

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL ON CHRISTIAN ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO: DECREE ON ECUMENISM (excerpts)

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, November 21, 1964

CHAPTER I: CATHOLIC PRINCIPLES ON ECUMENISM

4... For although the Catholic Church has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all means of grace, yet its members fail to live by them with all the fervor that they should, so that the radiance of the Church's image is less clear in the eyes of our separated brethren and of the world at large, and the growth of God's kingdom is delayed. All Catholics must therefore aim at Christian perfection⁽²⁴⁾ and, each according to his station, play his part that the Church may daily be more purified and renewed. For the Church must bear in her own body the humility and dying of Jesus,⁽²⁵⁾ against the day when Christ will present her to Himself in all her glory without spot or wrinkle.⁽²⁶⁾

.... Catholics must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren. It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in His works and worthy of all praise.

Nor should we forget that anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can be a help to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian is never contrary to what genuinely belongs to the faith; indeed, it can always bring a deeper realization of the mystery of Christ and the Church.

CHAPTER II: THE PRACTICE OF ECUMENISM

7. There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from renewal of the inner life of our minds,⁽²⁸⁾ from self-denial and an unstinted love that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way. 8. This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name, "spiritual ecumenism."

9. We must get to know the outlook of our separated brethren. To achieve this purpose, study is of necessity required, and this must be pursued with a sense of realism and good will...From such dialogue will emerge still more clearly what the situation of the Catholic Church really is. In this way too the outlook of our separated brethren will be better understood, and our own belief more aptly explained.

11. When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists a "hierarchy" of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened by which through fraternal rivalry all will be stirred to a deeper understanding and a clearer presentation of the unfathomable riches of Christ.⁽³⁴⁾

I AM REMINDED...

By Edward L. Shirley, SFO
Chair, Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee
NAFRA

I have been reminded of many truths through my encounters with Christians of other Christian Churches:

Eastern Orthodox have reminded me of the absolute centrality of the Trinity.

Anglicans have reminded me that it is possible to pass on a Tradition without being chained by it, and that one can do so in many diverse ways.

Lutherans have reminded me of that it is only through the Cross that we reach Resurrection.

Methodists have reminded me that ultimately, it is not doctrine that unites us; it is love.

Baptists have reminded me of the importance of personal decision and personal commitment to God.

Pentecostals have reminded me of the importance of being empowered by the Holy Spirit in all that I am and do.

Quakers have reminded me of that each person has the Divine Indwelling, and that simplicity, gentleness and silence are ways to connect with that Indwelling.

Christian fundamentalists have reminded me of the importance of Scripture.

FINAL THOUGHT

I was once asked, "What would you do to prove your religion is the true one."

I replied, "I have no desire to prove my religion is the true one. However, if I wanted to prove that my religion was relevant and offered a way of life, I would begin to truly practice it."