

Drawing Aside the Purple Curtain

The Papal System Today: an Analysis of the News

Rome Still Claims to be the

One True Church

Despite Four Decades of Ecumenism, Protestant Institutions are Not Churches, Says Rome

by Shaun Willcock

To the dismay of ecumenically-minded Protestants, the Roman pope, Benedict XVI, made it clear, in a document released in 2007, that the Roman Catholic institution is the “one, true Church”, and that Protestant institutions, not being in full communion with Rome, are not true churches.

The brief document was released on July 10, 2007, and was entitled “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church.” It was put out by the Vatican’s “Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith”. This office used to be called the Inquisition, and it should always be remembered that before he became pope, Benedict headed up this sinister institution. The document was approved by Benedict before publication; and it *reaffirmed* – note that it didn’t say this for the first time, it *reaffirmed* what Rome had in fact always said – that the Roman Catholic “Church” is the one, true Church founded by Jesus Christ. It did, however, concede that certain “elements of truth” can be found in other “churches” and “ecclesial communities”.

But what is the difference between “churches” and “ecclesial communities”? Was this simply a figure of speech? Not at all. The words were very carefully chosen. The document states that the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s used the term “church” in reference to the *Eastern Orthodox* institutions. The reason being that, although the Orthodox were separated from the Roman Catholic “Church”, they preserved the Popish doctrines and practices of apostolic succession, the ordained priesthood, and the eucharist. This, in Rome’s view, made them churches, although it went on to state that they “lack something in their condition as particular churches” because they are not in union with the pope of Rome.¹

The Eastern Orthodox institutions, of course, *are* essentially the same as Rome when it comes to the doctrines and practices mentioned. They are false religious institutions just as certainly as Rome is, and not in any sense true churches of Christ according to the Scriptures. But they do not recognise the Roman pope as their head, and thus although they are churches in Rome’s judgment, they are *deficient* ones. And Rome, via the ecumenical movement, is working hard for them to see this deficiency, and once again acknowledge and accept the pope as their head, submitting to Papal authority.

On the other hand, the “Christian communities” born out of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, says the document, do not have apostolic succession – the supposed unbroken succession of bishops going back to Peter, which Rome claims it alone enjoys – and therefore “cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called ‘Churches’ in the proper sense.”² *This* is why they are referred to as “ecclesial communities” instead.

Of course, *neither* the Roman Catholic institution *nor* the Protestant institutions engaged in seeking unity with Rome are true Christian churches! But the document reveals Rome’s true attitude towards

spiritually blind, ecumenical Protestants who are so committed to establishing “unity” with Rome: its purpose has always been to place them all under itself, believing itself to be the “only true Church.” Yet they have naively pressed ahead with their ecumenical plans, believing Rome viewed them all as equals.

Not surprisingly, the document caused ecumenical Protestant institutions to react with shock and dismay. For example, the general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Setri Nyomi, published an open letter addressed to the Vatican’s chief ecumenist, Roman Catholic cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the “Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity”. He wrote: “An exclusivist claim that identifies the Roman Catholic Church as the one church of Jesus Christ... goes against the spirit of our Christian calling toward oneness in Christ. It makes us question the seriousness with which the Roman Catholic Church takes its dialogue with the Reformed family and other families of the Church.”³ And there was a similar reaction from various other Protestant institutions.

Let us backtrack here, so as to put this latest document in its historical context. The official entry of the Roman Catholic institution into the ecumenical movement was the Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II, held from 1962 to 1965. And that council succeeded in deceiving the Protestant world into believing that Rome had somehow changed; that it no longer viewed itself as the only true Church; that it no longer wanted to persecute Protestants; and that it was open to working towards full unity between itself and all other “churches”, without insisting that it should control all others.

In one of the documents released at Vatican II, it was stated that the Church founded by Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor”.⁴ This was nothing less than the traditional Popish doctrine. But it added, for the first time, that elements of “sanctification and truth” are found outside the Roman Catholic institution’s visible structure.⁵ This was new! And it was statements like this that caused ecumenical Protestants to gibber with excitement. They now started to loudly proclaim that there was hope – that Rome had softened its stance, and opened the door to eventual full unity. How wrong they were! Rome never intended any such thing.

In the year 2000, the discussion over the term “churches” surfaced publicly, when the Inquisition – headed by the cardinal, Joseph Ratzinger – said that the term “sister churches” (as used since Vatican II) was being *misused* in ecumenical dialogue. And Ratzinger became pope upon the death of John Paul II a few years later.

In the year 2000, the Inquisition released a document entitled “Dominus Iesus”, which caused an uproar among ecumenists at the time. It stated that the Roman Catholic institution was necessary to salvation. This of course has always been Rome’s doctrine, but again, it had been played down since Vatican II, to entice ecumenical Protestants. Played down, yes, but never abandoned – and when it was again categorically stated in 2000, ecumenical Protestants expressed shock and dismay.

Hence this new document, released in 2007. According to the Inquisition’s prefect, Romish cardinal William Levada, it was released in response to the critical reactions to the teaching of the “Dominus Iesus” document, and to ongoing confusion over interpretations of the phrase “subsists in”:⁶ that the Church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church”, as stated above.

This new document states that Vatican II did *not*, in fact, change Roman Catholic doctrine on the meaning of the Church! Its precise words are: “The Second Vatican Council neither changed nor intended to change this doctrine, rather it developed, deepened and more fully explained it.”⁷ Nothing could be clearer. Roman Catholic cardinal, Walter Kasper, president of the “Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity”, said that although initial reactions to the document were marked by “irritation among Protestant Christians”, a second reading of the document should lead to the conclusion “that the document does not say anything new”, but rather provides a synthesis of Roman Catholic teaching.⁸ In this he was quite correct – the document indeed does not say anything new. Rome has *always* stated that its doctrines were not changed at Vatican II.⁹ And yet the belief has persisted among the Protestant institutions that Vatican II somehow represented an about-face by Rome; that it actually altered some of its fundamental doctrines. *Rome* never said so; but it was happy for the gullible to believe it. And believe it they certainly did! And for over forty years, the ecumenical movement has

advanced by leaps and bounds, as foolish and blind Protestants have fallen over themselves in their mad rush for “unity” with Rome.

In answer to the question, “What is the meaning of the affirmation that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church?” the document states categorically, quoting from documents of Vatican II: “Christ ‘established here on earth’ only one Church and instituted it as a ‘visible and spiritual community’, that from its beginning and throughout the centuries has always existed and will always exist, and in which alone are found all the elements that Christ himself instituted... This Church, constituted and organised in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.”¹⁰ There is nothing ambiguous about this, just as there was nothing ambiguous about what Vatican II stated: the **only** true “Church” **is** the Roman Catholic “Church”.

The document states that the use of the phrase “subsists in” was intended to show that all the elements instituted by Christ endure in the Roman Catholic “Church” **alone**. The “sanctifying elements” that exist outside the structure of the Roman Catholic “Church”, it states, can be used as instruments of salvation; but their value derives from the “fullness of grace and truth which has been entrusted to the Catholic Church”, quoting from Vatican II’s “Decree on Ecumenism”. In other words, any sanctifying elements within other religious communities are in some mysterious way **derived from** the Roman Catholic religion! Take heed to these quotations from the document:

“It is possible, according to Catholic doctrine, to affirm correctly that the Church of Christ is present and operative in the churches and ecclesial Communities not yet fully in communion with the Catholic Church, on account of the elements of sanctification and truth that are present in them. Nevertheless, the word ‘subsists’ can only be attributed to the Catholic Church alone... and this ‘one’ Church subsists in the Catholic Church.” Note the words, “churches and ecclesial Communities **not yet** fully in communion with the Catholic Church”. Rome’s clear intention is that oneday, somehow, some way, all others will be in “communion” with it, for it alone is the one true Church.

“The use of this expression [“subsists in’], which indicates the full identity of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church, does not change the doctrine on the Church. Rather, it comes from and brings out more clearly the fact that there are ‘numerous elements of sanctification and of truth’ which are found outside her structure, but which ‘as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, impel towards Catholic Unity.’” Think carefully about what is being stated here! As far as Rome is concerned, those elements which are good within other religious institutions must **impel toward Catholic unity!** Again, this demonstrates plainly that the “unity” Rome strives for is not a unity of equality, but a “unity” **under Rome**, a “unity” whereby what it believes to be inferior and defective religious institutions recognise the full authority of the Roman Catholic “Church” and submit to it!

According to an authoritative commentary in the Vatican’s newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the Inquisition) had acted to protect the unity and **uniqueness** of the Roman Catholic “Church” by issuing this document! Throughout the centuries, Rome has claimed to be the one, true Church, unique in every way. Gullible ecumenical Protestants thought that at Vatican II Rome cast aside centuries of doctrine and no longer made this claim. It did not! And now this document has again made it clear. Rome still believes itself to be the only true Church, to which the whole world must submit! In the words of the document itself, it took aim at the notion that the Church of Christ was “the sum total of the churches or the ecclesial communities”. Rome had **never** defined the Church this way. It **always** insisted that it alone was the truth, and that the ecumenical movement’s ultimate purpose was, not for Rome to join with all other churches in some kind of new set-up, but to get all other churches to submit to the **pope**, and to ultimately be **absorbed by** the “Church” of Rome. The Vatican newspaper stated that what Vatican II intended was to recognise ecclesial elements in non-Catholic communities. **“It does not follow that the identification of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church no longer holds”**, it said.¹¹ Read that sentence again, and see how blind the Protestant ecumenicals have been for four decades, naively assuming that Rome wanted nothing more than for all churches to unite together on some kind of level playing field, as equal partners, with none above the others.

The reason for the issuing of this document is clear. Rome is still committed to ecumenism. But its purpose, in being involved in the ecumenical movement, is to finally **take control of** all other “churches!

Absorption of all other “churches”, not equality with them, has always been Rome’s goal through the ecumenical movement. But as the ecumenical movement progressed over the years, it was becoming clear, to Rome, that this goal was being buried under the momentum of the ecumenical movement itself, which was treating all “churches” as equal and not, in general practice, leading to the kind of dominant position for Rome which it desires. This would never do. Not only was the ultimate goal not always being kept in mind, but increasingly, Roman Catholics themselves, being swept up in the ecumenical excitement, were losing their distinct sense of identity, and coming to view their “church” as just one of many churches in the world, instead of as *“the Church”* which their parents and grandparents had always been taught to believe it was. Something had to be done. This document marks a turning point. The pope of Rome has drawn a line in the sand: the Roman Catholic “Church” will pursue ecumenism, but *only* on its terms. All other “churches” *must* recognise the Roman Catholic “Church” as the one, true Church; this is the ultimate objective of the ecumenical movement, and on this point Rome will not budge. U.S. Dominican priest, Augustine Di Noia, under-secretary of the Inquisition, said that the document does not call into question Benedict’s pledge to work for ecumenical progress. “The Church is not backtracking on its ecumenical commitment. But... it is fundamental to any kind of dialogue that the participants are clear about their own identity,” he said.¹² As stated by Robert Moynihan of *Inside the Vatican* magazine, “The Pope’s intent, it seems clear, is to lessen confusion in the Church, and at the same time to reinforce the sense of Catholic identity over against a type of exaggerated ecumenism in which all Christian communities are increasingly, in practice, regarded as equally valid expressions of Christian faith.”¹³

In other words, Roman Catholics (and everyone else) must know that *their* “church” is the *only true* “church” on earth, and this fundamental doctrine must *never* be sacrificed for the cause of unity.

The Vatican newspaper, in its commentary on the document, said: “Despite the fact that this teaching has created no little distress in the communities concerned and even among some Catholics, it is nevertheless difficult to see how the title of ‘Church’ could possibly be attributed to them, given that they do not accept the theological notion of the Church in the Catholic sense and that they lack elements considered essential to the Catholic Church.”¹⁴

Trying his best to put a good spin on it, while at the same time categorically stating Rome’s official position, Popish cardinal Walter Kasper said, “The document does not say that the Protestant churches are not churches, but that they are not churches in the precise sense, that is, they are not churches in the way that the Catholic Church uses the term ‘church’.”¹⁵ Well, since the way in which Rome uses the word “church” is believed, by Rome, to be the only correct way to use it, no amount of spin will change the fact of the matter: that Rome is saying it alone is the true Church, and all others are false.

This has *always* been Rome’s belief. For a short while, so as to advance its own agenda, it covered up this “truth” which it had always proclaimed; but Benedict is far less of an “all things to all men” kinda guy than John Paul II was. And the present pope isn’t hiding this doctrine of Rome – he wants it spread abroad as far as possible, so that the world knows what Rome really believes on this point! For William Levada, the cardinal prefect of the Inquisition, asked the world’s Popish bishops to do all they can to promote and present the document to the wider public. There is nothing subtle or underhanded about this at all, and Benedict wants the world to be quite clear on this point: Rome is the one, true Church, and many others, with whom it has been in ecumenical dialogue for decades, must understand clearly that they cannot even be called “churches”, merely separated “communities”.

Incredibly, what we see is this: the Roman Catholic institution proudly and categorically stating that it alone is the one, true Church; and the ecumenical, cowardly, fawning “Protestant” institutions falling over themselves, as they have for decades, telling us all that the Roman Catholic institution is a true church, as much a true church as their own, that Roman Catholics are their brothers and sisters in Christ, true Christians, and that oneday full union would be achieved between Roman Catholic and Protestant institutions, all equally valid, all on the same level, all happily marching forward as Christians together. And all this time, Rome had never altered its fundamental conviction. If only the ecumenical Protestants had paid attention, they would have noticed that Rome had not changed, and that it was only stating what it had always stated about itself – and about them.

At least Rome is being honest, and true to its own doctrine. Protestants, tragically, are nowhere near as honest to their own written confessions of faith! According to the confessions of faith of many Protestant denominations, the pope of Rome is the Antichrist. This being so, they used to have no fellowship whatsoever with Papists, who they correctly understood to be idol-worshippers, false “christians”, *not* true Christians. But times have changed. The once-Protestant institutions have abandoned their own doctrinal standards, and are now fully prepared to receive Papists as true Christians, the pope of Rome as a brother in Christ, and the Roman Catholic institution (which they once branded correctly as the Whore of Babylon of Rev. 17) as a true Christian church. They have moved so far away from the Bible as the sole rule of faith, that they readily sprout such nonsense, even though the pope of Rome has officially declared they are not even churches in his eyes!

They register shock when Benedict simply states what has been Roman Catholic belief all along. Yet the ecumenical Protestants did not have the backbone, nor indeed the spiritual conviction, to have said from the very start of the ecumenical movement, “The Roman Catholic institution is *not* a true church, and there will be no unity with it.” The ecumenical Protestant attitude is well encapsulated in the words of Thomas Wipf, president of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe: “We recognise the Roman Catholic Church as a church. It is and remains regrettable that this is not made possible the other way around.”¹⁶ *They* continue to recognise Rome, but *Rome* does not recognise them! How utterly naive and blind!

The tragedy of all this is that *neither* the Roman Catholic institution, *nor* the Protestant institutions seeking unity with Rome, are true churches of Christ! They are *both* full of false, unbiblical doctrines and practices, and with wolves in sheep’s clothing in the pulpits and goats in the pews.

Will this latest bombshell from the Vatican put an end to the ecumenical Protestant obsession with seeking unity with Rome? No, it will not. The ecumenical movement is now too far advanced. Perhaps, if this latest document had been released three decades ago, it might have stopped the ecumenical bulldozer in its tracks. But not today. Rome evidently feels confident enough to release such a document now, without fear of it permanently stopping the ecumenical advance. This is why the Vatican’s chief ecumenist, the cardinal Walter Kasper, could make the statement that by clarifying its own position, the Vatican was actually helping ecumenical dialogue! He said that while initial reactions were marked by “irritation among Protestant Christians”, yet by explaining what still divides “Christians” the document “does not limit dialogue, but promotes it.”¹⁷

The Protestant institutions have all been sufficiently weakened, doctrinally and practically. They have cast off their own confessional standards. They have cast aside various doctrines of the faith. They are filled with unregenerate men and women. They are floundering, rudderless, uncertain, shedding members, losing credibility. They are increasingly ripe for the picking by Rome.

True Christian unity is a reality and always has been, because it is a spiritual unity between all true believers in Christ, and Christ Himself as their Head. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ prayed for (Jn. 17:20,21), and His prayer was answered, for His prayers were always answered (Jn. 11:41,42). “There is one body” (Eph. 4:4). All true Christians are united to Christ their Head, and form the one, united, mystical body of Christ, the true Church.

The ecumenical movement is the attempt of worldly men, falsely professing to be “christians”, to create some kind of external, structural “unity” between false “churches”. The Papal Antichrist is doing his utmost to expand his territory and increase his power. From such a devilish “unity” all true Christians must remain absolutely separate (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Rev. 18:4,5).

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ENDNOTES:

1. *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church*, document of the "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith", June 29, 2007.
2. *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church*.
3. *The Southern Cross*, July 25 to 31, 2007.
4. The Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 8.2.
5. The Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 8.2. Also the Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, by John Paul II.
6. *The Southern Cross*, July 18 to 24, 2007.
7. *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church*.
8. *The Southern Cross*, July 25 to 31, 2007.
9. e.g. Address of Paul VI, 29 September 1963; Address of Paul VI, 21 November 1964.
10. *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church*.
11. *The Southern Cross*, July 18 to 24, 2007.
12. *Vatican Congregation Reaffirms Truth, Oneness of Catholic Church*, by John Thavis, Catholic News Service, as quoted in *Pope Benedict Continues His "Benedictine Reform" by Stressing Catholic Identity*, by Robert Moynihan, 10 July 2007. www.INSIDEtheVatican.com
13. *Pope Benedict Continues His "Benedictine Reform" by Stressing Catholic Identity*.
14. *Vatican Congregation Reaffirms Truth, Oneness of Catholic Church*.
15. *The Southern Cross*, July 25 to 31, 2007
16. *The Southern Cross*, July 25 to 31, 2007.
17. *The Southern Cross*, July 25 to 31, 2007.