

CONTRA LEFEBVRISM

PART I: ON ECUMENISM

1. Abstract

One of the main objections of the Society of St. Pius X concerns the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on ecumenism, which the Society claim denies the unique role of Christ and His Church in the salvation of souls and in the path to holiness, proclaiming instead the idea that all beliefs, since they come from the individual, are all worthy expressions of the human spirit, and each can lead to universal peace and happiness.

This seems to be a great misunderstanding, for a more detailed review of the conciliar documents reveals, in fact, the opposite intention. Far from seeing dialogue and respect for other beliefs as the end, the Church instead holds both up as just the beginning. Instead of being content with a universalist “live and let live”, the Church challenges its members to reach out with a spirit of friendship and respect to people of other faiths to learn where we are the same, understand where we are different, and from there, by our example, shine the light of the Gospel on others and lead them to Christ.

2. The Position of the Society of St. Pius X:

“Catholicism upholds the rights of God and promotes conversion while modernism pursues dialogue and compromise. This new idea of dialogue and of ecumenism is one of the most confusing novelties introduced by the Second Vatican Council - despite the condemnations of the Popes of the 19th century.”

The Society opens their argument against ecumenism, which they define as “the search for worldwide religious unity”, condemning the ecumenical events organized by the recent Popes, claiming that they “raise both doctrinal and pastoral problems.” In the Society’s FAQ video, Fr. McDonald presents the difference between a Catholic and Modern understandings of ecumenism.

In Catholicism:

- Christianity is the one true religion revealed directly by God. Only the Catholic faith can bring lasting peace, not only among men in the world, but between God and men for all eternity in heaven.
- Because these teachings come directly from God Himself, they are free of all falsehood.

- The Catholic Church therefore has the duty and responsibility to spread its teachings and presence as far and wide as possible, lovingly encouraging souls to abandon error and embrace the truth for the sake of their souls.¹

Unlike in Modernism:

- Religious knowledge comes from man rather than God, and arises from within as a subjective impulse of conscience.
- All religions are to be considered good and praiseworthy since they all, in their own unique way, manifest man's religious instinct, with as many different expressions and understandings of God as there are men.
- Through dialogue and mutual respect, all the religions of the world come together to understand one another, promoting healthy peace and compromise.

In other words, Catholicism upholds the rights of God and promotes conversion, while Modernism pursues dialogue and compromise. These latter ideas were, according to the Society, one of the most confusing doctrines introduced at Vatican II, despite the condemnations of the 19th and early 20th century Popes, and flourished with repeated ecumenical ceremonies (the prayer meeting in Assisi on October 27, 1986 is frequently cited). The Society still considers these ceremonies to be a true offense, both to Jesus as our unique Savior and to non-Catholics who are, as a result, left in error without any motivation or encouragement to be saved.

3. The Documents at Issue:

The Society identifies the Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (specifically Ch. 1, §8), the declaration *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), and the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism) as the primary sources of the Council's teachings on ecumenism.

4. The Position of the Second Vatican Council:

Before stating the position of the Council, it needs to be clarified that the Society's definition of the term "ecumenism" as "the search for worldwide religious unity" is not quite correct. In the context of the Vatican II documents, ecumenism only refers to *Christian* unity, and not simply religious unity; in fact, the words "ecumenism" and "ecumenical" do not even appear in *Nostra Aetate*. However, one

¹ cf. Matthew 28:19-20.

can discern from the Society's arguments that they are objecting primarily to these two ideas:

- That all religions are true (or at least, true enough) and any religion can be a sure path to salvation.
- That dialogue and respect for differences should be sought for as ends unto themselves.

Therefore, even though *Nostra Aetate* does not deal with ecumenism per se, it seems to have a direct bearing on the Society's underlying argument against what it sees as the council's implicit endorsement of universalism. The document will thus be considered and summarized below, along with *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, in the order in which they were promulgated (with **emphasis** added by the author).

4a. The Position of *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964):

Christ established and continues to sustain His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity. Through this entity, one with visual delineation, He communicated truth and grace to all.

The visible (i.e. the hierarchy, the visible and earthly assemblies) and invisible (i.e. the Mystical Body of Christ, the spiritual and heavenly communities) components of the Church are not separate realities, but rather one complex reality that mirrors her Divine Spouse, who likewise was fully divine and fully human.

This one reality is the one Church of Christ, professed as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic; shepherded by Peter, directed by the Apostles, and erected for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth"² Constituted and organized by Christ in the world as a society, this Church continues and has its being in the Catholic Church, likewise governed by the successor of Peter and those in communion with him. Although many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside of the visible structure of the Church, they are nevertheless forces that impel toward Catholic unity, as gifts belonging to the Church.³ (Ch. 1, §8).

4b. The Position of *Unitatis Redintegratio* (November 21, 1964):

The restoration of unity among Christians is of the utmost importance. For although Christ founded one Church, and one Church only, many

² 1 Timothy 3:15.

³ *Dei Filius* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith), Ch. 3, 24 April, 1870.

Christian communities present themselves as the true inheritors of Christ, yet differ in mind and go their different ways, leaving one with the impression that Christ Himself could be divided. This division is a source of grave scandal, openly contradicts God's will for His Church, and damages the cause of evangelization. However, there is a growing recognition of Christian divisions and a deeper longing for unity. This movement toward unity is what is called "ecumenical" (Introduction, §1).

In the course of His life, death and resurrection, Christ sought the will of the Father, praying that all who believed in Him "may be one even as we are one."⁴ To foster and preserve this unity, Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist, through which the unity of the Church is both signified and made a reality; He sent his Holy Spirit upon His followers, through which the people of the New Covenant are gathered into a communion of faith, hope and charity; and He entrusted His Apostles and their successors, with St. Peter and his successors as their head, the eternal task of ruling the Church and administering the sacraments. Christ, as the chief cornerstone, continues through the Holy Spirit to perfect His people's fellowship in unity (Ch. 1, §2).

Over time, various communities became separated from full communion with the Church, and often enough men from both sides bore the blame. Nevertheless, children born in these communities and who believe in Christ cannot be held responsible for the separation. Although differences in doctrine and discipline can represent serious obstacles to full communion, the Church embraces them as brothers, for all who believe in Christ and are truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church, even if this communion is imperfect. In addition, many elements (both interior and exterior) that together build up the life of the Church can be found outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church, such as the Bible, the life of faith, hope and charity; interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and liturgical actions.

Because of this, the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using separated churches and communities as means of salvation, means which draw their efficacy from the fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church. However, they are not blessed with that unity which Christ wished to bestow on all the baptized. It is only through the Catholic Church, the "all-embracing means of salvation", that men can benefit fully from the means of salvation. Moreover, God entrusted the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter, and therefore the Pope, is the head, so as to establish the one Body of Christ on earth to which all should be fully incorporated (Ch. 1, §3).

4 John 17:22

All Catholics are called to take an active, intelligent part in the work of promoting Christian unity. In performing these undertakings, Catholics must fairly and accurately represent the conditions of their separated brethren while also tending to what needs to be done or renewed within the Catholic household. Next, dialogue and meetings between competent experts of different communities should take place wherein each side explains their teachings in greater depth, to bring out their distinctive features and thus enhance their understanding of each other. This prepares the way for cooperation in duties toward the common good, common prayer whenever allowed, and finally, an opportunity to examine their faithfulness to Christ's will for His Church and to act on it.

Such actions, when done worthily, promote a spirit of charity which, when perfect ecclesiastical communion is achieved, will enable all to gather into that unity which subsists in the Catholic Church. That unity is something the Catholic Church can never lose and, with time, will hopefully increase (Ch. 1, §4).

The attainment of Christian unity is the concern of the whole Church; it cannot happen without the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to Whom we pray for the grace to be self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others, and have an attitude of fraternal generosity. Catholics should further have recourse to prayer, especially the prayer for the unity of the Church which Christ himself prayed on the eve of his death. In certain circumstances, such prescribed prayers for unity and during ecumenical gatherings, it is desirable that Catholics should join in prayer with their separated brethren. Such prayers are both an effective means of obtaining the grace of unity and an expression of the ties that bind all Christians.

However, worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*) should not be used indiscriminately for the sake of unity. It is likewise essential that the Catholic faith should be presented in its entirety, for nothing is so foreign to ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss, and its genuine and certain meaning obscured (Ch. 2, §5-12).

4c. *The Position of Nostra Aetate (October 28, 1965):*

In her task of promoting unity and love among men, the Church considers what they have in common and what draws them to fellowship. For one is the community of all peoples and nations, just as there is one origin and goal common to all peoples and nations: God. His providence, goodness, and salvific design extends to all men until the day when the elect will be united in the Holy City of God. (§1).

Throughout time, men turn to religion for answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition concerning who we are, the meaning and aim of our lives, good and evil, right and wrong, the road to happiness, and life after death. Though other religions differ in their teachings and precepts, and though they have struggled to answer those questions with more refined concepts or with a more developed language, the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions. Indeed, she reveres those ways of conduct and of life within those religions that reflect a ray of the Way, Truth, and Life⁵ Whom she proclaims, and must ever proclaim. For example:

- Hindus contemplate the divine mystery, expressing it through myths and searching philosophical inquiry. Through ascetical practices, profound meditation, or a flight to God with love and trust, they seek freedom from the evils of the world.
- Buddhists realize the insufficiency of the world and follow a way by which they might be able to attain supreme illumination.
- Muslims adore the one merciful and all-powerful God, linking themselves to Abraham in submission to God. Although they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as prophet. They also honor Mary, His Virgin Mother and, like Christians, await the day of judgment with prayer, almsgiving and fasting.
- Jews, as people of the Old Testament, are linked to Christians through their common spiritual patrimony. Although the Jews did not accept the Gospel, and though it was the Jewish authorities, and those who followed them, who pressed for the death of Christ, this crime cannot be laid at the feet of all Jews without distinction, nor must it be forgotten that God continues to hold them dear for the sake of their fathers.

Catholics cannot truly call upon God if we refuse to love men of other religions as our brothers, created as they are in the image of God, for “He who does not love does not know God.”⁶ Therefore, Christians are called to follow in the footsteps of Sts. Peter and Paul “maintain[ing] good fellowship among the nations” and seeking to live in peace with all men, that they might truly be sons of the Father. (§2-5).

5. Pre-Conciliar & Post-Conciliar Teachings:

⁵ John 14:6.

⁶ 1 John 4:8.

5a. Pre-Conciliar Teaching:

To understand Vatican II's teachings on both ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, it is necessary to reference the beginning of the declaration *Nostra Aetate*:

"In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

"One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men, until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light." (§1)

The declaration then goes on to list elements of truths in other religions, specifically in Hinduism (ch. 2), Buddhism (ch. 2), Islam (ch. 3) and Judaism (ch. 4). One could call these areas of commonality "seeds of the truth", as suggested by St. Justin Martyr:

"And the holy Spirit of prophecy taught us this, telling us by Moses that God spoke thus to the man first created: Behold, before your face are good and evil: choose the good. And again, by the other prophet Isaiah, that the following utterance was made as if from God the Father and Lord of all: Wash you, make you clean; put away evils from your souls; learn to do well; judge the orphan, and plead for the widow: and come and let us reason together, says the Lord: And if your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as wool; and if they be red like as crimson, I will make them white as snow. And if you be willing and obey Me, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you do not obey Me, the sword shall devour you: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. Isaiah 1:16, etc. And that expression, The sword shall devour you, does not mean that the disobedient shall be slain by the sword, but the sword of God is fire, of which they who choose to do wickedly become the fuel. Wherefore He says, The sword shall devour you: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. And if He had spoken concerning a sword that cuts and at once dispatches, He would not have said, shall devour. And so, too, Plato, when he says, The blame is his who chooses, and God is blameless, took this from the prophet Moses and uttered it. For Moses is more ancient than all the Greek writers. ***And whatever both philosophers and poets have said concerning the immortality of the soul, or punishments after death, or contemplation of things heavenly, or doctrines of the like kind, they have***

received such suggestions from the prophets as have enabled them to understand and interpret these things. And hence there seem to be seeds of truth among all men; but they are charged with not accurately understanding [the truth] when they assert contradictories. So that what we say about future events being foretold, we do not say it as if they came about by a fatal necessity; but God foreknowing all that shall be done by all men, and it being His decree that the future actions of men shall all be recompensed according to their several value, He foretells by the Spirit of prophecy that He will bestow meet rewards according to the merit of the actions done, always urging the human race to effort and recollection, showing that He cares and provides for men. But by the agency of the devils death has been decreed against those who read the books of Hystaspes, or of the Sibyl, or of the prophets, that through fear they may prevent men who read them from receiving the knowledge of the good, and may retain them in slavery to themselves; which, however, they could not always effect. For not only do we fearlessly read them, but, as you see, bring them for your inspection, knowing that their contents will be pleasing to all. And if we persuade even a few, our gain will be very great; for, as good husbandmen, we shall receive the reward from the Master.”⁷

In other words, by identifying areas of commonality in certain elements of truth, Catholics could then use that knowledge, through dialoging with others and living an authentic Catholic life, to show those truths in the greater context of the whole Truth of Catholicism. St. John Henry Newman considered the Church to be at her best throughout history whenever she embraced the very approach to evangelization that Vatican II put forth in its documents:

“What man is amid the brute creation, such is the Church among the schools of the world; and as Adam gave names to the animals about him, so has the Church from the first looked round upon the earth, noting and visiting the doctrines she found there. She began in Chaldea, and then sojourned among the Canaanites, and went down into Egypt, and thence passed into Arabia, till she rested in her own land. Next she encountered the merchants of Tyre, and the wisdom of the East country, and the luxury of Sheba. Then she was carried away to Babylon, and wandered to the schools of Greece. *And wherever she went, in trouble or in triumph, still she was a living spirit, the mind and voice of the Most High, “sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions,” claiming to herself what they said rightly, correcting their errors, supplying their defects, completing their beginnings, expanding their surmises, and thus gradually by means of them enlarging the range and refining the sense of her own teaching. So far from her creed being of doubtful credit because it resembles foreign*

⁷ 1st Apology, Ch. 44

theologies, we even hold that one special way in which Providence has imparted divine knowledge to us has been by enabling her to draw and collect it together out of the world."⁸

"True religion is *the summit and perfection of false religions*; it combines in one whatever there is of good and true separately remaining in each. *And in like manner the Catholic Creed is for the most part the combination of separate truths*,⁹ which heretics have divided among themselves, and err in dividing. So that, in matter of fact, if a religious mind were educated in and sincerely attached to some form of heathenism or heresy, and then were brought under the light of truth, it would be drawn off from error into the truth, not by losing what it had, but by gaining what it had not, not by being unclothed, but by being 'clothed upon.' *True conversion is ever of a positive, not a negative character.*"¹⁰

On the specific topic of ecumenism, which again is defined as "the principle or aim of promoting unity among the world's *Christian Churches*", it should be recalled that even before the ecumenical movement began among the Eastern Orthodox and Protestant churches in earnest in the 1910s and 20s, such gestures were not unusual for the Church. Consider the Council of Florence, which sought to reunite the Catholic Church with the churches of the East. Consider the decrees of Pope Eugene IV:

"It befits us to render thanks to almighty God who, mindful of his past mercies, always bestows on his church even richer growth and, although he allows her to be tossed on occasions by the waves of trials and tribulations, yet never permits her to be submerged but keeps her safe amid the mountainous waters, so that by his mercy she emerges from the various vicissitudes even stronger than before. For behold, *the western and eastern peoples, who have been separated for long, hasten to enter into a pact of harmony and unity; and those who were justly distressed at the long dissension that kept them apart, at last after many centuries, under the impulse of him from whom every good gift comes, meet together in person in this place out of desire for holy union.*"¹¹

"Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice. For, the wall that divided the western and the eastern church has been removed, peace and harmony have returned, since the corner-stone, Christ, who made both one, has joined both sides with a very strong bond of love and peace, uniting and

⁸ *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, p. 316

⁹ Hence the term "subsists in..." used by *Lumen Gentium*.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 164-165

¹¹ Council of Florence, Session IV, April 29, 1438

holding them together in a covenant of everlasting unity. After a long haze of grief and a dark and unlovely gloom of long-enduring strife, the radiance of hoped-for union has illuminated all. Let Mother Church also rejoice. *For she now beholds her sons hitherto in disagreement returned to unity and peace, and she who hitherto wept at their separation now gives thanks to God with inexpressible joy at their truly marvelous harmony. Let all the faithful throughout the world, and those who go by the name of Christian, be glad with Mother Catholic Church. For behold, western and eastern fathers after a very long period of disagreement and discord, submitting themselves to the perils of sea and land and having endured labours of all kinds, came together in this holy ecumenical council, joyful and eager in their desire for this most holy union and to restore intact the ancient love.* In no way have they been frustrated in their intent. After a long and very toilsome investigation, at last by the clemency of the holy Spirit they have achieved this greatly desired and most holy union. Who, then, can adequately thank God for his gracious gifts? Who would not stand amazed at the riches of such great divine mercy? Would not even an iron breast be softened by this immensity of heavenly condescension?"¹²

Also consider the Council of Trent, which decreed safe conduct for Protestants to attend, and even actively participate in, the council:

“The sacred and holy, general Synod of Trent, -lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same Legate and Nuncios of the holy Apostolic See presiding therein, -grants, as far as regards the holy Synod itself, to all and each one throughout the whole of Germany, whether ecclesiastics or Seculars, of whatsoever degree, estate, condition, quality they be, who may wish to repair to this ecumenical and general Council, the public faith and full security, which they call a safe-conduct, with all and each of the necessary and suitable clauses and decrees, even though they ought to be expressed specifically and not in general terms, and which it is Its wish shall be considered as expressed, so as that *they may and shall have it in their power in all liberty to confer, make proposals, and treat on those things which are to be treated of in the said Synod; to come freely and safely to the said ecumenical Council, and there remain and abide, and propose therein, as well in writing as by word of mouth, as many articles as to them shall seem good, and to confer and dispute, without any abuse or contumely, with the Fathers, or with those who may have been selected by the said holy Synod; as also to withdraw whensoever they shall think fit.*¹³ It hath furthermore seemed good to the holy Synod, that if, for their greater liberty and security,

¹² Council of Florence, Session VI, July 6, 1439

¹³ It would be beneficial for those who objected to the Protestant observers who attended the Second Vatican Council to keep this in mind.

they desire that certain judges be deputed on their behalf, in regard of crimes whether committed, or that may be committed, by them, they shall themselves nominate those who are favourable towards them, even though the said crimes should be ever so enormous and should savour of heresy.”¹⁴

Pope Pius XI devoted an entire encyclical, *Mortalium Animos* (On Religious Unity, January 6, 1928), in response to the growing ecumenical movement among Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Christians, and while its primary focus was distinguishing true ecumenism from a false irenicism, he nevertheless joined his voice with those longing for Christian unity in the one Church of Christ:

“So, Venerable Brethren, it is clear why this Apostolic See has never allowed its subjects to take part in the assemblies of non-Catholics: for the union of Christians can only be promoted by promoting the return to the one true Church of Christ of those who are separated from it, for in the past they have unhappily left it. To the one true Church of Christ, we say, which is visible to all, and which is to remain, according to the will of its Author, exactly the same as He instituted it. During the lapse of centuries, the mystical Spouse of Christ has never been contaminated, nor can she ever in the future be contaminated, as Cyprian bears witness: ‘The Bride of Christ cannot be made false to her Spouse: she is incorrupt and modest. She knows but one dwelling, she guards the sanctity of the nuptial chamber chastely and modestly.’¹⁵ The same holy Martyr with good reason marveled exceedingly that anyone could believe that ‘this unity in the Church which arises from a divine foundation, and which is knit together by heavenly sacraments, could be rent and torn asunder by the force of contrary wills.’¹⁶ For since the mystical body of Christ, in the same manner as His physical body, is one,¹⁷ compacted and fitly joined together,¹⁸ it were foolish and out of place to say that the mystical body is made up of members which are disunited and scattered abroad: whosoever therefore is not united with the body is no member of it, neither is he in communion with Christ its head.¹⁹

“Furthermore, in this one Church of Christ no man can be or remain who does not accept, recognize and obey the authority and supremacy of Peter and his legitimate successors. Did not the ancestors of those who are now entangled in the errors of Photius and the reformers, obey the Bishop of

14 Council of Trent, Session XIII, October 11, 1551

15 De Cath. *Ecclesiae unitate*, 6.

16 Ibid.

17 1 Cor. 12:12.

18 Eph. 4:16.

19 Cf. Eph. v, 30; 1, 22.

Rome, the chief shepherd of souls? Alas their children left the home of their fathers, but it did not fall to the ground and perish for ever, for it was supported by God. Let them therefore return to their common Father, who, forgetting the insults previously heaped on the Apostolic See, will receive them in the most loving fashion. For if, as they continually state, they long to be united with Us and ours, why do they not hasten to enter the Church, ‘the Mother and mistress of all Christ's faithful’?²⁰ Let them hear Lactantius crying out: ‘The Catholic Church is alone in keeping the true worship. This is the fount of truth, this the house of Faith, this the temple of God: if any man enter not here, or if any man go forth from it, he is a stranger to the hope of life and salvation. Let none delude himself with obstinate wrangling. For life and salvation are here concerned, which will be lost and entirely destroyed, unless their interests are carefully and assiduously kept in mind.’²¹

“Let, therefore, the separated children draw nigh to the Apostolic See, set up in the City which Peter and Paul, the Princes of the Apostles, consecrated by their blood; to that See, We repeat, which is ‘the root and womb whence the Church of God springs,’²² not with the intention and the hope that ‘the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth’²³ will cast aside the integrity of the faith and tolerate their errors, but, on the contrary, that they themselves submit to its teaching and government. ***Would that it were Our happy lot to do that which so many of Our predecessors could not, to embrace with fatherly affection those children, whose unhappy separation from Us We now bewail. Would that God our Savior, ‘Who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,’²⁴ would hear us when We humbly beg that He would deign to recall all who stray to the unity of the Church! In this most important undertaking We ask and wish that others should ask the prayers of Blessed Mary the Virgin, Mother of divine grace, victorious over all heresies and Help of Christians, that She may implore for Us the speedy coming of the much hoped-for day, when all men shall hear the voice of Her divine Son, and shall be ‘careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’***”²⁵ (§10-12)

5b. Post-Conciliar Teaching:

20 Conc. Lateran IV, c. 5.

21 Divin. Instit. Iv, 30. 11-12.

22 S. Cypr. Ep. 48 ad Cornelium, 3.

23 1 Tim. 3:15

24 1 Tim. 2:4

25 Eph. 4:3

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, promulgated by Pope St. John Paul II in 1992, essentially, albeit extensively, restates both *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio* in nos. 813 through 838 and *Nostra Aetate* in 839-848 on the matters of ecumenism and relations with other religions. To block-cite the entire passage would be impractical, but it will suffice to quote just a few examples:

820. “Christ bestowed unity on his Church from the beginning. ***This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.***”²⁶ Christ always gives his Church the gift of unity, but the Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her. This is why Jesus himself prayed at the hour of his Passion, and does not cease praying to his Father, for the unity of his disciples: “That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me.”²⁷ The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit.²⁸

836. “***All men are called to this catholic unity of the People of God....*** and to it, in different ways, belong or are ordered: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind, called by God's grace to salvation.”²⁹

843. The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved. ***Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as “a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life.”***³⁰

844. In their religious behavior, however, men also display the limits and errors that disfigure the image of God in them:

Very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and served the creature rather than the Creator. Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair.³¹

26 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4, #3

27 Jn 17:21; cf. Heb 7:25.

28 cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1

29 *Lumen Gentium*, 13

30 *Lumen Gentium*, 16; cf. *Nostra Aetate* 2; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 53.

845. *To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son's Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is "the world reconciled." She is that bark which "in the full sail of the Lord's cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world." According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves from the flood.*³² (Pt. 1, §2, Ch. 3, Art. 9, ¶3).

Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* (On the Commitment to Ecumenism), refined and developed the teaching of Vatican II on ecumenism, affirming the timeless teachings of the Church on (1) her perpetual unity and oneness:

"The Catholic Church thus affirms that during the two thousand years of her history she has been preserved in unity, with all the means with which God wishes to endow his Church, and this despite the often grave crises which have shaken her, the infidelity of some of her ministers, and the faults into which her members daily fall. The Catholic Church knows that, by virtue of the strength which comes to her from the Spirit, the weaknesses, mediocrity, sins and at times the betrayals of some of her children cannot destroy what God has bestowed on her as part of his plan of grace. Moreover, "the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). Even so, the Catholic Church does not forget that many among her members cause God's plan to be discernible only with difficulty. Speaking of the lack of unity among Christians, the Decree on Ecumenism does not ignore the fact that "people of both sides were to blame",³³ and acknowledges that responsibility cannot be attributed only to the "other side". *By God's grace, however, neither what belongs to the structure of the Church of Christ nor that communion which still exists with the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities has been destroyed.*

"All these elements bear within themselves a tendency towards unity, having their fullness in that unity. It is not a matter of adding together all the riches scattered throughout the various Christian Communities in order to arrive at a Church which God has in mind for the future. *In accordance with the great Tradition, attested to by the Fathers of the East and of the West, the Catholic Church believes that in the Pentecost Event God has already manifested the Church in her eschatological reality, which he had prepared*

31 *Lumen Gentium* 16; cf. Rom 1:21, 25.

32 St. Augustine, Sermon 96, 7, 9: PL 38, 588; St. Ambrose, *De virg.* 18, 118: PL 16, 297B; cf. 1 Pet 3:20-21.

33 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.

"from the time of Abel, the just one".³⁴ This reality is something already given. Consequently we are even now in the last times. The elements of this already-given Church exist, found in their fullness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other Communities,³⁵ where certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasized. Ecumenism is directed precisely to making the partial communion existing between Christians grow towards full communion in truth and charity." (I, §11, 14)

...(2) the fundamental importance of doctrine, and with it the necessity of preserving it intact:

“Taking up an idea expressed by Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Council,³⁶ the Decree on Ecumenism mentions the way of formulating doctrine as one of the elements of a continuing reform.³⁷ **Here it is not a question of altering the deposit of faith, changing the meaning of dogmas, eliminating essential words from them, accommodating truth to the preferences of a particular age, or suppressing certain articles of the Creed under the false pretext that they are no longer understood today. The unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth. In the Body of Christ, ‘the way, and the truth, and the life’ (Jn 14:6), who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of the truth? The Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* attributes to human dignity the quest for truth, ‘especially in what concerns God and his Church’,³⁸ and adherence to truth's demands. A "being together" which betrayed the truth would thus be opposed both to the nature of God who offers his communion and to the need for truth found in the depths of every human heart.**

“Even so, doctrine needs to be presented in a way that makes it understandable to those for whom God himself intends it. In my Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli*, I recalled that this was the very reason why Saints Cyril and Methodius laboured to translate the ideas of the Bible and the concepts of Greek theology in the context of very different historical

34 Cf. SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, *Homilies on the Gospel*, 19, 1: PL, 1154, quoted in SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 2.

35 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4.

36 Opening Address of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (11 October 1962): AAS 54 (1962), 792.

37 Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6.

38 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1.

experiences and ways of thinking. They wanted the one word of God to be ‘made accessible in each civilization's own forms of expression’.³⁹ They recognized that they could not therefore ‘impose on the peoples assigned to their preaching either the undeniable superiority of the Greek language and Byzantine culture, or the customs and way of life of the more advanced society in which they had grown up’.⁴⁰ Thus they put into practice that ‘perfect communion in love which preserves the Church from all forms of particularism, ethnic exclusivism or racial prejudice, and from any nationalistic arrogance’.⁴¹ In the same spirit, I did not hesitate to say to the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia: ‘You do not have to be divided into two parts ... Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture’.⁴² Because by its nature the content of faith is meant for all humanity, it must be translated into all cultures. Indeed, the element which determines communion in truth is the meaning of truth. The expression of truth can take different forms. The renewal of these forms of expression becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning.” (I, §18-19)

...and (3) the necessity of communion with the Pope as a necessary condition for unity (echoing *Mortalium Animos*):

“The Catholic Church, both in her *praxis* and in her solemn documents, ***holds that the communion of the particular Churches with the Church of Rome, and of their Bishops with the Bishop of Rome, is – in God's plan – an essential requisite of full and visible communion. Indeed full communion, of which the Eucharist is the highest sacramental manifestation, needs to be visibly expressed in a ministry in which all the Bishops recognize that they are united in Christ and all the faithful find confirmation for their faith.*** The first part of the Acts of the Apostles presents Peter as the one who speaks in the name of the apostolic group and who serves the unity of the community—all the while respecting the authority of James, the head of the Church in Jerusalem. This function of Peter must continue in the Church so that under her sole Head, who is Jesus Christ, she may be visibly present in the world as the communion of all his disciples.

“Do not many of those involved in ecumenism today feel a need for such a ministry? A ministry which presides in truth and love so that the ship—that beautiful symbol which the World Council of Churches has chosen as its

39 Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli* (2 June 1985), 11: *AAS* 77 (1985), 792.

40 *Ibid.*, 13: *loc. cit.*, 794.

41 *Ibid.*, 11: *loc. cit.*, 792.

42 Address to the Aboriginal Peoples (29 November 1986), 12: *AAS* 79 (1987), 977.

emblem— will not be buffeted by the storms and will one day reach its haven.” (III, §97)

5c. The Teaching of the Current Pontificate:

Pope Francis, on the 25th anniversary of the promulgation *Ut Unum Sint*, reaffirmed his predecessor’s encyclical in his letter to Cardinal Koch (President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity). Specifically, he confirmed that (1) a bishop is the visible sign of unity of the Church (implicating, of course, the Catholic teaching regarding the Pope as the visible sign of the universal Church’s unity) and (2) that unity is not the result of mere human activity (i.e. false irenicism), but a gift of the Holy Spirit:

“...(T)he service of unity is an essential aspect of the mission of every Bishop, who is “***the visible source and foundation of unity***” in his own Particular Church.⁴³

“On the path that leads to full communion it is important to keep in mind the progress already made, but equally important to scan the horizon and ask, with the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, ‘*Quanta est nobis via?*’.⁴⁴ One thing is certain: ***unity is not chiefly the result of our activity, but a gift of the Holy Spirit. Yet ‘unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather, unity comes about in journeying; the Holy Spirit does this on the journey’***.⁴⁵ With confidence, then, let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide our steps and to enable everyone to hear the call to work for the cause of ecumenism with renewed vigour. May the Spirit inspire new prophetic gestures and strengthen fraternal charity among all Christ’s disciples, ‘that the world may believe’,⁴⁶ to the ever-greater praise of our Father in heaven.”

And again, on June 25, 2021, welcoming the leaders of the Lutheran World Federation:

“For ecumenism is not an exercise of ecclesial diplomacy but a journey of grace. ***It depends not on human negotiations and agreements, but on the grace of God***, which purifies memories and hearts, overcomes attitudes of inflexibility and directs towards renewed communion: ***not toward reductive agreements or forms of irenic syncretism, but toward a reconciled unity amid differences.***”

43 *Lumen Gentium*, 23; cf. CIC 383 §3; CCEO 902-908.

44 § 77

45 *Homily at the Celebration of Vespers*, Saint Paul Outside the Walls, 25 January 2014.

46 John 17:21

6. Observations:

The Society claims the Vatican II, mostly the documents *Lumen Gentium* (treated above), *Gaudium et Spes*, and primarily the documents *Nostra Aetate* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, promotes a religious indifferentism. In particular, Fr. McDonald, in the Society's FAQ videos, draws a supposed distinction between a Catholic understanding of ecumenism (based on dispelling error and bringing souls to Christ) and a modernist understanding of ecumenism (based on dialogue and compromise). To be entirely fair, Archbishop Lefebvre rightly, if indelicately, states:

“The doctrine of the Church also recognizes implicit baptism of desire. This consists in doing the will of God. God knows all men and He knows that amongst Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists and in the whole of humanity there are men of good will. They receive the grace of baptism without knowing it, but in an effective way. In this way they become part of the Church.

“The error consists in thinking that they are saved by their religion. They are saved in their religion but not by it. There is no Buddhist church in heaven, no Protestant church. This is perhaps hard to accept, but it is the truth. I did not found the Church, but rather Our Lord the Son of God. As priests we must state the truth.”⁴⁷

The Society goes on to draw from Pope Pius XI's *Mortalium Animos* in support of their argument (see above), compares it with the Vatican II documents, and seemingly concludes that the Church set aside notions of teaching the true faith in favor of forming what Pius XI decried as a “mystical body is made up of members which are disunited and scattered abroad.” They claim that Vatican II's call to engage in dialogue with our “separated brethren” (which is a term suggested by the Council of Trent; see above) has supplanted the evangelical impulse of the Church, waved away the differences between the Church and those outside of her full communion, and placing firmly in the background “the fact that all the truths defined by the Church are revealed by God.”

Such a claim is disproven almost instantly by the very first section of *Unitatis Redintegratio*:

“The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to

⁴⁷ *An Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, Ch. 10

be followers of the Lord but differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided.⁴⁸ ***Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.***” (§1)

“...Our separated brethren, whether considered as individuals or as Communities and Churches, are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those who through Him were born again into one body, and with Him quickened to newness of life - that unity which the Holy Scriptures and the ancient Tradition of the Church proclaim. ***For it is only through Christ's Catholic Church, which is "the all-embracing means of salvation," that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation. We believe that Our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, in order to establish the one Body of Christ on earth to which all should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God.*** This people of God, though still in its members liable to sin, is ever growing in Christ during its pilgrimage on earth, and is guided by God's gentle wisdom, according to His hidden designs, until it shall happily arrive at the fullness of eternal glory in the heavenly Jerusalem.” (§3)

So, since it seems that this document is not calling for, nor settling for, a federation of Christian communities made up of scattered members, what then is *Unitatis Redintegratio* calling for? I propose that the interpretive key lies in no. 4:

“Today, in many parts of the world, under the inspiring grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires. The Sacred Council exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism.

“The term ‘ecumenical movement’ indicates the initiatives and activities planned and undertaken, according to the various needs of the Church and as opportunities offer, to promote Christian unity. These are: first, every effort to avoid expressions, judgments and actions which do not represent the condition of our separated brethren with truth and fairness and so make mutual relations with them more difficult; then, ‘dialogue’ between competent experts from different Churches and Communities. At these meetings, which are organized in a religious spirit, each explains the teaching of his Communion in greater depth and brings out clearly its distinctive features. In such dialogue, everyone gains a truer knowledge and more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both Communions. In addition, the way is prepared for cooperation between them in the duties for

48 Cf. 1 Cor. 1, 13.

the common good of humanity which are demanded by every Christian conscience; and, wherever this is allowed, there is prayer in common. Finally, all are led to examine their own faithfulness to Christ's will for the Church and accordingly to undertake with vigor the task of renewal and reform.

“When such actions are undertaken prudently and patiently by the Catholic faithful, with the attentive guidance of their bishops, they promote justice and truth, concord and collaboration, as well as the spirit of brotherly love and unity. ***This is the way that, when the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion have been gradually overcome, all Christians will at last, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, be gathered into the one and only Church in that unity which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning. We believe that this unity subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.***” (§4)

It is apparent that the document is instead calling for bridges to be built out to reach our separated brethren, for Catholics to venture out and get to know them, and then, once trust is built and obstacles are overcome, to accompany them back across said bridge so that they may return to full communion with the Church, which is, as stated, the Catholic Church.

The problem seems to be that the Society thinks that Vatican II is calling for Christian unity consisting of dialogue with no regard for the present divisions in doctrine or, as *Unitatis Redintegratio* calls it, a “false irenicism” (no. 11), which is a term for attempts at ecumenism that would allow Catholic doctrine to be distorted or clouded. In other words, like the Society's obfuscation of "collegiality" with "conciliarism", they seem to do the same with "ecumenism" and "false irenicism" respectively. But as we have seen (and as we know, since Protestants are still not admitted to reception of communion), the Church does not consider dialogue as unity in and of itself, but rather as a beginning toward unity, at which point the true doctrine of the Church could be more readily accepted with the grace of God.

This broader context helps to explain perhaps the greatest yet often misunderstood expression of Pope St. John Paul II's teaching on ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue: The World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in October 1986. Now, it would be remiss not to mention this event since the Society, along with other traditionalists, have spilled no shortage of ink denouncing the event as religious syncretism and indifference, again citing *Mortalium Animos* as proof of the Pope's heterodoxy. In response, I would argue that the criticism fails due to the following considerations:

1. Read in context, *Mortalium Animos* was largely addressing the Catholic Church's relation to non-Catholic Christians. It was rejecting the idea that the Catholic Church was merely one Christian

denomination among many, while making the statement that to be in union with Christ was to be in union with His Church, with Peter and his legitimate successors as its head.

2. Likewise, in dealing with assemblies with other religions *Mortalium Animos* (§2) discourages any such assembly that operates under the pretext that any religion is as good as another religion. However, it is clear to the objective observer that the purpose of the World Prayer for Peace was not to blend all religions together, but to gather as people and turn the hearts and minds of all present toward the path of peace, and to prove to a cold, hostile, and increasingly secular world that people, even though they may be of different religions, can meet each other where they are at as brothers before journeying on the path towards the truth.

3. Although various religious groups were represented in Assisi, each group prayed individually, on their own, each according to their own faith. There is no evidence of the Pope joining members of another faith to pray to different gods or in an otherwise non-Catholic manner.⁴⁹

4. Finally, a casual reading of Pope St. John Paul II's statements at Assisi (along with countless other documents promulgated by his papacy) demonstrate that he neither personally embraced nor taught indifferentism of any kind. Quite the opposite; in his concluding remarks, Pope St. John Paul II used the occasion as an opportunity to evangelize as a Catholic:

“I profess here anew my conviction, shared by all Christians, that in Jesus Christ, as Saviour of all, true peace is to be found, ‘peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are near’. His birth was greeted by the angels’ song: ‘Glory to God in the highest and peace among men with whom he is pleased’. He preached love among all, even among foes, proclaimed blessed those who work for peace and through his Death and Resurrection he brought about reconciliation between heaven and earth. To use an expression of Paul the Apostle: ***‘He is our peace’.***”⁵⁰

49 Much ado is made about the Buddhist delegation placing a statue of a Buddha on top of a tabernacle of the Church of San Pietro, however the scant evidence provided does not demonstrate whether the Pope was aware of the incident, or whether measures were taken to prevent sacrilege (i.e. removal of consecrated hosts) ahead of time.

50 Pope St. John Paul II, *Address to the Representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions*, 27 October 1986.

Indeed, this “show, don’t tell” evangelical approach is reminiscent of St. Paul’s visit to Athens, who acknowledged the religious nature of its inhabitants, but still spoke the truth among them. He did not smash their idols or burn their temples down, but rather pointed out what was good in their practice, then called them to use it towards the True God:

“Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And some said, ‘What would this babbling man say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’ – because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new teaching is which you present? For you bring some strange things to our ears; we wish to know therefore what these things mean.’

“Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

“Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.

“Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ So Paul went out from among them. But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris and others with him.”⁵¹

7. Conclusion

The Society claims that unity cannot come about from a journey, but “the profession of the same Creed, participation in the same worship and subjection to the same government.” This is an attempt to draw a contradiction where none exists, since the journey initiated by dialogue, guided by the Holy Spirit, necessarily brings about, in God’s time, that common profession of the same creed. Again, to reiterate Pope Francis above:

“To journey together is already to be making unity.⁵² Unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather unity comes about in journeying, *the Holy Spirit brings it during the journeying.*”⁵³

Put another way, unity does not come about by withdrawing from the world and waiting for God to do it Himself. Rather, it is by going out, meeting people where they are at, and accompanying them. It is through this accompaniment that seeds of the Word are planted for the Holy Spirit to nurture and grow. How could one plant those seeds if we take dialogue, journeying, and accompanying out of the equation? It would be akin to trying to teach without a voice, to reach out without arms, and to walk without legs.

The Church cannot live in isolation from the world, even if it is not of this world; the Church is a mission, specifically a mission to go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every nation. Again, it is never a question of compromising our faith, but of identifying areas of common ground, while never denying our differences, and beginning our evangelical work from there. Journeying indeed is not unity in and of itself, but rather the beginning of a process that, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, leads to unity through, with, and in the Catholic Church. Agreeing to accompany someone is the beginning of unity, not the end of it. One can certainly pursue dialogue and understanding while also working for the salvation of souls. It is illogical to say, as the Society does, that dialogue and evangelization are necessarily opposed to each other. One need only read *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Nostra Aetate*, using the hermeneutic of continuity,⁵⁴ to understand that.

In sum, the Society’s argument fails to demonstrate that Vatican II contradicted any Catholic dogma or non-changeable doctrine. It is also logically flawed, drawing a false dichotomy between two non-contradictory concepts. It should therefore be rejected.

52 It should be noted the Holy Father says, “making unity”, not “being in union”, distinguishing between the means and the end, between a process and a goal. The example of Jesus meeting up with the disciples on the road to Emmaus comes to mind (*see* Luke 24:13-35).

53 *Homily at the Celebration of Vespers*, Saint Paul Outside the Walls, 25 January 2014.

54 cf. Pope Benedict XVI, “Address to the Roman Curia” (22 December 2005).