

# What We're Not

The Quest for Unity of Theory and Praxis

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What we're not is one. There is one God. There is one revelation. But we receive it differently. At a meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy, we are not all one faith, though we each have faith. Common worship happens here, as it does in other venues: a small town American Memorial Day gathering or a mayor's Thanksgiving breakfast. Several years ago when the Kansas City Royals opened the baseball season on Good Friday, I objected at a family gathering. My brother Mike tried to console me with this thought: "Maybe they'll have a moment of silence before the game." We worship together as one, even though we're not. Our differences make our unity at worship all the more miraculous and, we hope, more pleasing to God.

Outside this gathering, differences of beliefs become strikingly evident at combative moments such as abortion demonstrations, gay rights parades, piqued withdrawals from interfaith dialogue, and any election day when the candidates or the media have sown the fields of ethics with the seeds of politics.

But differences of beliefs are also evident in the more pacific moment when one member of one congregation decides to join another. Within Christianity, this activity has a peculiar character, quite distinct from the transfer of allegiance between larger families of faith. If a Muslim becomes a Christian, the baptism has a life-changing significance. If a Jew becomes a Muslim, he or she crosses a cavernous divide. If a Christian becomes Wiccan, the heart of belief is transposed. But within the Christian family, when one person chooses another Church, the decision reveals something bigger about Christianity. Its imperfections are laid bare by the very existence of choice. The same intramural choices exist in other bodies: Judaism has its branches; so does Islam. And even if one person decides, "I am now a Jew," there is no guarantee that every other Jew will agree. If a baptized Christian is received into the Catholic Church, Catholics assign a specific meaning to that decision, (which I will explain shortly), but not every other Christian will agree.

People who decide to shift from one belief to another make a personal choice, but they enter a nexus of ecclesial and inter-confessional issues.

Faith communities simultaneously sustain several different stances toward one another. For example, by our nature, in each of our traditions, we want people to become like us. We rejoice when we have new members, just as a family does

with a new child. We are friendly, zealous, and inviting toward those who are what we're not.

Yet we also respect differences. We form alliances of ministers. We participate jointly in civic events. We pitch in when natural disasters strike. (They don't call them "acts of God" for nothing.) We purchase ads on the same page in the newspaper. We subdue ourselves to the alphabetical hierarchy of the Yellow Pages. It is considered rude to steal sheep. Many believers find themselves not just tolerant of what we're not, but fascinated by what we're not. We want to learn more about how our neighbors worship, what they believe about stem-cell research, end of life care, and life after death. The diversity of beliefs is not appalling; it's appealing. It reveals more about who we are, what we believe, and how we act. Because people who are different help us evaluate what we are, it helps us if they don't change what we're not.

Some of us, though, nearly forget who we are and define ourselves by what we're not. I still hear Catholics say the mass has become "too Protestant." Presbyterians are nervous about liturgical movements that seem "too Catholic." And so on. A body of believers chooses a specialized vocabulary for vessels, vestments and architectural features, as well as the liturgical grammar of rites, gestures and styles. It helps identify who they are, but it also sets them apart from what they're not.

The city of Chicago rejoiced in a World Series sweep this year – unless you were a Cubs fan. To Cubbies, the wrong Chicago team won. You have to be careful how much rejoicing you do over a victorious rival. Some polite applause. Some civic pride. Perhaps a few beers. But then it's back down to the sports-fed trenches of separation. If you know who you are, you can't be seen long with those whom you're not.

Like the few undocumented Chicagoans who cheer for both teams, many scholars of the liturgy are also ministers of worship. We spend time in both worlds to enhance our work. The scholarship of worship is generally done by individuals who have faith and express it or lead it within some specific confession. This provides a helpful balance that assists those who devote their entire lives as practitioners in the pastoral field. Although many academics believe they have a grasp of the work that pastors do, many pastors are quite sure they do not have a grasp of the work that academics do, and in fact, they doubt that academics have all that firm a grasp on the work that pastors do.

Still, it is important that the work of scholars and pastors converge. In broad strokes they represent the fields of theory and praxis. Problems result when the two are not in union. This paper will illustrate this maxim with the example of a particular liturgical event: the reception of baptized Christians from one fold into another. I will give a historical survey of the theory and praxis with special reference to the ecumenical movement and the Catholic Church. I will compare

what several Christian Churches do today, and what their liturgies mean. Then I will summarize some lessons learned from this example. In doing so, I hope to show – no matter one’s confession – how scholarship can influence pastoral practice, and the price we pay when it does not.

## Historical Summary

Even in its earliest years, Christians did not own a unified set of beliefs. In the New Testament, the Letters of John confidently proclaimed that God is love,<sup>[1]</sup> because it was evident that Christians were not. John cautioned the believers against those who went beyond the teaching of Christ: “Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.”<sup>[2]</sup> And there was the snippy response to the situation of Diotrephes: “I have written something to the church,” writes John; “but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refuses to welcome the friends, and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church.”<sup>[3]</sup> Separations existed from the beginning.

These separations became more formalized when some of those called “heretics” by “orthodox” or mainstream Christianity, started to baptize.<sup>[4]</sup> Some recruits had never been baptized before; others had been baptized in orthodox Christianity; heretics baptized them all. Questions about the validity of the baptism of heretics provoked great theological controversy. In the early third century two famous disputes ensued: Hippolytus the theologian v. Callistus the bishop of Rome,<sup>[5]</sup> and Cyprian of Carthage v. Stephen, a later bishop of Rome. The disputes were noteworthy for several reasons. For example, in both cases the bishop of Rome took a lax position. Hippolytus and Cyprian, standing on the shoulders of Tertullian a generation before them, were more rigorist. The disputation concerned a pastoral question: If someone baptized by a heretic wishes to join orthodox Christianity, does that person need to be baptized again? The rigorists said yes; the Roman bishops said no.

The rigorists held that heretics did not possess the Holy Spirit, so they could not impart the Holy Spirit. Cyprian wrote about the case of one whose first and only baptism had been administered by heretics:

If from the heretics comes someone who was not first baptized in the Church, but comes as a complete outsider and a pagan, he or she must be baptized in order to become a sheep, because there is only one water that makes sheep in the holy Church.<sup>[6]</sup>

However, in the end it was determined that heretic baptisms counted. Tertullian, Hippolytus and Cyprian lost the argument. Stephen and Callistus prevailed. Remarkably history has not retained any of the work of Stephen and Callistus

except as they are cited by others. Both Hippolytus and Cyprian quoted them as adversaries; that's how we know what those Roman bishops thought. Imagine that all of your life's written work and recorded lectures were completely obliterated – all hard and electronic copies. And the only things we knew about your theological positions were the footnotes in popular books written by people who disagreed with you. Then imagine that in spite of what those books said, readers liked the way you looked in footnotes, and your positions were the more convincing. Essentially, that happened to Stephen and Callistus.

How did this happen? It could have been because they were right. It may have been because they were bishops of Rome. Or it could have been that Augustine threw the considerable weight of his opinion to their side.

At the turn of the fifth century Augustine wrote that Christ was the ultimate minister of baptism, and that “when the water of baptism is given to anyone in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it is neither ours nor yours.”<sup>[7]</sup> He distinguished between the administration of baptism and the power of the sacrament. An unworthy minister could still be the instrument of God's power, because it is Christ who baptizes. Commenting on Paul's First Letter to the people of Corinth, where the Church was splintering into factions according to the minister of baptism, Augustine says,

Paul baptized as a minister, not as power itself. But the Lord baptized as power. . . . The Lord kept to himself the power of baptizing; he gave its administration to his servants.<sup>[8]</sup>

It didn't matter that heretics administered baptism; it mattered that God was exercising the necessary power.

But the pastoral question remained. Once baptism was ruled out, the Church still had to discern how to welcome those who had been baptized by heretics. Augustine called for handlaying over “reformed heretics”:

A hand is imposed on reformed heretics because of the union of charity, which is the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit, and without which any other holy things that are in a person have no power for salvation.<sup>[9]</sup>

The fourth century Council of Laodicea said those “returning” from heresies could be “received” by renouncing all heresies, learning the creed and being anointed with chrism.<sup>[10]</sup>

The Council of Constantinople also required those “embracing” orthodoxy and “joining the number” of the saved to renounce all heresies and to be anointed with chrism. In this way they were “received.”<sup>[11]</sup>

Innocent I distinguished between those who were brought up as heretics and those who started as orthodox Christians and then were baptized by heretics. The first group could be “received” by an imposition of the hand, while the apostates, “coming to their senses and realizing their perdition,” had to be “admitted” with a period of “penance”.<sup>[12]</sup>

Leo the Great favored handlaying for the “confirming” of those being “received”.<sup>[13]</sup>

I point out all these texts so that you may see the vocabulary that interprets what was happening. Theologians spoke of “receiving” “reformed” heretics who are “coming” or “returning”. They do not speak of “forgiving” heretics or having them do “penance”. The language of penitence was reserved to apostates – members of the faithful who ventured into heresy, but then returned, contrite, to the fold. To them belonged penitence and forgiveness.

It is common to hear of this history as the “the reconciliation of heretics.” But that is not the language of the early Church. They spoke of it as the reception of reformed heretics. For Christians, heretics are not what we’re not. Their baptism made them sharers in what we are. When heretics came to orthodox Christianity they were not reconciled; they were received.

However, by the middle ages, this gradually changed. The Gelasian Sacramentary maintained the distinctive vocabulary between heretics and apostates. One prayer praised God who was pleased “to rescue” servants “from the error and lie of the Arian heresy and to guide them” to the Church.<sup>[14]</sup> Another praised God who was pleased to “rescue” heretics and “to call” them to the Church.<sup>[15]</sup>

But there were other prayers for those baptized in orthodoxy, who then migrated to a heresy and were baptized again, and then asked to be received back into orthodoxy. These are grouped under the heading, “The Reconciliation of Someone Baptized again by Heretics,” and their tone is more penitential; e.g., “May he (she) worthily complete the fruit of penance by your mercy.” These apostates needed “reconciliation” with the Church.<sup>[16]</sup>

But in the Gellone Sacramentary, the prayer for those being received from Arianism had changed its title. It was now called “The Reconciliation of Those Returning from the Pagans.” The body of the prayer remained the same as in the *Gelasianum vetus*, but the title was revised for the “reconciliation” of those “returning”.

The Gellone also slightly altered a prayer from the *Gelasianum vetus* for the reconciliation of apostates<sup>[17]</sup> to include the intention that they be “absolved.” This language is not altogether surprising as it applies to apostates, but it shows that the liturgical vocabulary for what was happening to the two groups was

becoming assimilated. Incidentally, this prayer was also given the curious title *Oratio super eos qui mortitina conmedunt*, “Prayer over Those Who Eat Dead Things.” As to the pastoral situation in late eighth-century Gaul that provoked the need for a prayer with that title, well, your guess is as good as mine.

The situation became even more indistinct in the eleventh century *Liber ordinum* of Visigothic (Mozarabic) usage. Its rite for “reconciliation” includes a prayer<sup>[18]</sup> ambiguous enough to cover heretics and apostates. The title is “reconciliation”, using the language of one returning from apostasy. The formula of chrismation calls for the “forgiveness of all your sins,”<sup>[19]</sup> bridging toward the gift of the sevenfold Spirit. Furthermore, the prayer speaks of one who was “wandering from the truth for a while,” who will “remain from now on in your church,” which would also signify an apostate returning to the fold.

But the same text embellishes the prayer for the sevenfold Spirit with the petition that the person be “joined to your faithful people and gathered into the flock,” as if this had not been the case before. The distinction between heresy and apostasy was not sharp. The medieval Church presumed that those brought up within the heresies were sinners who should repent, a position that differed from that of the early Church.

The thirteenth-century pontifical of William Durandus includes an “Order for Reconciling Apostates, Schismatics or Heretics.”<sup>[20]</sup> This title brings to a head the theological development of these medieval liturgical books. The differences among apostates, schismatics and heretics were deemed so slight that all could be treated by the same liturgical text. Whereas in the patristic era only apostates were “called back to the Church,” “reconciled” and “forgiven,” Durandus applied these terms to heretics and schismatics. By inference, they were being charged with the same sin as apostates. Their reception into the Church was termed “reconciliation”.

One prayer is difficult to read today because of its blatant bigotry against Judaism. The text assumes the person in question received a valid baptism and apostatized, even if he or she never did.<sup>[21]</sup>

In this prayer Durandus continues the language formerly reserved for apostates. Individuals had “carelessly wandered,” God is taking them and setting them again in the flock, and mother church rejoices in the restoration of a child nearly lost. No changes were made to this prayer for converts from Judaism or non-Christian religions.

This was the status of this liturgy on the eve of the Reformation. It was called the Reconciliation of Heretics because the term “heretic” was conflating schismatics and apostates as well, and they were all tarred with the same brush of sin. Hence, if they were to be received into the Church, they had to repent and be reconciled.

At the time of the Reformation, Protestants and Catholics called each other heretics, employing colorful language. “Heretic” was the only category they had for describing adversaries. If someone wished to “convert” from Protestantism to Catholicism, for example, the Catholic Church used the only ritual it had: the reconciliation of heretics. The liturgical language was mutating because of insufficient clarification from scholars, and pastors were using a liturgy for a circumstance that did not completely imitate that of the early Church. Divisions of heresies in the early church arose from issues pertaining to the Creed, but the Churches of the Reform and Counter-Reform all retained allegiance to those same creeds. The fragmentation of the Church was serious in the sixteenth century, but different. Using the ritual language at hand caused the problems to deepen.

## The Ecumenical Movement and the Catholic Church

By the twentieth century the ecumenical movement had started to work its miraculous progress. A deeper respect was growing among the different believing bodies. In 1958, Father Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, addressed a pastoral council in Vienna with these words:

There is no appropriate category in Catholic thought for the phenomenon of Protestantism today (one could say the same of the relationship to the separated Churches of the East). It is obvious that the old category of “heresy” is no longer of any value. Heresy, for scripture and the early church, includes the idea of a personal decision against the unity of the church, and heresy’s characteristic is *pertinacia*, the obstinacy of the one who persists in his or her own private way. This, however, cannot be regarded as an appropriate description of the spiritual situation of the Protestant Christian. In the course of a now centuries-old history, Protestantism has made an important contribution to the realization of Christian faith, fulfilling a positive function in the development of the Christian message and, above all, often giving rise to a sincere and profound faith in the individual non-Catholic Christian, whose separation from the Catholic affirmation has nothing to do with the *pertinacia* characteristic of heresy. . . . We must try to think our way forward here in the spirit of the New Testament and to apply this spirit to all the things that did not exist then, but are in our world today.<sup>[22]</sup>

In 1959 the Vatican revised the traditional Good Friday prayer for the Jews. Up to this time, that prayer called the Jews “perfidious”. But the word was dropped as part of the revision because the Church accepted the point that Jews were not by definition treacherous.<sup>[23]</sup>

The ecumenical movement seems to be making more headway among Churches of the Reform than with the Catholic Church. Still, the bishops attending the Second Vatican Council will always be regarded as the strategists who catapulted the Catholic Church into ecumenical dialogue. The progressive yet

measured tones still reverberate in the Council's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, which described Christians this way:

Concerning those who, having been baptized, are adorned with the Christian name, but who do not profess the entire faith (*integram fidem*) or do not preserve the unity of communion under the Successor of Peter, the Church recognizes that it is joined to them for many reasons. For there are many who hold the Sacred Scriptures in honor as the norm of believing and living, and who manifest a sincere religious zeal, who lovingly believe in God the almighty Father and in Christ the Savior, the Son of God, who are signed in baptism, by which they are conjoined to Christ, and who even recognize and receive other sacraments in their own Churches or ecclesial communities.<sup>[24]</sup>

The Council's Decree on Ecumenism describes a whole new relationship. In the early Church those born into heresies were not charged with sin. In the middle ages they were. With the Decree on Ecumenism, the Catholic Church set the matter straight on two points: those born into other Christian communities were not thereby charged with sin; nor were they charged with heresy.<sup>[25]</sup>

The same decree even apologized for sins that obstructed the union of Christians, a spirit of sorrow that the Catholic Church rarely shows in ecumenical dialogue:

Concerning sins against unity, the witness of St. John still has value: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). Therefore we ask pardon from God and from our separated brothers and sisters with a humble prayer, as we also forgive those who trespass against us.<sup>[26]</sup>

Regarding the unity that comes from baptism, however, the Council took a more nuanced position:

Baptism therefore establishes a sacramental bond of unity thriving among those who have been reborn through it. Nevertheless baptism of itself is no more than an entrance and a beginning (*dumtaxat initium et exordium*), which indeed tends toward acquiring the fullness of life in Christ. Therefore baptism is ordered toward a complete profession of faith, toward complete incorporation into the plan of salvation, as Christ himself wanted it, toward the complete introduction, therefore, into eucharistic communion.<sup>[27]</sup>

To call this progress shows how long the road of progress is, and how deep the hurts have been. Still, many differences have been worked out. It is illuminating to examine how the vocabulary and rites have changed in the liturgies of reception.

## **Christian Rituals of Reception**



Here is a survey of how some of these liturgies have evolved in various Christian families. Remember, though, many Christian groups receive new members without a published liturgical rite. Fundamentalist, pentecostal or evangelical Christians, for example, may welcome new members with some combination of testimony, preaching, song and proclamation. They sometimes receive baptized Christians by baptizing them. This survey is limited to a few published ritual texts. The complete context is broader than this. Still, this should suffice to illustrate the point that pastors need good liturgical scholarship, and liturgists should be alert to pastoral needs.

An Episcopal commentary<sup>[28]</sup> on the *Book of Common Prayer*, where the ritual is called Confirmation with forms for Reception and for Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows,<sup>[29]</sup> describes the person as one “who wishes to affiliate.” The ceremony involves “a recognition of membership” in the body of Christ. After the candidate recommits to his or her baptismal faith, the bishop says, “We recognize you as a member of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church and we receive you into the fellowship of this Communion.”<sup>[30]</sup>

During the similar ceremony in the Australian Anglican Church, the bishop takes the person by the hand and says, “We recognize you as a baptized and communicant member of the Christian Church.” The congregation responds, “We receive and welcome you into the communion of the Anglican Church.”<sup>[31]</sup>

In the Church of South India, the ceremony is called “The Reception of Members from Other Churches,” and it may be led by a presbyter, who prays that the member may “remain faithful,” and who gives the person “the right hand of fellowship.”<sup>[32]</sup>

The Methodist Church in England has a ritual called “The Reception of Christians of Other Communion into the Membership of the Methodist Church.”<sup>[33]</sup> A minister addresses those who “have been *members of other communions* within the Church of Christ. Do you now wish to be *members* of the Methodist Church?” They answer, “I do.” The minister says, “we receive and welcome you as *members* of the Methodist Church and of the church in this place.” Then they are asked about their intention to commit and persevere. It is assumed that the baptized who wish to join the local church may.

In the United Church of Christ one finds the Order for Reception of Members: Affirmation of Baptism.<sup>[34]</sup> A leader says of the persons in question, “They have been led by the Holy Spirit to affirm their baptism and to claim in our presence their covenantal relationship with Christ and the members of the church.”<sup>[35]</sup> The pastor says, “We give thanks for every community of faith that has been your spiritual home, and we celebrate your presence in this household of faith.” The people acclaim, “We welcome you with joy in the common life of this church.”<sup>[36]</sup>

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the names of those being received are read, and the pastor says, "Dear friends, we rejoice to receive you, members of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, into our fellowship in the Gospel."<sup>[37]</sup>

In the United Reform Church in the United Kingdom, those to become new members reaffirm their faith. The minister says, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, welcome." The congregation answers, "In the name of Christ we welcome you. May we grow together in unity, and be built up into the body of Christ in love, to the glory of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen."

If someone wishes to affiliate with the Disciples of Christ, members are invited to make a statement such as this: "Reaffirming our own faith in Jesus the Christ, we gladly welcome you into this community of faith, enfolding you with our love and committing ourselves to your care."<sup>[38]</sup>

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) those to be received publicly profess their faith, and the minister offers this prayer:

Holy God, we praise you for calling us to be a servant people, and for gathering us into the body of Christ. We thank you for choosing to add to our number brothers and sisters in faith. Together, may we live in your Spirit, and so love one another, that we may have the mind of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom we give honor and glory forever.<sup>[39]</sup>

In the United Church of Canada, the minister begins the ceremony with these words:

A Christian is a member of the holy catholic church. He exercises this membership in the denomination to which he belongs, which for us is The United Church of Canada, and within the fellowship of a local congregation.

We are now to welcome into this congregation persons who are already members of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>[40]</sup>

Each of these ecclesial bodies has its own interests, and it is not fair to treat them as one unit, but some common elements occur.

1. The ceremonies acknowledge that one who is already baptized is baptized into the one, holy, catholic apostolic church.

2. The ceremonies recognize that a person wishes to live out his or her baptism in a new congregation.
3. Some evidence is given - a written testimony from the previous congregation's leadership, a time of testing with church leaders in the new congregation, and/or a public statement of faith and intention.
4. The ceremony takes place in the presence of the new congregation, not in private.
5. A recognized leader of the new congregation presides for the ceremony.
6. The congregation may make some statement or gesture of welcome.
7. The ceremony is fairly simple and straightforward. It is celebrating the personal decision of a new member.

## **Changes in the Catholic Church**

With regard to the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council introduced a change in practice. It did not call for a reform of the rite for reconciling heretics. It called for a new rite to be created for the reception of baptized Christians. Prior to this time, it was common for a Catholic priest to receive another Christian with a conditional baptism. The traditional formula was expanded to this: "If you have not been baptized, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The practice was common, and many adult Catholics today remember being received in this way.

Catholic priests are not supposed to do that anymore. Some do. But they shouldn't – except in exceptional circumstances. Instead, the Church has a new rite, a simpler rite, an improved rite, the fruit of scholarship in liturgy, history and ecumenical studies. Ideally this rite takes place at mass. The one to be received recites the Nicene Creed together with the Catholic assembly. Then he or she adds this statement, "I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God."<sup>[41]</sup> On one level, there

is nothing surprising about this statement. Someone joining any body of believers could be expected to assent to something similar. The priest then says to the person, “N., the Lord receives you into the Catholic Church. His loving kindness has led you here, so that in the unity of the Holy Spirit you may have full communion with us in the faith that you have professed in the presence of his family.”<sup>[42]</sup>

The meaning of these words is also contained in the title of the rite. It is called “The Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church.” The provisional translation of this rite had a different title, “The Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into Full Communion with the Catholic Church.” The Latin title did not change, but the translation became more literal. It is not reception into full communion with – as if someone outside the Catholic Church could have communion with it. It is the full communion of – because the Catholic Church sees itself as the seat of full communion into which other baptized Christians are received.

These meanings were fairly subtle. They were tucked into the title of the rite and the statement the priest makes when receiving a new member. But the intent became clearer in an infamous document from the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000, under the title *Dominus Iesus*.

The timing proved ironic. Pope John Paul II had announced the Jubilee Year as a time that would bring rejoicing to the world, as it recalled the anniversary of the birth of the Savior.<sup>[43]</sup>

But it was that year that the Congregation released this document on Jesus and the Church, which disturbed the ecumenical and interfaith dialogues. The Congregation quoted the Council, “[The Church of Christ] subsists in [*subsistit in*] the Catholic Church,” and then offered this interpretation:

With the expression *subsistit in*, the Second Vatican Council sought to harmonize two doctrinal statements: on the one hand, that the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that “outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth.”<sup>[44]</sup>

Remember that the Council had not used the word “only”.

Furthermore, the Congregation explained its distinction between Churches and ecclesial communities. The Second Vatican Council had used these terms, but did not otherwise define them. The Congregation wrote,

[T]he ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense; however, those who are baptized in these communities are,

by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church. Baptism in fact tends *per se* toward the full development of life in Christ, through the integral profession of faith, the Eucharist, and full communion in the Church.<sup>[45]</sup>

The chorus of objections was thunderous, even among Catholic theologians. For example, Francis A. Sullivan, wrote,

[The] official Catholic doctrine prior to the council – as expressed, for instance in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of Pius XII – was that the church of Christ is strictly and exclusively identified with the Catholic Church. . . . [The Council said,] rather, that it *subsists in* it. The intention clearly was to continue to make a positive statement about the Catholic Church, but without the negative implication that the previous doctrine of exclusive identity had regarding the other churches.<sup>[46]</sup>

Richard McBrien summarized,

In changing the verb from “*est*” to “*subsistit in*” the council fathers clearly intended to include non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities in the one, albeit divided, Body of Christ.<sup>[47]</sup>

In a December 2005 issue of *L’Osservatore Romano*, Jesuit Fr. Karl Becker argued that “subsists in” is simply a stronger way of saying “is”.<sup>[48]</sup> However, the Council left the meaning undefined, avoiding a proto-Clintonian excursus on the definition of the verb “is”.

So if Joe Smith, a charming Presbyterian, decides to become a Catholic because his wife and children go to St. Aloysius every Sunday, he is making a very personal decision about his faith, his community, his God, and his family. He is also throwing himself into the maelstrom of ecumenical conversations over what is “the church”, whether or not there is “one baptism”, what privileges that one baptism leads to, and whether or not the other Christian Churches are what we are or what we’re not.

To make matters worse, the praxis has become dislodged from the theory; the pastoral implementation of the Rite of Reception in Catholic parishes has gone astray. And other Christian Churches, turning to the Catholic Church for inspiration if not imitation, share the danger of losing the path. Here’s the problem: In spite of what can be regarded as an inflammatory title to the rite, the ritual conceived by the Second Vatican Council aimed to be sensitive to ecumenical discussions. Conditional baptism was discouraged. The reception begins with a common profession of faith with the Catholic community. It may be celebrated with mass prayers called “For the Unity of Christians.” The preface of that set goes like this: “Through Christ you bring us to the knowledge of your truth, that we may be united by one faith and one baptism to become his body.

Through Christ you have given the Holy Spirit to all peoples. How wonderful are the works of the Spirit, revealed in so many gifts! Yet how marvelous is the unity the Spirit creates from their diversity!” Hearing those words in this context, it sounds as though the divisions among Christians are over. All that’s left is to celebrate the gifts of the Spirit.

But when the catechumenate was restored, liturgists in the United States wanted to reach out to Christians already baptized. The results have produced much spiritual benefit to the faithful, but the new book did something that the Council did not have in mind. It expanded the Rite of Reception with a series of pre-reception rituals: The Rite of Welcoming the Candidates, the Rite of Sending the Candidates for the Call to Continuing Conversion, the Call to Continuing Conversion itself, and a Penitential Rite. At one point the baptized candidates go to the cathedral, no less, and state their intentions to join the Catholic Church in the presence of the local bishop. Then they finally celebrate their reception not in the relative obscurity of a parish Sunday mass, but in the splendor of the Church’s most exquisite ritual solemnity, the Easter Vigil.

None of this was intended by those who created the Rite of Reception. The Vatican’s Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity opposed a combined rite of reception and baptism at the Easter Vigil because of ecumenical concerns: “The insertion of this rite into the Easter Vigil gives such importance to the event that it may cause surprise and even pain to our fellow Christians and give rise to new difficulties.”<sup>[49]</sup>

Yet, in Catholic parishes, it is considered beautiful, and it is considered required, which it is not.

Other Christian churches are imitating this same sequence of pre-reception rituals and Easter receptions. Maxwell Johnson has written,

Let’s stop receiving “converts” at the Easter Vigil. . . . [There] is neither historical precedent for the reception/confirmation of baptized Christians from other traditions at *Easter*, nor any sound *theological* reasons why such *should* take place. If anything, the theology of *baptism* itself mitigates against such a practice and it is *baptismal* theology – not convenience and not some vague notion of inclusivity – that must shape pastoral practice at this point.<sup>[50]</sup>

## **Lessons to Be Learned**

Somehow the work of scholars evaded the hands of practitioners. Scholars had helped resurrect the catechumenate and bury the reconciliation of heretics. But practitioners have created something else in the midst of it all that has become popular, if misguided. It isn’t just believers who need unity. Theory and praxis need it as well.

We can all learn some lessons, regardless of our religious affiliation.

1. Scholars need to be in touch with the decisions of practitioners. Practitioners are shaping a way of worship on their own. Sometimes it's wonderful, and scholars need to learn from it – which is what we do anyway. All these ancient liturgies were practiced by somebody who thought they fit the pastoral situation. But sometimes the local decisions are well-intentioned, uninformed, and teach things that veer the ship off course. We can stay in touch by exercising our own ministry, and by visiting with real people struggling with real issues. A good ear and a listening heart will tell us what we need to study.
2. Scholars can contribute helpful guidance when issues become passionate. The Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission produced in 2004 a document called “Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ.”<sup>[51]</sup> The very topic was enough to make news. But the dialogue between the Churches has been stumped by many questions, none more currently neuralgic than the eligibility requirements for ordination. Although there are official positions on the ordination of women and gays, you will find Anglican and Catholic theologians and pastors on both sides of this divide. We need scholarship, cool, clear-thinking scholarship to step in and offer the therapy of research and theology. We also need cool-headed pastors, equipped with their experience of the domestic Church, the *sensus fidelium*. The road ahead is difficult, but we must not lose heart. Forty years ago the Vatican issued *Nostra aetate* on the relations between Catholics and non-Christian religions. Forty years prior to that, it would have been an unthinkable document. But patient scholarship made it possible.
3. Scholars may also help us find some peace in stasis. Good scholarship examines not just the vertical history of what was done, but the horizontal history of what others think. This brings us into a milieu where people can learn to live with some tension. For example, when the academy gathers for its annual meeting, we experience the exhilaration of friends and colleagues in our fields of study. We practically overlook confessional stances, except for how they help clarify thinking. Religious belief by its nature always involves some proselytizing. But the NAAL, a bevy of scholars who each strongly hold a personal faith, limit proselytizing to seminar groups in search of broader membership. We have struggled and persevered in the quest for good worship among ourselves, but even our most hobbled attempts do not deter us from the grander aim: to gather with people who are like us, yet not. It's like one of those 12-step programs, where you finally meet someone who has the same problem you do: a love for foreign languages, obscure sources, and the correct usage of the verb “comprise”. In the end, what we experience at academy meetings is a little bit of heaven. We live in pristine hotel rooms, gather in splendid ball rooms, travel by air, gaze upon the ocean, eat and drink with relish. And we do it all with what we're not. We do it with people

with whom we are not one. The stasis of that tension creates its own reality, a state of being that is not what any one of us is but what only all of us can be when we are together. The insights we gather here – of tolerance, affection and hope – those insights we can share with a world yearning for stronger unity and greater precision between what we believe and how we act.

4. Finally, with some humility, scholars should also remember something else that we are not: God. I fear that 100 years from now someone will enter heaven's gate and see a bearded figure there wearing an academic robe, dispensing advice everywhere he goes. The new arrival will point to this figure and ask, "Is that God?" And the nearest angel will respond, "No, that's Paul Turner. He just thinks he's God." Sometimes in our papers, our classrooms, our books, articles and internet exchanges, we act like we are God, but we are not. Gaining that humility in God's presence is the first step toward entering more deeply into the mystery of God. Especially for those of us in the field of worship, when we go to worship, we may be attracted to the sin of analysis at the expense of spirituality. It is easier to write about religion than to enter into its practice. But the first will be void without wrestling with the second. We cannot persuasively critique the history of liturgy or its current manifestations if we are not willing to abandon ourselves to what liturgy is about, worship. In the *Apostolic Tradition*, catechumens were told to remove everything before entering into the water. Scholars have to remove criticism before we enter worship. It's humbling, but a necessary component of what we do. We need to be able to leave work at the office, and take time just for the mystery of God, as it comes to us, as others present it to us, even if it is not the way it should be.

The world is full of well-meaning people of faith who are attracted and repulsed by what others believe. There will always be tension between what we are and what we're not. But what we're not is what pulls us on toward what we will be. What we're not reminds us that what we are is not where we can rest. What we are is only here for a time; we who deal with history should know about eternity. When we place ourselves at the service of the God whose worship we study, when we silence the humming of the mind, and when we open our hearts to what loves us, it is then that we come closer to the unity we seek, to the only One who is what we're not.

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[1] 1 John 4:8.

[2] 2 John 10-11 (NRSV).

[3] 3 John 9-10.

[4] For the history of the liturgy of receiving Christians from one family to another, I am indebted to the work of Dale J. Sieverding, who treated this in his doctoral dissertation at Sant' Anselmo. See *Ordo admissionis valide iam baptizatorum in plenam communionem ecclesiae catholicae: An Historical Study of the Ritual Aspects of Reception into Full Communion with Special Attention to the Adaptations of the Rite for Use in the Catholic Church in the United States of America* (Rome, 1997). The abridged version of his work appears in the Forum Essays series of Liturgy Training Publications, under the title *The Reception of Baptized Christians: A History and Evaluation* (Chicago, 2001).

[5] Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9:12,22 *Patristiche Texte und Studien* 25 (Berlin/New York: 1986):355. Hippolytus is not the putative author of the *Apostolic Tradition*, but the author of the *Refutatio omnium hæresium* whose name became associated with it. See *The Apostolic Tradition* ed. Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, L. Edward Phillips, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002): 2-6.

[6] Cyprian, *Epistula* 71:2, CSEL 3/2:773.

[7] Augustine, *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2:2,5, CSEL 52:24.

[8] Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* 5:7, CCL 36:44.

<sup>[9]</sup> Augustine, *De baptismo* 5:24,33, CSEL 51:290.

<sup>[10]</sup> “Concerning those who return from heresies – Novatians, Photinians, or Quartodecimans – whether catechumens or faithful in these sects, let them not be received before having renounced all heresies, and in particular those they have left. Those among them who are called faithful in these sects may participate in the holy mystery after having learned the creed of the faith and having been anointed with holy chrism.” Hefele-Leclercq, *Histoire des conciles*, 1.2, p. 999. Translation from the French by Turner, *Sources of Confirmation*, p. 88.

<sup>[11]</sup> “Those who embrace orthodoxy and join the number of those who are being saved from heretics. . . we receive when they hand in statements and anathematise every heresy which is not of the same mind as the holy, catholic and apostolic church of God. They are first sealed or anointed with holy chrism on the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth and ears. As we seal them we say: ‘Seal of the gift of the holy Spirit.’” *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 35.

<sup>[12]</sup> “Those coming from the Novatians or the Montanists may be received by the imposition of the hand only, because they were nevertheless baptized in the name of Christ, although by heretics. This does not apply to those who were perhaps baptized again when they crossed over from us to them. If these wish to return – coming to their senses and realizing their perdition – they must be admitted under a long satisfaction of penance.” Innocent I, *Epistula* 2:8,11 PL 20:475.

<sup>[13]</sup> “They must be confirmed only by the invocation of the Holy Spirit through the imposition of hands because they received only the form of baptism without the power of sanctification. . . . Only the sanctification of the Holy Spirit must be invoked. In this way, that which no one receives from heretics is obtained from catholic bishops.” Leo the Great, *Epistula* 7, PL 54:1138-1139.

<sup>[14]</sup> “*A blessing over those who return to Catholic unity from Arianism:* Lord God almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you who were pleased to rescue your male and female servants from the error and lie of the Arian heresy and to guide them to your catholic Church, send onto them, Lord, the holy paraclete, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety,

and fill them, Lord, with the spirit of the fear of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, our saving God,

through whom and with whom all honor and glory is yours for ever and ever. Amen.” GeV 683.

<sup>[15]</sup> “Another one for those who come from other heresies: Holy Father, almighty God, you who were pleased to rescue your servant from the error of heresies, and to call him (her) to the holy catholic Church, we ask you, Lord, send onto him (her) the paraclete, your holy sevenfold Spirit, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and fortitude, of knowledge and piety; pour into your servant the spirit of the fear of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” GeV 684.

<sup>[16]</sup> GeV 685-686.

<sup>[17]</sup> GeV 687.

<sup>[18]</sup> “Turn your gaze upon this your servant, we pray, whom we present to you in sincerity, offering a living victim, who has now converted to you, who, wandering from the truth for a while, has finally set foot in your flock. The one about to enter to you – indeed, through you – about to remain from now on in your church, deserves its communion, hurrying to his (her) mother church, in which no heresy, no perversity, no division and no impiety remains, but true and lasting peace, which divine grace has established and the doctrine of the apostles has made firm, and holy faith has obtained.

“Give him (her) therefore, Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and confirm in him (her) the spirit of divine fear, so that, joined to your faithful people and gathered into the flock with your chosen ones, he (she) may obey your will, and no one may grasp him (her) from your hand, but may he (she) persevere in the true and catholic faith, to which he (she) comes under your inspiration, and in which he (she) lives under your protection for ever.” *Le Liber Ordinvm en usage dan l’église wisigothique et mozarabe d’espagne du cinquième au onzième siècle*, *Monvmenta Ecclesiae Litvrgica* 5:100-103 (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1904).

<sup>[19]</sup> “I chrismate you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in forgiveness of all your sins, that you may have eternal life. Amen.” Ibid.

<sup>[20]</sup> Michel Andrieu, *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen-âge, Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1940) 3:9, 616-619.

<sup>[21]</sup> “Then he brings him (her) into the church, saying, ‘Enter the church of God, from which you carelessly wandered, and realize that you have escaped the snares of death. Abhor idols; repudiate every heretical, pagan or Jewish distortion or superstition. Worship the almighty God and Jesus Christ his Son and the Holy Spirit, the living and true God, the holy and undivided Trinity. And you, almighty God, in paternal compassion, take (*percipe*) this your lamb, extracted from the jaws of the wolf by your might, and in your kindness set him (her) again (*refirma*) in your flock, so that the enemy may not rejoice in the

damnation of your family, but that the devoted mother of the restored son (daughter) may be thankful for his (her) conversion and liberation in your church. Through Christ our Lord.” Andrieu 3:9,4:616-617.

[22] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Open Circle: The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood*, trans. W. A. Glen-Doeple, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 124-125, alt.

[23] Sacred Congregation of Rites, “Variationes in missali et in rituali romano in precibus pro iudaeis,” *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 74 (1960):133.

[24] *Lumen gentium* 15, AAS 57 (1965):19.

[25] “Those who now are born into such communities and are instructed with the faith of Christ cannot be accused of the sin of separation, and the Catholic Church embraces them with fraternal reverence and love. For these who believe in Christ and have received baptism correctly are established in a certain, although not complete (*perfecta*), communion with the Catholic Church.” *Unitatis redintegratio* 3, AAS 57:93.

[26] *Ibid.* 7, AAS 57:97.

[27] *Ibid.* 22, AAS 57:105-6.

[28] “The form designed for use with the laying on of hands for a person baptized within another tradition who wishes to affiliate with the Episcopal Church incorporates a recognition of membership in the church which is . . . “the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and of which all baptized persons are members.” This form is comparable to those provided for the reception of “Protestants” or “Converted Papists” in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century when the Church of England first recognized and tolerated the existence of other Christian communions.” Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), pp. 282-283.

[29] *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with The Psalter or Psalms of David According to the use of The Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1979), p. 413.

[30] *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with The Psalter or Psalms of David According to the use of The Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1979), p. 418.

[31] *A Prayer Book for Australia for use together with The Book of Common Prayer (1662) and An Australian Prayer Book (1978)* (Alexandria: Broughton Books, 1995), p. 95-97.

<sup>[32]</sup> “Grant to thy *servant* the continued aid of thy Holy Spirit, that abiding with us in the fellowship of thy holy Church, *he* may remain faithful in thy service and obtain thy promises, through the same our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . **Amen.**

*Then the presbyter, giving the right hand of fellowship, says:*

We admit you into the fellowship of the Church of South India, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

May God, the Giver of all grace, who has called you to share his eternal glory through Christ, make you perfect, stablish and strengthen you. **Amen.**” *The Book of Common Worship: The Church of South India* (London, New York, Madras: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. xxi-xxiii.

<sup>[33]</sup> *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough, England: Methodist Publishing House, 1999). Pp. 353-354.

<sup>[34]</sup> *Book of Worship*: United Church of Christ (New York: United Church of Christ Office for Church Life and Leadership, 1986), pp. 157-165.

<sup>[35]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>[36]</sup> *Ibid.*, cf. 163-165.

<sup>[37]</sup> *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg Publishing House and Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America), 1982, p. 198.

<sup>[38]</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>[39]</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 461.

<sup>[40]</sup> *Service Book for the use of ministers conducting public worship*, ([S.I.] Canec Publishing & Supply House, 1986), pp. 232-233.

<sup>[41]</sup> RCIA 491.

<sup>[42]</sup> RCIA 492.

<sup>[43]</sup>“ The term *jubilee* speaks of joy; not just an inner joy but a jubilation which is manifested outwardly, for the coming of God is also an outward, visible, audible and tangible event, as St. John makes clear (cf. 1 Jn. 1: 1). It is thus appropriate that every sign of joy at this coming should have its own outward expression.

This will demonstrate that the church rejoices in salvation. She invites everyone to rejoice, and she tries to create conditions to ensure that the power of salvation

may be shared by all. Hence the year 2000 will be celebrated as the Great Jubilee.” John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente* 16, AAS 77 (1995):15.

<sup>[44]</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Declaration: ‘*Dominus Iesus*’: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church,” 16, citing the Second Vatican Council and various fathers of the Church. *Origins* 30/14 (September 14, 2000):216. Italics in original.

<sup>[45]</sup> *Ibid.*, #17.

<sup>[46]</sup> Francis A. Sullivan, “The Impact of *Dominus Iesus* on Ecumenism. *America* 183/11 (October 28, 2000), pp. 8-11.

<sup>[47]</sup> Richard McBrien, “*Dominus Iesus*: An Ecclesiological Critique,” *Centro Pro Unione Semi-Annual Bulletin* 59 (Spring 2001), p. 19-20.

<sup>[48]</sup> John Allen, “Reinterpreting Vatican II,” *National Catholic Reporter* 42/9 (December 23, 2005):23, citing the December 5-6, 2005 issue of *L’Osservatore Romano*.

<sup>[49]</sup> Letter of Virgil Noe, Secretary CDW to Bishop Doyle, 1 September 1986, CDW prot. 432/86. This was confirmed in another letter of Noe to Bishop Malone, 18 October 1986, CDW prot. 898/86. Cf. Sieverding, p. 279-280.

<sup>[50]</sup> Johnson, “Let’s Stop Receiving ‘Converts’ at Easter,” pp. 90-91.

<sup>[51]</sup> E.g. [http://www.ecumenism.net/archive/arcic/mary\\_en.htm](http://www.ecumenism.net/archive/arcic/mary_en.htm).

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