

In Part III we examined the Call to Ecumenism found in Vatican II. The Decree on Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) and the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) both demonstrate the Council’s care in calling for Ecumenism. Now we will look at its teachings, in particular its guidelines.

Ecumenism.

The Church’s teaching on Ecumenism is grounded in the Teaching of Christ and the Nature of the Church. This is set forth in the Documents of Vatican II, the Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church (1983), the Eastern Churches’ Code of Canon Law (1994), the New Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992), and in the magisterial teaching of John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II. In 1993 His Holiness Pope John Paul II approved, authorized, and ordered the publication of a very important work—*The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (available online at www.vatican.va). Its purpose is to help form us for ecumenism. One section in particular deserves attention so I apologize for its length.

... the Directory is meant to be an instrument at the service of the whole Church and especially of those who are directly engaged in ecumenical activity in the Catholic Church. The Directory intends to motivate, enlighten and guide this activity, and in some particular cases also to give binding directives in accordance with the proper competence of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. In the light of the experience of the Church in the years since the Council and taking account of the present ecumenical situation, the Directory brings together all the norms already established for implementing and developing the decisions of the Council given up to the present and brings them up to date when necessary. It strengthens the structures that have been developed for the support and guidance of ecumenical activity at every level of the Church. While fully respecting the competence of authorities at different levels, the Directory gives orientations and norms of universal application to guide Catholic participation in ecumenical activity. Their application will provide consistency and coordination to the various practices of ecumenism by which particular Churches and groups of particular Churches respond to their different local situations. It will guarantee that ecumenical activity throughout the Catholic Church is in accordance with the unity of faith and with the discipline that binds Catholics together.

In our day there exists here and there a certain tendency to doctrinal confusion. Also it is very important in the ecumenical sphere, as in other spheres, to avoid abuses which could either contribute to or entail doctrinal indifferentism. The non-observance of the Church's directives on this matter creates an obstacle to progress in the authentic search for full unity among Christians. It is the task of the local Ordinary and of the Episcopal Conferences and Synods of Eastern Catholic Churches to see to it that the principles and norms contained in the Ecumenical Directory are faithfully applied, and with pastoral concern to take care that all possible deviations from them are avoided. (n 6)

The Directory.

One can readily see in this quotation the importance of ecumenism and the seriousness with which the Church engages in such dialogue. The Directory is divided into 5 sections which reflect the extent of the Catholic Church's commitment to unity in the Church and fidelity to Christ. Section I (*The Search for Christian Unity*) examines the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church based on the doctrinal principles of the Second Vatican Council; while Section II (*Organization in the Catholic Church at the Service of Christian Unity*) treats the persons, structures, and the norms that direct ecumenical activity. In Section III (*Ecumenical Formation in the Catholic Church*) we find a look at the people in the Church who need to be formed, those responsible for formation; the aim and methods of formation; its doctrinal and practical aspects. For most of us Section IV (*Communion in Life and Spiritual Activity Among the Baptized*) holds the greatest interest. It explains the Church as *communio*, the communion that exists with other Christians on the basis of the sacramental bond of Baptism. Here we find the norms for sharing in prayer and other spiritual activities, including in particular cases, sacramental sharing. Finally, in Section V (*Ecumenical Cooperation, Dialogue and Common Witness*) we find the principles for cooperation, and the different forms and norms for cooperation between Christians. This is so to achieve greater dialogue and our common witness as Christians in the world. (8)

Why?

So what is the goal of all this? Why? The Directory clearly states this in paragraph 20. This is one passage that we ought to really study. It seeks "full visible communion" which requires a great deal of work. It declares:

The Catholic Church solemnly pledged itself to work for Christian unity at the Second Vatican Council. The Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* explains how the unity that Christ wishes for his Church is brought about "through the faithful preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles and their successors—the Bishops with Peter's successor at their head—through their administering the sacraments, and through their governing in love", and defines this unity as consisting of the "confession of one faith,... the common celebration of divine worship,... the fraternal harmony of the family of God". This unity which of its very nature requires full visible communion of all Christians is the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement. The Council affirms that this unity by no means requires the sacrifice of the rich diversity of spirituality, discipline, liturgical rites and elaborations of revealed truth that has grown up among Christians in the measure that this diversity remains faithful to the apostolic Tradition. (20)

We need to take seriously Christ's prayer for the Unity of the Church, the One Church He called into being. It is no easy task and will not be done over night but requires good women and men of faith to work toward such a noble goal. We must avoid extremes-- Indifferentism (not caring) on the one hand, and proselytism (forcing conversion) on the other hand.

What do we need?

As you can tell the Directory is a rich resource for understanding the Church's teaching on Ecumenism. By way of closing this article I want to list its "requirements," the kind of people we need to be to work for this unity. It rather beautifully tells us that we need to meet key requirements. I end with this as both a list and a prayer. O Lord, Help Us to:

- a) have a sincere personal commitment, lived out in faith, without which dialogue is no longer a dialogue between brothers and sisters but rather a mere academic exercise;
- b) search for new ways and means for building up mutual relationships and re-establishing unity based on greater fidelity to the Gospel and on the authentic profession of the Christian faith, in truth and charity;
- c) keep the conviction that ecumenical dialogue is not a purely private matter between persons or particular groups but that it takes place within the framework of the commitment of the whole Church and must in consequence be carried out in a way that is coherent with the teaching and the directives of its Pastors;
- d) have a readiness to recognize that the members of the different Churches and ecclesial Communities can help us better to understand and to expound accurately the doctrine and life of their Communities;
- e) keep respect for the conscience and personal conviction of anyone who expounds an aspect or a doctrine of his or her own Church or its particular way of understanding Divine Revelation;
- f) be open to the recognition of the fact that not everybody is equally qualified to take part in dialogue, since there are various degrees of education, maturity of mind and spiritual progress.

AMEN.