and among some in Free Churches it is a memorial feast.

By “division” I mean an impediment to unity.³⁴ These are most often encountered when we attempt to discern unity within the Catholic tradition. Those of our sisters and brothers who are mental health practitioners know well that some of the most difficult relationships we encounter in life are with members of our own families. Thus, the four resources (or, more precisely, bits of food for thought as we discern our unity) mentioned above will need to come into play as we deal with the variety of expressions of the Catholic tradition within and beyond the ECC. We need to walk a path between a particularism that would exclude the Apostles (I have good reason to doubt that they ever said “*Introibo ad altare Dei*”) and an unreflective universalism

³⁴ Ephraim Radner, *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) is a profound and sobering reflection on the significance of division in the Church. I recommend it for all who are interested in Christian unity and who lament our unhappy divisions.

that would make a reality out of Flip Wilson’s satirical “Church of What’s Happening Now.”³⁵

Let’s briefly explore this path using two examples:

Not every community in the ECC, nor every community in every Catholic ecclesial body we encounter, will worship in precisely the same way. Indeed, I would be very surprised if any *two* communities worship in *precisely* the same way. The question ought never to be one of uniformity, but of unity in the shape and meaning of the liturgy. Thus, seeing division rather than diversity in “high” and “low” ceremonial practices is an error of perception, but for Catholic unity it is questionable whether infrequent celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar or a merely symbolic perspective on that sacrament is acceptable. To paraphrase Luther (and to introduce a highly improbably choice for purposes of illustration), I would rather receive Christ’s blood in a Tridentine rite (not my favorite liturgical form) with a clear real presence Eucharistic prayer than sip wine in a *Novus Ordo* rite (a form I prefer) with a memorial declaration in lieu of a Eucharistic prayer.³⁶

Not every person in the ECC, nor every community in every Catholic ecclesial body we encounter, will interpret all of the articles of the Creeds in the same way. The question ought never to be one of uniformity, but of the ability to recite the Creeds in solidarity with those in the Church Catholic today and in the past. For example, whether one’s notion of the specifics of creation is formed more by ancient cosmology or by modern physics and biology is not as important as whether one acknowledges God as the author of that creation.

In both of these examples, the diversity does not mean that there are no essential absolutes. It means that we, collectively as the Church, need to discern the *essence* of those absolutes rather than dictate them as though any one of us have been to Sinai. In doing so we need constantly to remember that our task is one of discernment and not judgment. If we are informed by Royce’s understanding of the Church as a progressively

³⁵ I mention “division” only in passing in this essay because the emphasis is on unity and diversity. Please do not assume that I am minimizing the serious problem of division in both the history and present reality of the Church Catholic, Christianity, and our species in general. Almost a decade ago I addressed the problem of division in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and offered a brief suggestion about ways in which we can deal with divisive issues in the Church using the structured spirituality of the Catechumenate and the profound insights of a handful of social theorists. That essay can be found at: <http://www.mcsletstalk.org/5w01.htm>

³⁶ Luther’s quote is, “I would rather have pure blood with the Pope, than drink mere wine with the Enthusiasts.” *Luther’s Works: Vol. 37*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958-1986), p 317.

realized community of interpretation, then we discern the unity of the Church Catholic best by intentionally being the Church.

Diversity does not mean adoption or even affinity. We can both accept and embrace practices and expressions in which we see the Gospel and the Catholic faith, even if they are not practices and expressions that speak directly to us. Fidelity to the Catholic tradition requires us to hold both unity and diversity in dynamic tension. The contingent reality of historical circumstances is a vital part of Christian anthropology, in which human finitude is the reciprocal of the theology of boundless grace. Thus we should seek the largest possible definition for Catholic. As a point of departure for further discussion, and not as an attempt at definitive definition, I would posit the following characteristics: 1) adherence to the Ecumenical Creeds; 2) a conscious retention of the shape of the liturgy as it has evolved and adapted to various cultural environments; 3) a sacramental theology which denies a purely memorialist and subjective interpretation; 4) a vision of ecclesia as something considerably more than a voluntary association; and 5) the episcopate as an expression of Apostolic authority that involves an interaction between the Bishop, the other clergy, and the laity.³⁷

Thus far I have given reasons why we should accept (or, worse yet, tolerate) Diversity. Why should we embrace it? First, it is reflective of the diversity of God's creation (just as our unity is expressive of the unity of God's creation). Second, it requires us to learn from one another and from the Holy Spirit. Third, that increased appreciation within diversity can expand our experience of the wideness of the love we have for one another, as Christ loves us in our diversity. But the most important reason is that our commitment to diversity within unity will lead us to pray for and work with existing hopeful efforts at greater cooperation among Christians in the Catholic tradition. Too often we look for signs and portents in dramatic institutional mergers, but we ought not to let them obscure less dramatic, but ultimately more important, ongoing cooperative ventures which bring Christians (both in and beyond the Catholic tradition) together.

The most obvious and effective arena of unity is in Holy Praxis. We can see it on all continents as people of all faiths and no faiths gather in such servant ventures as Habitat for Humanity. We can see it in such ecumenical endeavors as the various AIDS Pastor Care Networks. We have no difficulty joining together in Mitzvahs, Corporal Works of Mercy, and just plain old doing the right thing. I would encourage an escalation of these pragmatic engagements, and would suggest that they be made a gateway for increased interfaith, ecumenical and pan-Catholic dialogues. That we work

³⁷ In the clause on the episcopacy I have in mind something akin to the British definition of the Crown, which is defined as the ongoing conversation between the monarch and Parliament.

together is wonderful. Now let us explore the common root of our motivation for that work.

I would draw attention particularly to the Liturgical Movement, the diaconate, the catechumenate, and the growing popularity of Taizé vespers.

The Liturgical Movement has been, is, and will continue to be a place where Catholics (Old, Independent, and Roman), Lutherans and Anglicans and others will continue to meet, pray together, and work together. It is instructive that the Roman Catholic liturgical conferences at Collegeville and Notre Dame are no longer exclusively Roman, that the Anglican Sewanee Province Summer Liturgical Music Institute now draws from across the Catholic spectrum, and that the Liturgical Institute at Valparaiso is no longer a Lutheran ghetto. It is even more instructive that the graduate program in liturgy at Notre Dame presently has two Lutherans on the faculty, and has had Anglicans as well as Roman Catholics. Liturgy will continue to be an important area of ecumenical activity and growing Catholic solidarity across institutional divisions. What can be said of the liturgical movement can also be said of the diaconate and the catechumenate, where institutions and workshops are increasingly ecumenical. Taizé styles of worship draw upon the ecumenical strength of the community in France and attract increasing numbers of people from wide array of ecclesial bodies (some from beyond the Catholic tradition) who gather to pray for peace, justice, and unity.

The point of urging the ecumenical activity is not to achieve organic institutional unity. Unity in Christian life and around the altar is far more important. It is going to be more and more difficult to tolerate Eucharistic separatism if we get to know one another as Sisters and brothers in Christ. Given our peripheral place in the world in which we are called to minister and proclaim, this separatism comes close to being an obscenity. At best, it certainly makes us look foolish to the world.

So, if we happily worship our way together we will have achieved Nirvana, right? Wrong! This takes persistence and sticking with relationships over a long period of time. From time to time we may get a foretaste of that feast when every tear shall be wiped away and denominational boundaries will be banished to perdition, but don't confuse that with the ongoing reality.

Oh, we have all had wonderful moments when the barriers were removed, but I do would caution against a casual breaking of canons and crossing , of such lines. That might seem surprising given everything else I have had to say. In order to explain this, I will have to speak personally. I have received in Roman Catholic churches. I have also refrained from receiving. I will undoubtedly do both again. Every time I have

received or refrained from receiving, I have been conscious of the decision and have felt the tension present in both actions. I know that as a baptized person Jesus Christ invites me to the meal. If it were that simple I would not have felt tension. More is involved than simply my personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We are also related to each other through Jesus Christ. That relationship is known as The Church. In the long run, ecclesia is ultimately transcendent. For the present, however, it has complex historical, existential, and institutional realities that must be considered, as well as the incarnational and eternal reality that must be allowed to have the final word. Thus, I have never "simply" received, or "simply" refrained.

I generally take my cues from what I know of the specific assembly and the dynamic of the liturgy as it unfolds in that specific situation. The crucial question is whether I have a sense of being seated for the meal. Vague indicator that, and not always reliable, but it is what I have. I recall a mass at which a good friend was taking his final vows as a Jesuit. My sense was that I was not seated, and I was determined to refrain. During the distribution my friend brought the sacrament to me. After mass he said, "Greg, I would never invite you to dinner and not feed you."

I can live with either decision if it is achieved while dealing with the tension inherent in the situation. What would distress me is either receiving or refraining as a reflexive action without a serious consideration of issues of sacramental theology and ecclesiology. From those two perspectives combined, both receiving and refraining are flawed. More often than not I refrain as a conscious choice and allow the resultant pain and tension to be an impetus for escalating serious ecumenical endeavors. Perhaps there should be a place for ritual expression of the tension, the pain, and the hope involved in such a refraining. The pain is real. So is the hope. Perhaps our most effective witness to the world, and to each other, is to live with the tension and pain of our sinful divisions in such a way that our love for each other is manifest to a world looking for a sign of hope that a broken and flawed humanity can be healed.

So, this tired old Christian in the Catholic tradition has no set templates or formulas to aid us in discernment. Perhaps there are no such instruments. But there is the possibility that we can, in this specific historical circumstance, discern together what it means to be Church Catholic. And as we discover that, the circumstances will change, and we will have to continue discerning what it means. This is a pilgrimage we are on, and not a puzzle to be solved. It is a life to be lived together, in and under Christ.