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Subsistit In: Full Identity or Discontinuity?

Brian Kusek

University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, blkusek11@gmail.com

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THE SAINT PAUL SEMINARY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Subsistit In: Full Identity or Discontinuity?

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Divinity

Of the University of St. Thomas

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Arts in Theology

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Brian L. Kusek

St. Paul, MN

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This thesis by Brian L. Kusek fulfills the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts degree in Theology approved by Christian D. Washburn, Ph.D., as Thesis Adviser, and by William Stevenson, Ph.D. and by Kristin Towle, Ph.D. as Readers.



Christian D. Washburn, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser



William Stevenson, Ph.D., Reader



Kristin Towle, Ph.D., Reader

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In its dogmatic constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II teaches, “This Church, constituted and ordered as a society in this world, *subsists in* the Catholic Church.”¹ In the post-conciliar period this text proved to be controversial with some theologians, who concluded that the Church of Christ is not fully identical with the Catholic Church.² These theologians have used this text as an example of a fundamental discontinuity between the council and the previous magisterium. Other theologians insisted that the teaching of *Lumen genitum* was in full continuity with preconciliar teachings. In 2005, Pope Benedict addressed this concern, calling this hermeneutic of discontinuity a “hermeneutic of rupture.”³ In 2007, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

¹ “Haec Ecclesia, in hoc mundo ut societas constituta et ordinata, *subsistit in* Ecclesia Catholica.” emphasis added; Peter Hünermann, Helmut Hoping, Robert L. Fastiggi, Anne Englund Nash, and Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd edition (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), 4118 (hereafter DH).

² See, Christopher Malloy, “Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?”, *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 1-44.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia,” https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedictxvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html. Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI, even before his papacy, had spent much time exploring the problem of having two competing hermeneutics in the Church. While his initial position focuses on reform rather than continuity *per se*, it is evident that his perspective is, at minimum, *not* one of discontinuity. “Reform”, though distinct from “continuity,” is not a contradiction; that is, continuity is not synonymous with rigidity. Thus, it may be said that Benedict’s hermeneutic is of both reform and continuity, even if the latter remains implicit. See *The Ratzinger Report* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 33-35. For earlier essays, see “Catholicism after the Council,” *The Furrow* 18 (1967), 3-23. For still a third interpretation of the Council, see J.A. Komonchak, “Interpreting the Second Vatican Council,” *Landas* 1 (1987): 81-90; J.A. Komonchak, “Interpreting the Council: Catholic Attitudes toward Vatican II,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. by M.J. Weaver, R.S. Appleby (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 17-36.

defended and affirmed this full identity by stating the “Council did not wish to change, nor is it to be said to have changed, this doctrine; instead, it wished to unfold it, to understand it more deeply, and to express it more fruitfully.”⁴ Nevertheless, two contradictory positions continue to exist, one in defense of the traditional identity of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church, the other in opposition to the traditional teaching, or rather, in defense of discontinuity.

The council fathers, as we will see, had no disagreement over the meaning of this pivotal phrase, as is evident in the context of *Lumen Gentium* and the other fifteen conciliar documents. Only in the last fifty years did two hermeneutics come to the foreground. Yet, this debate has been unlike most in theology, when an undefined principle may be worked out through faith and reason until the teaching authority of the Church reaches a conclusion. The history of dogma clearly puts questioning to rest, as the Church has long held that outside of her bounds there can be no salvation, and that She is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. If the Church of Christ is not fully identical with the Catholic Church, if salvation may be obtained by other means, then the pre-conciliar Church had erred in its definitive declarations of revealed truth. Thus, the schools concerned with this debate are uniquely focused on either continuity or discontinuity.

Those who accept doctrinal continuity in the identity of the Church of Christ as uniquely Catholic, as the CDF does, do so with the *sensus fidei*. Their systematic interpretation of councils approaches the history of the Church as part of a larger story,

⁴ Congregation for Divine Faith (hereafter CDF), “Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church,” response to the first question. DH 5108. For a more complete explication of the term “full identity,” see Malloy, “Subsistit in: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?”, 1.

that is, salvation history.⁵ In other words, there is emphasis on a supernatural reality, one that constitutes the living tradition and thus leaves little room for rupture or contradiction. It is this perspective that provides the magisterial argument, largely taken up by the hierarchy of the last half century, especially since the pontificate of John Paul II, and defended regularly by Benedict XVI.⁶ The means by which doctrine is interpreted rely heavily on textual evidence. This is not to say that context and application are insignificant, but only that they remain accidental in the ontological reality that the science of theology aims to discover.

The other hermeneutic, then, is that of discontinuity, which holds that the Church of Christ is not fully identical with the Catholic Church. Theologians who espouse this hermeneutic tend to stress historicity as the primary way of understanding the Council, rather than theological discourse. This historical-critical method often puts primacy on the sociological, anthropological, or geopolitical meaning of Vatican II, which regularly leads to the use of past tradition as a kind of foil.⁷ Furthermore, this collection of scholars has increasingly proposed the conciliar documents as compromise texts, ones that might be interpreted in different ways depending on historical artifacts.⁸ Systematically, they generally argue with a horizontal perspective in their ecclesiology, as opposed to a hierarchical or vertical one. Thinkers who interpret Vatican II this way were, in many

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sr. Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 367.

⁶ See John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*. For more surveys of this hermeneutic, see Roberto de Mattei, *The Second Vatican Council: An Unwritten Story*, translated by Patrick T. Brannan, S.J., Michael J. Miller, and Kenneth D. Whitehead (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2012), 564-567.

⁷ Guiseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2006), viii; Giusseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995-2007), I:1-50; John W. O'Malley, "Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?" in *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 3-33; John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2008), 15-53.

⁸ Karim Schelkens, "Lumen Gentium's "subsistit in" Revisited: The Catholic Church and Christian Unity After Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 875-893.

cases, prominent players in the Council. After years of disagreement with the teaching authority of the Church, they were frequently reprimanded in the late decades of the twentieth century.

It is the purpose of the following study to argue for the former hermeneutic by establishing proof of the Church's exclusive identity as the one true Church of Christ. More precisely, the following study aims to remove the possibility that the phrase *subsistit in* can be used as a doctrinal proof of discontinuity. Imbued with the fullness of all the means with which Christ entrusted her, the Church remains forever, exclusively, and immutably Catholic. That the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church is proof of exclusive identity. Since this has been the prevalent perspective of the Church throughout its history, surely this proposition removes *subsistit in* from the arguments for discontinuity.

The means of proving the full identity of the Church of Christ and the Catholic Church will be employed in the following five chapters. First, chapter two will take a closer look at the pre-conciliar historical context of the constitution. This chapter will discuss the views of the Fathers of the Church with particular attention paid to Cyprian (200-258), Augustine (354-430), and Pelagius II (520-590). This chapter will then examine the doctrinal teaching of the magisterium, particularly the teaching of Lateran IV (1215), Vienne (1311-1312), Florence (1431-1449), Trent (1545-1563), Vatican I (1869-1870), Boniface VIII (1230-1303), Pius IV (1559-1565), Leo XIII (1878-1903), Pius XI (1922-1939), and Pius XII (1939-1958).

Chapter three will provide a brief history of the Second Vatican Council, as well as a history of relevant texts, particularly *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*. The

aim here is to address the text and context in relation to the preceding history. Moreover, this history will take on legitimate development in applications like ecumenism, especially in regard to the *elementa* mentioned in *Lumen Gentium* 8. The end of this study of the Council itself is to prove that the texts themselves demonstrate full identity, as the tradition has throughout the history of the Church.

Chapter four will examine the views of some theologians who use the phrase *subsistit in* to argue for a fundamental doctrinal discontinuity between the Second Vatican Council and previous magisterial teaching. This chapter will specifically argue against Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009), Richard McBrien (1936-2015), George Linbeck (b. 1923), Hans Küng (b. 1928), and Leonardo Boff (b. 1938), who identify the Church of Christ much more broadly than tradition and the council allows. Additionally, several categories of rupture or discontinuity will be examined and refuted.

Finally, chapter five will offer insights and conclusions in the debate over identity. The implications of the debate in regard to ecumenism and ecclesiology will be discussed as well.

Chapter 2

The Identification of the Catholic Church with the Church of Christ Prior to Vatican II

The assertion that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church is really a question of identity. Answering the question depends, first of all, on the teachings of the Fathers, who lay the foundation upon which centuries of doctrine are formed. It depends, too, on the doctrinal teaching of the magisterium. It is this lens that directs and shapes the Second Vatican Council in its discussion on the Church, which in turn determines whether the *subsistit in* phrase may contribute to the hermeneutic of discontinuity.

The transformative effect of the incarnation has always been the interpretive key in understanding the true nature of the Church and so is used as such in the text of *Lumen gentium*.⁹ That is, the eternal Logos becomes man to assume our weak human nature, thereby elevating it, perfecting it, and making it holy. The mystery of the God-man enables the human person to participate in eternity.¹⁰ Surely, the Church on earth already participates in this mystery by the power she has to safeguard divine truths, most especially through the magisterium and the supreme pontiff.¹¹ The eternal became finite, that the finite might become eternal. Christ came to earth to assume humanity, thereby

⁹ See *Lumen gentium*, 8.

¹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University, 1991), bk. 10 chap. 42, no. 67; Athanasius, *Discourse III against the Arians*, no. 33, ed. Archibald Robertson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 2nd series (1885; reprinted, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 4:412.

¹¹ Matthew 16:18.

giving access to the eternal, the perfect, and the divine.¹² This humanity of Christ is His instrumental cause of salvation, one that is assumed by His divinity. But Christ wished to stay with His people always, even after His resurrection and ascension into heaven. Therefore, He established the Church as yet another instrumental cause of salvation, which is connected to His holy humanity. Since the divine is unchanging, the faithful can have confidence in knowing their faith is securely built upon the foundation of Christ and His apostles.¹³

If there is nothing new to reveal, there can be no new developments in the essential principles of the Church. Christ intended to establish a visible Church on earth to carry out His work, and He left a clear framework in which this might be accomplished. First, He appointed Peter as its head.¹⁴ Second, He left His apostles power and authority.¹⁵ Third, Christ commanded what His work should be.¹⁶

If there can be no corruption in her full identity, then subsistence may not be indicative of discontinuity. This is evidenced in Scripture and the history of the Church. The identity of the Church is first evident in Sacred Scripture, albeit principally in the negative. That is, there is “no salvation outside the Church.”¹⁷ It is clear, first of all, that the Gospel is addressed to all men, for all nations at all times.¹⁸ Yet, the New Testament also reveals that salvation is being incorporated specifically in Christ and in His Church. It must be received so that, as members, believers may live in Christ and thus be

¹² *Lumen Gentium*, 2.

¹³ Matthew 16:19.

¹⁴ Matthew 16:18.

¹⁵ Matthew 18:18; John 20:23.

¹⁶ Luke 22:19; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15.

¹⁷ Charles Cardinal Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, trans. Victor Szczurek (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 315.

¹⁸ I Cor. 1:24; Eph. 2:14; Mt. 28:19-20.

conformed to Him.¹⁹ Christ speaks frequently of this soteriology. “If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.”²⁰ “If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”²¹ “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”²²

Two aspects of the aforementioned axiom are suggested in the Gospel:

(1) Those who refuse the Gospel, more precisely, those who, having understood and accepted Christ's preaching, reject the true faith cannot be saved. The apostles are told very clearly what happens to those who refuse them. Jesus commands the apostles to shake the dust from their feet, for instance, to signify that those who deny His teaching are not followers of the true master. Further, he qualifies them with unfavorable terms, like ‘Gentile’ or ‘tax collector’.

(2) Not all who claim full membership in the Church are saved. In other words, there are those who retain membership in a non-salutary manner. There are those in Matthew’s gospel who are mentioned as being part of the kingdom but are nevertheless thrown out by the angels of the Son of Man.²³

¹⁹ Jn. 17:23, 15:4-5; I Cor. 12:12; Rom. 8:29; Gal. 2:20.

²⁰ Mt. 10:14-15.

²¹ Mt. 18:17.

²² Jn. 3:5.

²³ Mt. 13:41-42. See also Lk. 2:34, 13:9; Jn. 3:19, 9:39, 22:8-9, 22:12-14, 25:41; I Tim. 1:20; I Jn. 2:18-19; 2 Jn. 10; I Cor. 13:2; Gal. 5:6. See Journet, *Theology of the Church*, 316.

The Fathers of the Church

Certainly this was a well-established understanding of salvation throughout the history of the Church, and her teaching affirms this. The earliest creeds, particularly those of the fourth and fifth centuries, anathematize those who do not hold fast to the teachings of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.²⁴ “For where there is the Church,” says Irenaeus (d.202), “there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God, there is the Church, and every kind of grace.”²⁵ To be one in part is to be united in a singular body of beliefs, specifically, the Church founded by Christ during his earthly ministry and organized at Rome by the rock of Peter, who was succeeded there by the second pope, where apostolic Tradition has been preserved continuously.²⁶

St. Cyprian (200-258) writes in the third century about the absurdity of the notion that the Church of Christ is divisible in any way. According to the Fathers, it is not possible to belong to the unique Church of Christ and hold divisive beliefs simultaneously. Cyprian compares this indivisible unity to the seamless garb of Christ.

Who, then, is so wicked and faithless, who is so insane with the madness of discord, that either he should believe that the unity of God can be divided, or should dare to rend it— the garment of the Lord— the Church of Christ?” He Himself in His Gospel warns us, and teaches, saying, “*And there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*” And does any one believe that in one place there can be either many shepherds or many flocks? The Apostle Paul, moreover, urging upon us this same unity, beseeches and exhorts, saying, “*I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you; but that you be joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*”²⁷

²⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 10, chap. 42, no. 67; Athanasius, *Discourse III against the Arians*, no. 33, Robertson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 4:412. DH 14, 18b-38.

²⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, bk. 3, chap. 24. John R. Willis, S.J., *Teachings of the Church Fathers* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002) (hereafter *TSEE*), 2:129.

²⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, bk. 5, chapter 20, *TSEE*, II, 141; Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, chapter 5, *TSEE*, 2:144.

²⁷ Cyprian, *De Unitate*, 8; John 10:16, 1 Corinthians 1:10.

Cyprian's words carry definitive weight not on their own authority but by appealing to the very words of Christ and the New Testament. Garments signify a united body throughout Scripture. For instance, the unity of the kingdom of Israel was signified by garments, first by the robe of Joseph and later by the robe of Samuel.²⁸ The garments of the Old Testament always signified disunity by their rending. The integrity of Christ's garment, then, ought to convey clearly that the Church is of the same integrity.

Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386) speaks of the unique nature of the Lord's "house," and reprimands those who describe their heresies in the same way.²⁹ This house of God described by Cyril is not merely one of many, nor is it divided within. Catholic is "the peculiar name of this Holy Church, the mother of us all."³⁰

Augustine (354-430) speaks confidently of this Church as "Catholic." While the Bishop of Hippo clearly uses this term to mean "universal", the fullness or totality of this truth is to be found uniquely in the Catholic Church, "because it embraces all truth."³¹ Surely this kind of universalism is not to say that the Church of Christ contains a multiplicity of realities, for that would compromise the aforementioned marks. Instead, Augustine argues for a singular universal truth that is uniquely Catholic. Though fragments of truth may be found in some heresies, the Church "is called Catholic because it honestly holds the whole truth."³² Take, for instance, the Donatists, against whom Augustine wrote Letter 93. They were strict religious purists, who zealously followed ritual norms that belonged by right to the Catholic faith. Nevertheless, they denied the

²⁸ Genesis 37:29-32; 1 Samuel 15:24-28; 1 Kings 11:11-32.

²⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, No. 17:14, *TSEE*, 2:148.

³⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, No. 17:14, *TSEE*, 2:148.

³¹ Augustine, *Letter 93*, in *Letters of St. Augustine*, John Leinenweber, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 408. see *TSEE*, 2:149.

³² Augustine, *Letter 93*, 149.

communion that is preached by the Lord Himself in the Gospel, even to the extent of re-baptizing some of the faithful. While certain sects may retain this kind of sacramental purity and observance of divine precepts, unless they are united to the communion that embraces the whole world, they may not be called properly Catholic. That the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church is to realize universality. In other words, Augustine is elucidating that oneness and apostolicity extend to the furthest bounds, not simply adherence to norms and practice. What Christ instituted was a direct connection to his heavenly kingdom, which bears universal significance. For Augustine, the Church is not one phenomenon among many earthly spectacles; it is an eternal reality in which earthly pilgrims participate.³³

In the sixth century, Pelagius II (579-590) confirms the four ecumenical councils that have preceded him by iterating “[i]f anyone, however, either suggests or believes or presumes to teach contrary to this faith, let him know that he is condemned and anathematized per the opinion of the same Fathers,” and “whoever has not been in the peace and unity of the Church cannot have the Lord.”³⁴ In line with tradition, he identifies this Church as Catholic, drawing a direct connection by its association with Peter, the rock upon which our Lord promised the gates of hell would not prevail.³⁵ As with the other early Fathers, Pelagius demonstrates that the Church of Christ is inseparable from the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church.

³³ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. by Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 513-550.

³⁴ Pope Pelagius II, *Quod ad Dilectionem*. DH 246.

³⁵ Matthew 16:16.

Developments of the Medieval Church

After the tenth century, the Church grew significantly in the secular world. No longer threatened by tribes migrating from Germanic regions but instead accepted by them, the Catholic faith spread significantly in scale and stature. This growth nevertheless faced significant challenges left over from the “dark ages.” Islam spread quickly and threatened to capture much of the Christian West. Further, internal strife was troubling ecclesiologists as the East moved swiftly into schism. Two facets needed to be addressed anew, namely, the Church as temporal and the Church as mystical. For nearly five hundred years, this doctrine would develop through the teaching authority of popes and councils. Three councils, Lateran IV (1215), Vienne (1311-1312), and Florence (1438-1445), address these issues most directly. Likewise, two popes, Boniface VIII (1294-1303) and Pius IV (1559-1565), speak of this ecclesiology authoritatively.

The twelfth ecumenical council was held in the thirteenth century at Rome’s Lateran Palace to suppress the heresies of Joachim, the Albigensians, and the Waldensians. Further, the council fathers wished to reconcile with the East, who had only recently mutually anathemized Rome. Most significantly for the purpose here, Lateran IV affirms what Cyprian had claimed in the third century, “one indeed is the universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is saved.”³⁶ To revisit the image of the Church as the Body of Christ, it is necessary to describe the authority entrusted to the apostles and how it is actualized throughout history.

The threefold nature of the Church expressed in the offices of priest, prophet, and king is conferred by Christ himself to all the baptized. These were the three offices united

³⁶ Cyprian, Ep. 73, n. 21. DH 430.

and fulfilled in the Second Person of the Trinity, the three offices the Second Vatican Council later emphasizes in the Constitution on the Church.³⁷ In sanctification, or the priestly office, the Church is guided toward its final end, that is, eternity. Governance, or the office of king, guards the keys of the house of David, which protects the Church as she participates in sanctification.³⁸ Prophecy, with which Christ fulfills the type given by the Old Testament writers, holds the two other offices together. It is the unifying element, the place in which sanctification and governance may occur.³⁹ Just as the prophets of the Old Testament called God's chosen people on His behalf, so too does the present office of prophecy give authoritative witness to God's revelation in Christ.

The structure of the Church follows the type ordained by Revelation, in both the Old and New Testaments. As such, the eternal truths of revelation are preserved, unstained, in the faithful developments of the Church's teaching authority. In other words, Christ speaks to the community by those commissioned to speak in his name, clarifying the one faith that is professed. The unity of the Church is secured by professing the same body of revealed truth.⁴⁰ Indeed, only the Catholic Church has access to Christ's full Revelation through the unstained teachings of the magisterium.⁴¹ The Church of Christ was entrusted to the headship of the apostles, preserved through this kind of immutable

³⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 12,13,21. See Gerald O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (New York: Oxford University, 2010), 206-34; Avery Dulles, *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 1-2; Gérard Philips, "History of the Constitution [LG]," trans. Kevin Smyth, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder, 1967), 1:105- 107; Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1983), 35-52.

³⁸ Matthew 16:18; Isaiah 22.

³⁹ Robert Sokolowski, *Christian Faith & Human Understanding* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 117.

⁴⁰ Sokolowski, *Christian Faith & Human Understanding*, 3.

⁴¹ Zephyrinus, *Epistle to the Corinthians*. DH 105.

authority, which can only be found in the Catholic Church.⁴² Therefore, the Church of Christ and the Catholic Church must be one and the same.

In further defining the reality of authority entrusted to the Church of Christ, Pope Boniface VIII in his bull *Unam Sanctam* declares that it is necessary for salvation to be subject to the Roman pontiff.⁴³ Though its context was to counter King Phillip of France politically, the papal document nevertheless speaks important truths theologically as well, especially in terms of identity and authority. Of the former, he proclaims, quoting Song of Songs, “*One is my dove, my perfect one. She is the only one, the chosen of her who bore her,*” and she represents one sole mystical body whose Head is Christ and the head of Christ is God. In her then is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”⁴⁴ The Church, then, reflects the perfect unity of the Godhead here on earth. In a similar way, she represents the authority of our Redeemer, or more precisely, directs the people of God to the fullness of truth through the guidance of the living tradition.

Likewise, using language that alludes to a spousal relationship, the Council of Vienne (1311-1312) speaks most profoundly about oneness as unity with Christ, the Church’s bridegroom. Just as Eve was formed from the side of her spouse, Adam, thereby joining into a kind of marriage with him, so too was the Church formed from the side of Christ when his side was pierced at his crucifixion.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most cogent formulation of the dogma of identity comes from the great fifteenth-century ecumenical council in Florence:

⁴² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, bk. 3, chap. 3, *TSEE*, 2:150; Tertullian, *The Prescription of Heretics*, Chap. 21, *TSEE*, II, 150.

⁴³ “Porro subesse Romano Pontifici omni humanae creaturae declaramus, dicimus, definimus, et pronunciamus omnino esse de necessitate salutis.” Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*, 9. DH 870-875.

⁴⁴ Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam* 1.

⁴⁵ Clement V, *Fidei catholicae*. DH 901.

[The Church] firmly believes, professes, and proclaims that those not living within the Catholic Church... cannot become participants in eternal life... unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock; and that the unity of the ecclesiastical body is so strong that only to those remaining in it are the sacraments of the Church of benefit for salvation... and that no one, whatever almsgiving he has practiced, even if he has shed blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless he has remained in the bosom of the Catholic Church.⁴⁶

In short, this definitive declaration of revealed truth says nothing new. The council fathers are simply retelling the timeless teaching of Christ; they only conclude that what was true in the first century is still true in the fifteenth. There are a couple key emphases made by Florence that bear significant weight for discussing the *subsistit in* dilemma; namely, (1) the true Church, given to the apostles by Christ, is named explicitly as the Catholic Church; (2) there is nothing outside the one true Church that could even come close to its salvific power. These emphases are of great import, particularly because Florence is the last applicable council before the Reformation.⁴⁷

When the Reformation rocked the Church in the following century, stability was to be sought through a council at Trent (1545-1563). It was through this council that Pius IV would deliver his bull *Iniunctum nobis* as a means of clarifying the true faith of the Church of Christ. This Church, the council clarifies, is the “holy Catholic and apostolic Roman Church...the mother and teacher of all churches.”⁴⁸ It is the Catholic Church that is fully identical with the Church of Christ.

⁴⁶ “Firmiter credit, profitetur et praedicat, “nollos extra catholicam Ecclesiam existentes... aeternae vitae fieri posse participes... nisi ante finem vitae eidem fuerint aggregati, tantumque valere ecclesiastici corporis unitatem, ut solem in ea manentibus ad salutem ecclesiastica sacramenta proficiant... “Neminemque, quantascumque eleemosynus fecerit, etsi pro Christi nomine sanguinem effuderit, posse salvi, nisi in catholicae Ecclesiae gremio et unitate permanserit.” Council of Florence, *Cantata Domino*. DH 1333.

⁴⁷ Lateran Council V is excluded here, not to exclude it from the rank of Ecumenical Councils, but simply to emphasize Florence's influence in this field. Whereas Lateran V was convoked to address the Church's position against an array of various socio-economic concerns, Florence was focused more on ecclesiology, i.e., the Church as such.

⁴⁸ Pius IV, *Iniunctum Nobis*. DH 1868.

Identity in the Long Nineteenth Century

The groundwork of the Church's identity was laid at her very conception, and developed in the first centuries after Christ. Still, the divisions and fragmentations of the Church following the Reformation and Enlightenment produced brand new ecclesiological problems, and the attempts at reconciliation and healing often sowed more confusion and separation. Whereas salvation was the focus of theological debate in the early Church, the question of identity consumed the later centuries: which "church" is still a "church." Every ecclesiological movement leading to the Second Vatican Council was somehow aimed at solving this issue of the distinctiveness of ecclesial communities and disunity among Christians. For the Catholic Church, venturing into this discourse often meant reaffirming its identity as the Church of Christ. The following history is proof that the Church prior to Vatican II in no way warranted or signaled a change in teaching. On the contrary, the movements leading to Vatican II were simply a new strategy in affirming the same truths.

The immediate pretext for the council typically begins with the Council of Trent (1545-1563), followed by the French Revolution and Vatican I, and continues until the end of the pontificate of Pius XII (1958).⁴⁹ It was these formative years in which people threw off the "shackles" of religion and monarchy. This new perception of the human

⁴⁹ For more on "the long nineteenth century," see Guiseppe Alberigo, "From the Council of Trent to Tridentinism", in Raymond F. Bulman and Fredrick J. Parrella, *From Trent to Vatican II: Historical and Theological Investigations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 19-39; John O'Malley, "Trent and Vatican II: Two Styles of the Church," *From Trent to Vatican II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 301-321; Jared Wicks, S.J., "New Light on Vatican II," *Catholic Historical Review* 92 (2006): 609-628; Stephen Schlosser, "Against Forgetting: Memory, History, Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 275-319.

condition proved tumultuous for the Church. Under Napoleon, the French armies bore down on Italy and occupied the Papal States, forcing Pope Pius VI to flee. Moreover, an ideological war was sparked. Modernity issued a new kind of liberalism and individualism. Although Pius VII would return to Rome, the landscape was definitively changed, and the authority of the papacy seemed compromised by revolution both politically and philosophically. This kind of political and ideological unrest would serve as the backdrop for the Church's most definitive moment before Vatican II.

For many, the most important moment that preceded the Second Vatican Council was Vatican I (1869-1870), because its teachings entered most directly into the debates of the council fathers.⁵⁰ Within this pretext it is difficult not to see the previously mentioned antagonist, namely, modernism, which helped to reignite old ideologies against the faith, like pantheism, naturalism, and absolute rationalism.⁵¹ Naturally, then, the First Vatican Council reaffirmed the authority of the Catholic Church, and defended the Church as the true institution that Christ willed to establish on earth.

This defense of Christ's Church was precisely the emphasis of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on the unity of the Church, *Satis Cognitum*, released the same year of Vatican I's first session. Using the evidence of scripture and tradition, he argues the unicity of Christ's Church, that it was His express will to found *the* Church, a visible and hierarchically structured body of believers on earth. Leo XIII also reaffirms total assent and indefectibility, that the Church has always regarded as outside her communion

⁵⁰ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?*, 53-93; de Mattei, *The Second Vatican Council: An Unwritten Story*, 1-71; H. Daniel-Rops, *The Second Vatican Council: The Story Behind the Ecumenical Council of Pope John XXIII*, trans. Alastair Guinan, (New York: Hawthorn Publishers, 1962), 45-61. See also H. Daniel-Rops, *Our Brothers in Christ*, trans. J.M. Orphen and John Warrington, ed. A. Cox and J. Hetherington (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1967), 390-394.

⁵¹ For a detailed explication of modernism, see de Mattei, *The Second Vatican Council: An Unwritten Story*, 9-15.

“whoever would recede in the least degree from any point of doctrine proposed by her authoritative Magisterium.”⁵² In defending the supreme authority of the Petrine office, the Holy Father appeals to the authority of Christ Himself. It is Jesus who is at work in the sacraments, who chose the ministers He wished to work through. The successors of the apostles, most especially the successor of Peter, are a direct connection to the one head and shepherd. The bishops of the Church, in union with the Pope offer assurance that the teaching of the Church will be preserved from error or rupture. In other words, the Church of Christ, which is Catholic, is always one by her very nature.

Among tensions between civil and ecclesial institutions, new hermeneutics for understanding Tradition nonetheless arose from attempts to ground all theology in some historical approach. The next several papacies following Vatican I would deal directly with these new movements and methods that aimed principally to decentralize doctrine, making it subjective and individualistic. Alfred Loisy, a radical in the way of biblical studies and proponent of these new subjectivist principles, brandished his historical-critical writing against the divinity of Christ, the hierarchy, and the sacraments, summarizing his hermeneutic thus:

[I] paved the way, discreetly yet definitely, for an essential reform in biblical exegesis, in the whole of theology, and even in Catholicism generally... Historically speaking, I did not admit that Christ had founded the Church and the sacraments; I professed that the dogmas had developed gradually and that they were not unchangeable; I said the same thing about ecclesiastical authority, which I made into a ministry of human education.⁵³

⁵² Pope Leo XIII, *Satis Cognitum*, 9. DH 3300-3310.

⁵³ Alfred Loisy, *My Duel with the Vatican: The Autobiography of a Catholic Modernist*, trans. Richard Wilson Boynton (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1924), 228; *L'Evangile et l'Eglise* (1902) was listed with four other works by Loisy on the Index of Forbidden Books.

Loisy was promptly excommunicated for attempting to make the whole of Christianity a mere human endeavor. Indeed, these thinkers seldom fell short of entirely separating theology from tradition.⁵⁴ The result bore a kind of indifferentism toward the identity of the Church that minimalized its supernatural reality. In response to this dispiritedness, the tendency of the teaching authority of the Church was to remain resolute in its authority, emphasizing the teaching of the recent councils, like Trent and Vatican I.⁵⁵

In some way or another, each remaining movement of the long nineteenth century was directed at one aim, namely, the reconciliation of various Christian communities, but few succeeded in distancing themselves from those movements which created friction within the Church. For the liturgical movement, this attempt at reconciliation meant simplifying liturgy and renovating churches. In the biblical movement, scholars hoped to put greater emphasis on Scripture than on Tradition. This ecumenical tendency, though noble in many respects, borrowed many of its novelties from non-Catholic traditions, and thus rarely prospered in much else than a kind of pluralism between denominations.⁵⁶ It was only a matter of time, then, before the Holy See would prohibit participation in these kinds of gatherings, and so it did in 1919.⁵⁷ The prohibition would be strengthened and reaffirmed by Pius XI, who said, “The Catholic Church is alone in keeping true worship. This is the fount of truth, this the house of faith, this the temple of God: if any man enter

⁵⁴ Santo Schiffrini, in *Divinitas scripturarum adversus odierna novitates asserta et vindicata* (1905), 117, 118.

⁵⁵ See Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*. DH 3281, 3293.

⁵⁶ For more on the history and effect of ecumenism on the Catholic Church, see R. Rouse and S.C. Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* (Philadelphia, 1954), 1-27; A. Bea, *The Unity of Christians*, ed. B. Leeming (New York, 1963), 19-38.

⁵⁷ James M. Oliver, *Ecumenical Assocations: Their Canonical Status with Particular Reference to the United States of America* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1999), 31.

not here, or if any man go forth from it, he is a stranger to the hope of life and salvation.”⁵⁸

Pius XI fought against a kind of unity that only sought agreement in a few basic matters of belief, while agreeing to disagree on others. This erroneous perception of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, stemmed from the modernist error that all religions are just varying, fallible forms of a religious impulse.

Not only are those who hold this opinion in error and deceived, but also in distorting the idea of true religion they reject it, and little by little, turn aside to naturalism and atheism, as it is called; from which it clearly follows that one who supports those who hold these theories and attempt to realize them, is altogether abandoning the divinely revealed religion.⁵⁹

There is one, visible, and apparent Church with which other faiths must be unified. Essential truths matter; religion is not simply a man-made construct. A vivid boundary was set by the Holy Father to protect the Deposit of Faith from a perception of the Church that seemed distant from any sense of the sacred. To keep the truths of the faith intact, Pius highlighted the divisions between Christian denominations.

Though a barrier was developed to protect Tradition, the immediate precedent of the Second Vatican Council was one that hoped to find ways to strengthen ties between Catholicism and the rest of the world. The first semblance of ecumenism finding a sustainable place in the Catholic Church happened with a series of articles from Parisian publisher, du Cerf. Noted theologians like Congar, Couturier, Barth, and Chardin supported this publication, called “Unam Sanctam.” The question to which the publication sought answers was the very question of identity later addressed in *Lumen gentium*. Whether or not these scholars claimed for themselves heterodox propositions,

⁵⁸ Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos*, 11.

⁵⁹ Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos*, 2.

crisis nevertheless arose from the spread of this new school of ecumenism. The Church was, arguably for the first time, exposed more veraciously to a pivotal question, that is, are dissidents of the one true Church saved *because of* or *in spite of* their denominations?

Ultimately, the Catholic notion of unity would be guided by the teaching of Pius XII, who penned several significant pieces on the identity of the Church of Christ. He cites Sacred Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, as has been done above, in noting that the repeated teaching regarding the identity of the Church of Christ is in favor of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. In other words, identity is proved through continuity. The encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*, is dedicated to highlighting this connection in elucidation of the relation between Christ and his Body, the Church, largely to convey an understanding of the authority of the hierarchical Church as an extension of Christ's own headship, and in effect to secure the importance of unity in the body of believers:

For there are some who neglect the fact that the Apostle Paul has used metaphorical language in speaking of this doctrine, and failing to distinguish as they should the precise and proper meaning of the terms the physical body, the social body, and the Mystical Body, arrive at a distorted idea of unity.⁶⁰

The identities of the Church of Christ and the Mystical Body are one and the same. This reality is distinct from a physical or social body that is subject to error. In *Humani Generis*, Pius further clarifies this understanding of the faith against heterodox movements:

Some say they are not bound by the doctrine, explained in Our Encyclical Letter of a few years ago, and based on the Sources of Revelation, which teaches that the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 86. http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html.

⁶¹ Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, 27. http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html.

The teaching of the Supreme Pontiff could not be more clear. The Church of Christ is identical with the Catholic Church.

Finally, in *Orientalis Ecclesiae*, the Holy Father reiterates that there is but one way to unity among all Christians: returning to the one, true, visible Church, i.e., the Catholic Church.⁶² By a definitive declaration, the Roman Pontiff leaves little room for further concession or disunity. Though the discord between modernity and the Church served as pretext for the Second Vatican Council, the teaching that came from the long nineteenth century ultimately proved that the fullness of identity resides with the Catholic Church.

The Catholic ecumenical movement speaks volumes of the development of Christian doctrine and of what it means to subsist. While the Church ought to work for unity, it ought not be a compromising unity: one that claims that the identity of the Church of Christ is somehow broken from the Catholic Church. True, some visible elements of the faith would change most dramatically because of this era, perhaps more than they have for hundreds of years. Accidental change has no effect on essential truth; the deposit of faith and how it is interpreted. Though accidental changes may occur, the substance of the one, true Church is preserved. No magisterial teaching prior to the Second Vatican Council distinguished the Church of Christ and the Catholic Church.

⁶² See Pius XII, *Orientalis Ecclesiae*, 28; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, translated by Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 49-51.

Chapter 3

Subsistit in at Vatican II

Although the 21st ecumenical council seemed to change so much about the faith, it was clear from the start that its intent was to preserve, whole and entire, the identity of the Church of Christ. The Second Vatican Council was called in January of 1959 by John XXIII (1958-1963), beginning a period of preparation that would last longer than the gathering itself.⁶³ It was a massive council from the outset. Whereas the First Vatican Council only had seven hundred and thirty-seven participants, over three thousand gathered in Rome for its successor. Of those present, one hundred fifteen were non-clergy observers, and more than half of that audience was not Catholic. This was a dramatic shift from previous councils largely cut off from the outside world, consisting primarily of theologians and clergy. Just by virtue of the assembly, the question of identity as discontinuous had begun to emerge. On October 11, 1962, the Holy Father would open Vatican II with a speech in St. Peter's Basilica, and its four periods would continue until December 1965.⁶⁴ It is not insignificant that the successor of Peter noted in this address

⁶³ This period produced several times the amount of documents that the Council would officially promulgate. Over ninety percent of these preparatory schemata would not even be considered; Alberigo and Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, I:501.

⁶⁴ Floyd Anderson, ed., *Council Daybook, Vatican II: Sessions 1-4* (Washington D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965-1966), 1:25-29; Alberigo and Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, I:501.

that the greatest concern of the council was “that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively defended and presented.”⁶⁵

The initial draft of *Lumen Gentium*, titled *Schema constitutionis dogmaticae de Ecclesia*, was distributed to the council fathers in 1962 before the first period, along with seven other schemas dealing with issues ranging from revelation to liturgy.⁶⁶ John XXIII would establish a committee to review these drafts of conciliar documents by the end of the first period. It was then, with the text being presented as a dogmatic constitution, that the draft was rejected and essentially rewritten. Then, in the fall of 1963, a second draft of *Lumen gentium* was offered and voted on the day after its introduction. Of the 2301 voters, 2231 accepted the document, though certain points, like a chapter on Mary, had yet to be developed. Both the third and fourth drafts came about between the second and third sessions, though neither underwent significant change. On the twenty-first of November, 1964, the text was finally approved with the following subdivisions:

- I.) The Mystery of the Church
- II.) The People of God
- III.) The Church is Hierarchical
- IV.) The Laity
- V.) The Universal Call to Holiness
- VI.) Religious
- VII.) The Pilgrim Church
- VIII.) Our Lady

One thing was clear in the debate at the council, especially thanks to the Holy Father’s opening remarks: previous doctrine must be upheld.

⁶⁵ John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, 11, <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Christian D. Washburn, “The Theological Priority of *Lumen Gentium* and *Dei Verbum* for the Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council”, *The Thomist* 78 (2014): 107-134.

Subsistit in in Lumen gentium

Essential doctrine does not change, though the Church is always striving to better understand the truths entrusted to her by Christ. And so, for roughly one hundred and fifty years before the council, this deepening awareness of development became more prevalent among the faithful, especially regarding the nature and universal mission of the Church. The Second Vatican Council in general, and the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in specific, further stimulated the enrichment of this accumulating thought. This development would later be more broadly directed in the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

The significance of *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio* unfortunately carries with it a certain misunderstanding, most importantly regarding the phrase *subsistit in*. For this central paragraph of the Vatican Council to prove continuity, certain things must be evident in the explanation of this historical period. First, *Lumen Gentium* and its terms must be consistent with previous Church teaching. Secondly, *Lumen Gentium* and its terms must be consistent with the *Decree on Ecumenism*. Both consistencies will be proved if the Church's full identity is preserved.

The answer to the first qualification for continuity ought to be plain in *Lumen Gentium* itself. Within the footnotes alone, the authors cite scripture forty times, previous councils twenty-nine times, various popes fifty-eight times, and fathers of the Church sixty-four times. Within the text, just in the first eight articles, Sacred Scripture is quoted nearly one hundred times. This faithfulness to tradition was the framework, indeed, the impetus for the final key change of the *subsistit* phrase in the first draft, which was called *Aeternus Unigeniti*.

The text begins, both in the first schema and in the final draft, with a summation of the mystery of the Church in the context of the history of salvation. Beginning with the *telos* of the Church's existence, i.e., the glory of God and the salvation of souls, the council fathers explain the Catholic life as firmly rooted in the Old Covenant, gathered together by God for a kind of intimacy with Jesus Christ. This closeness is only accomplished through covenant, and, although the appearance of the community of believers is constantly transforming, its foundation is the holy men and women of Scripture, and its true hope is Christ, in whom the Church remains.⁶⁷

The purpose of *Lumen gentium* is the unfolding of the Church's inner nature and universal mission, which is accomplished by "following faithfully the teaching of previous councils."⁶⁸ Because of this, it is hard to imagine any other reading than indefectibility from these opening verses. The identity of the Church of Christ is described, on the surface, by her various parts. The roles of the laity, priests and bishops, religious, and even married persons are all described at length, followed by the eschatological nature of the sum, and finally, an entire chapter on Mary.

At first, no confusion could have arisen from the text; no one could have presumed that the Mystical Body is to be distinguished from the Church founded by Christ. Indeed, the fact of the Church's identity is stated even more plainly in the first chapter of the draft when it states that the Church is the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁹ It would seem, then, that the reason for abandoning this version of the constitution was this singular clause that affirms so clearly the full identity of the Church founded by Jesus

⁶⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 6.

⁶⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

⁶⁹ Hubert Jedin, *History of the Church: The Church in the Modern Age* (London: Burns & Oates, 1981), 125-135.

Christ with the Roman Catholic Church. This interpretation is hard to believe when looking at the alternative text, provided by Gerard Philips, which is assuredly different in methodology and tone, but which keeps the issue of identity the same.⁷⁰ The completed draft of Philips, which became the original working document, was presented to all on September 29, 1963, and emended in October of the same year.⁷¹ The following month, yet another draft was presented to the theological commission.

Original draft (February 1963): “Therefore, this Church, true Mother and Teacher of all, constituted and ordered as a society in this world, *is (est)* the Catholic Church, led by the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops in communion with him, although outside her total structure many elements of sanctification can be found, which, as things proper to the Church of Christ, impel towards Catholic unity.”

Emended draft (November 1963): “This Church constituted and ordered as a society in this world, *is present in (adest in)* the Catholic Church governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him, although outside of its structure many elements of sanctification are found, which as gifts proper to the Church of Christ, impel towards Catholic unity.”⁷²

Philips' explanation for the change from *est* to *adest in* was simple, that is, to fit more properly with the “although” clause.⁷³ Though the change admittedly appears to soften the issue of identity, even the biggest critics who desired to keep “*est*”, including Bea, Lienart, and Konig, did not criticize the February draft on this point.⁷⁴ It was discussion on the latter phrasing, “*adest in*,” not “*est*” which led to the final revision, namely, “*subsistit in*.”

⁷⁰ As Christopher Malloy notes in his article, “*Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?*,” no majority existed among the 150 fathers involved in the schema's production which argued that full identification was erroneous. See Jared Wicks, S.J., “Still more Light on Vatican Council II,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 98, 3, (2012): 476-502.

⁷¹ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?*, 173-189.

⁷² Malloy, “*Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity*,” 5. Karl Becker, “The Church and Vatican II's '*Subsistit in*' Terminology,” *L'Osservatore Romano* (weekly English edition), 14 December 2005, reprinted in *Origins* 35.31 (19 January 2006), 514-522.

⁷³ Becker, “The Church and Vatican II's '*Subsistit in*' Terminology,” 517B.

⁷⁴ Malloy “*Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?*,” 5; see Sullivan, “Response”, 397f.

Three possible interpretations of the phrase *subsist in* include, “to be realized in”, “to subsist ontologically” (as in the sense of the scholastics), or “to remain, to be perpetuated in.”⁷⁵ Nobody at the Council argued for the first interpretation. It is especially evident that no one interpreted the phrase as “to be realized in,” as evident in discussion on ecumenism and religious liberty, which is explored below. If the Church of Christ is realized for what it is, a complex reality, fully spiritual and visible, then there can be no difference between *est* and *subsistit in*.

As for the scholastic sense, many suggest the scholastics knew *subsistere*, not *subsistit in*, and the former was to indicate that something existed in itself, not in another.⁷⁶ This interpretation would mean “the Church of Christ exists in itself in the Catholic Church,” thus contradicting the sense that the two are one and the same.

Ratzinger later clarifies the influence of the term: “*Subsisting* is a special case of *being*. It is being in the form of a subject standing on its own. This is the issue here... This can occur only once, and the notion that *subsistit* could be multiplied misses precisely what was intended.”⁷⁷ Clearly, this affirms the second meaning. Sebastian Tromp, as a classical Latinist, would have affirmed this meaning as well, that all the means of salvation instituted by Christ are found forever in the Catholic Church. In other words, the Council wanted to express the singularity of the Catholic Church, not its multiplicity; its full identity, not partial presence.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Becker, “An Examination of *Subsistit In*: A profound theological perspective”, <https://www.ewtn.com/library/Theology/subsistitin.htm>

⁷⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 29, 2c.

⁷⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*” in R. Fisichella (ed.), *II Concilio Vaticano II: Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo* (Cinisello B. 2000), 79.

⁷⁸ Christian D. Washburn, “The Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, and *Subsistit in*,” *The Josephinum Journal of Theology* 22 (2015): 145-175.

The adaptation of *Lumen Gentium* 8 was simply to clarify the Church's timeless teaching that there is fullness to her identity. No one at the council contested this point specifically; most were more concerned with writing Mary into a schema on the Church, or the controversial claim of collegiality. A tape obtained from the final draft meeting does reveal a discomfort with the emended text and a forceful reminder by Sebastian Tromp to include an expression of exclusivity. Since this was the general sentiment regardless, the article which read *adest in* was updated. It was from this meeting that the final words, *subsistit in*, were derived.

On November 21, 1964, the council fathers adopted the dogmatic constitution, *Lumen gentium*, with 2,151 votes against five.⁷⁹ The influence of Pius XII's work mentioned above is evident in the text. The same presumption is made by Paul VI in expressing the relation of the Church of Christ and the Catholic Church, that is, that the two are one and the same thing. The constitution reads,

“This Church, constituted and ordered as a society in this world, *subsists in* the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him, although outside of its structure, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found, which as gifts proper to the Church of Christ, impel towards Catholic unity.”⁸⁰

The text in question officially changed a total of three times, from *est* to *adest* to *subsistit in*. It is this middle phrase that ought to dictate a complete understanding of what happened in the document's promulgation. That the Church of Christ ‘is present in’ the Catholic Church does not preserve full identity or continuity. To subsist, on the other

⁷⁹ Alberigo and Komonchak, *The History of Vatican II*, 4:40.

⁸⁰ “Haec Ecclesia, in hoc mundo ut societas constituta et ordinata, subsistit in Ecclesia catholica, a successore Petri et Episcopis in eius communione gubernata, licet extra eius compaginem elementa plura sanctificationis et veritatis inveniuntur, quae ut dona Ecclesiae Christi propria ad unitatem catholicam impellunt.” *Lumen Gentium*, 8. DH 4118.

hand, affirms the centuries-old teaching that the council fathers wished to affirm. This understanding is strengthened and affirmed at the very same session of the council, when those present begin the conversation of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism.

Identity in Unitatis Redintegratio

The November session of 1964 accomplished more than the aforementioned promulgation of *Lumen Gentium*. At the same time the fathers were deliberating the schema on the Church, another decree was being prepared on the subject of ecumenism, alongside another text on Eastern Churches. The former decree, which consisted of twenty-four paragraphs, had been underway since the prior session, from November 18 to December 2, 1963. On November 21, the fathers were asked to vote on the first three chapters so as to provide the foundation for further discussion. While it was determined to exclude the subject of religious liberty and Judaism, the text nevertheless went on with a vote of 1970 to 86. It was reintroduced in the third session, when the fathers voted once more on November 20, 1964. Paul VI introduced nineteen minor changes before the final vote on the very next day. The Decree on Ecumenism was officially promulgated on November 21, 1964, with a vote of 2,137 to 11.⁸¹

While many of the documents of the Second Vatican Council treat the matter of those outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church, none have so intimate a connection as this text, *Unitatis redintegratio*, which was accepted by the fathers on the

⁸¹ Alberigo and Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, 3:257-339; Alberigo and Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, 4:406-416; de Mattei, *The Second Vatican Council: An Unwritten Story*, 421.

exact same day. This shared history is evident especially in the end of the first chapter, which mirrors exactly what is said in *Lumen gentium* 8. The principles are essentially those of *Lumen gentium*: that the Catholic Church has been, is now, and forever will be the one, true Church of Christ. The debate over this central issue for the council was much more heated, as the fathers struggled to unpack the concrete effects of ecumenism on the Catholic faith.⁸² Specifically, what does it mean that “elements of sanctification” may be found outside the visible confines of the Church?⁸³ Though *Lumen Gentium* begins to answer the question, it is ultimately the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* that most affects the implementation of the phrase. The vision of *Unitatis Redintegratio* is therefore essential to understanding the encompassing vision of identity and continuity that *subsistit in* proves.

Despite a clear claim to full identity of the Catholic Church in the final text of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, there were numerous bishops who contested the schema for this decree, which was presented in a revised form of the second session schema by Archbishop Joseph Martin, a member of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini was among many who submitted that the term “ecumenism” as used in the text was “out of harmony with the authentic meaning of ‘ecumenical’ as applied to a council of the Church.”⁸⁴ Others took issue with the inclusion of Jews and

⁸² At the time of the council, ecumenism was fairly new to the Christian world, and to Catholic theology in particular. The first “ecumenical conferences” that concerned the Church grew out of some rebellion surrounding the First Vatican Council; they were held in Bonn in 1874 & 1875. The formal acceptance has been accredited to particular pontificates, but was not contextualized until Vatican Council the Second. See John McManners, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 371-6.

⁸³ *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

⁸⁴ Michael Novak, *The Open Church* (St. Louis, MO: Transaction Publishers, 1964), 268.

Oriental Churches and religious liberty, since the roots of these problems differ in both kind and degree from ecumenism.

Another issue arose from the pluralistic influence of the text. To suggest that Catholicism is just one religion among many, the fathers noted, is misleading and dangerous for the faithful. That the laity might suppose a kind of complacency in uncertainty would do serious harm in the Church around the world. To say that Catholicism ought to be ecumenical is a complex claim. As one father noted, to speak in this way of “Catholic ecumenism” is a little redundant, “like speaking of universal universalism.”⁸⁵ The object of being ecumenical in the Church of Christ is to acknowledge and actualize possibilities to reconnect with those who have been separated from the fullness of truth.⁸⁶ In all, four particular hazards were cautioned against on the council floor, including religious indifferentism, laicism, doctrinal relativism, and dilettantistic pessimism.⁸⁷

Pericle Felici (1911-1982) responded to these hazards on behalf of the Secretariat on November 10, 1964. Despite a number of bishops objecting to the text of the decree, the secretary clarifies with precision: It is only the Catholic Church that is the true Church of Christ.⁸⁸ Though the initial draft may have been ambiguous in its language, no bishop would have believed anything other than the continuous teaching of the Church. Furthermore, the secretary general himself presented the response as if exclusive identity

⁸⁵ Novak, *The Open Church*, 289.

⁸⁶ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1-4.

⁸⁷ Novak, *The Open Church*, 276.

⁸⁸ “Postea clare affirmatur, solam Ecclesiam catholicam esse veram Ecclesiam Christi.”; “In toto textu sufficienter effertur, quod postulator.”; “Ex toto textu clare apparet identificationem Ecclesiae Christi cum Ecclesia Catholica, quamvis ut oportet, efferantur elementa ecclesialia aliarum communitatem.”; “Textus supponit doctrinam in constitutione ‘De Ecclesia’ expositam.” See Karl Becker, “An Examination of *Subsistit in*: A Profound Theological Perspective,” <https://www.ewtn.com/library/Theology/subsistitin.htm>.

was an established fact, even a month after *subsistit in* was inserted by the doctrinal commission. *Unitatis Redintegratio* was thus promulgated with a clear understanding of *Lumen Gentium*.⁸⁹

By the time the fathers began working on the revised text of *Unitatis Redintegratio* in the third session, these issues had largely been addressed. It was agreed, first of all, that “ecumenism” and “religious liberty” were two very different issues. It was also affirmed that those outside the Church must return to full unity with her. Ernesto Cardinal Ruffini (1888-1968) would defend this affirmation in the second session. His argument included five points that were upheld by the council: (1) Christ founded only one Church, the Roman Catholic Church; (2) The Church as such may not be accused of faults, but only its members; (3) Leaving because of said members is itself a sin; (4) The one Church earnestly desires the return of non-Catholic Christians; (5) Dialogue with non-Catholics must be done in accord with the guidelines the Holy Spirit dictates through the Church.⁹⁰

Once it was clearly reiterated that there were no objections in terms of full identity, the bishops who were present focused chiefly on describing how elements of salvation are concretely present in other Christian communities. This was the real point of controversy on the council floor. Perhaps more relevantly, how do those elements affect the people in communities that have been separated from Rome for hundreds of years? Have any elements of the true Church been retained by those who have left the fold? If so, how?

⁸⁹ Washburn, “The Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, and *Subsistit in*,” 24.

⁹⁰ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?*, 197.

Most obviously, the *elementa* describe a concrete possibility: that non-Catholics can achieve salvation. As one bishop at the council noted, “for the solution of doctrinal questions, truth and charity must not suffer, but in the face of the ineffable mysteries of faith intellectual humility is also needed.”⁹¹ It is not possible to understand perfectly the riches of revelation. It is possible to submit to the mercy of God in attempting to understand how some are saved. At the same time, though, the council fathers affirm the reality of identity by reiterating to whom the instruments of salvation belong. This is simultaneously the most conservative and progressive truth taught by *Unitatis Redintegratio*. On the one hand, the fathers teach that some communions are rightly called churches, as they retain some common faith with the Church of Christ.⁹² On the other hand, this common faith is strictly due to the retention of valid orders and true celebration of the Eucharist, as is true of the Orthodox community.⁹³

The implications of such an understanding are extraordinary. While full communion with the true Church, the “seamless robe” as it were, has been ruptured by schism, sacramental grace may be preserved. This means that some unity in the true Church of Christ has been left untouched by division, whether in ordination, as in the aforementioned communities, or in baptism, as in many Protestant denominations. Salvation is still accessible by ordinary means in an extraordinary way. While cut off from the true Church, many still have access to her grace. The approachability of grace reveals the merciful truths that continuity and full identity preserve. While God has

⁹¹ Novak, *The Open Church*, 294.

⁹² *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.

⁹³ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 13.

bound salvation to the sacraments, He himself is not bound by the sacraments.⁹⁴ In other words, God, in His mercy, desires that all should be saved.

So if the use of the term “Church” for non-Catholic Christian communities does not divorce the identity of the Church of Christ from the Catholic Church, it must imply an honorific or sociological sense. The fundamental claim toward which all others must turn regarding ecumenism is that of the unicity of the Church of Christ, i.e., the Catholic Church, to not overlook yet another central concern: “non-Catholic particular churches are true Churches on account of what is Catholic in them.”⁹⁵ To be ecumenical is to attempt to restore the relationship of all ecclesial communities with the Catholic Church.

Ultimately, the fathers managed to preserve the previous tradition of what it means to subsist, while developing how soteriological realities could be possible in the *elementa* present outside the Church’s visible structure. Between the final drafts of *Lumen gentium* and *Unitatis redintegratio*, it cannot be supposed that these elements belong to other denominations in a strict sense, let alone to other religions. They belong to Christ, whose Church is properly and fully Catholic.

The exclusivity of salvific power is plain in both documents; the only gate to the fullness of truth is Christ, “without whom we can do nothing.”⁹⁶ Citing pre-conciliar magisterium, *Unitatis Redintegratio* proceeds to further define the one, true Church.⁹⁷ It is Christ, the doorway to truth, who establishes the visible structure that is the community of faith; this community is the same sole society in which sacraments are made available,

⁹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1257.

⁹⁵ Fernando Ocariz, “Forty Years After the Close of the Vatican Council II: Unity, Subsistence of the Church,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, December, 2005, 21:9.

⁹⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 6; Jn. 10:1-10; 15:1-5.

⁹⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3. DH 4188, 4189

connecting believers in a “hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified.”⁹⁸ This Church is identical to the reality of the spiritual community of the faithful, and this one inseparable instrument of salvation is governed by the shepherds whose authority was constituted by God, whose resurrected Son commissioned Peter and the other apostles to propagate, guard, and maintain the faith.⁹⁹

It is again made plain in the Decree on Ecumenism that “significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church,” though they nevertheless belong to the Church of Christ.¹⁰⁰ Again the question of identity presents itself. How can the Church of Christ be one with the Catholic Church if there are those outside of its visible confines who can still be saved? The question of identity, in this instance, relies heavily on solving the problem of a latitudinarian Church, as condemned by Pius IX in his *Syllabus*.¹⁰¹ It is necessary to accept the divine origin and authority of the Church, not only certain elements, to accept fully her identity. Doctrine, ecclesial structure, and liturgical practice, while each have accidental qualities about them, nonetheless remain essential elements of the Church of Christ and are therefore essential in rediscovering true unity with Protestant traditions.

This mystery of unity is described in the decree as having derived its efficacy from “the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church.” Still, the identity of the Church of Christ is securely described as Catholic:

⁹⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 7.

⁹⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 8; John 21:17; Matthew 28:18; 1 Timothy 3:15.

¹⁰⁰ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Pius IX, *Syllabus*. DH 2918. Whereas many scholars of the Bologna school and some moral theologians of the 1980’s attempt to discredit continuity for the sake of progress, some go so far as schism in failing to recognize the genuine development present in the conciliar documents, as in the case of Marcel Lefebvre and his priests.

[O]ur separated brethren, whether considered as individuals or as Communities and Churches, are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those who through Him were born again into one body... it is only through Christ's Catholic Church, which is "the all-embracing means of salvation," that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation. We believe that Our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, in order to establish the one Body of Christ on earth to which all should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God.¹⁰²

Christ's Church is fully and truly Catholic. Still, his gifts of salvation retain their efficacy in separated communities. The path to unity is a call to recognize from where these gifts come. Though the reality of "ecclesial elements" might prove to be complicated, there is no doubt what identity the Church of Christ retains in her holiness.¹⁰³

This element of the mystery of salvation may be explored, too, through the perspective of those who existed before the time of Christ. Every covenant in the Old Testament introduces some saintly character. Christ himself makes reference to the mystery of those who have passed before the Incarnation, and at the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appear in glory, indicating some evidence of a heavenly reward.¹⁰⁴ "This grace that preceded Christ but that would one day be merited through him, could have already been called "Christic," by anticipation."¹⁰⁵ Indeed, even Mary, the mother of God, was conceived before the Word became flesh. Yet tradition affirms that she was conceived without original sin before she bore Christ. Paul also makes mention of this

¹⁰² "fratres a nobis seiuncti, sive singuli sive Communitates et Ecclesiae eorum, unitate illa non fruuntur, quam Iesus Christus iis omnibus dilargiri voluit quos in unum corpus... solam enim catholicam Christi Ecclesiam, quae generale auxilium salutis est, omnis salutarium mediorum plenitudo attingi potest. Uni nempe Collegio apostolico cui bona Foederis Novi, ad constituendum unum Christi corpus in terris, cui plene incorporantur oportet omnes, qui ad populum Dei iam aliquo modo pertinent." *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3. DH 4190.

¹⁰³ *Lumen Gentium*, note 23.

¹⁰⁴ John 8:56; Matthew 17:1-11.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, 320.

mystery, that Christ gave himself for all.¹⁰⁶ Again and again in the Gospel, Christ's universal saving power is made known.¹⁰⁷ It is clear from Scripture, then, that there are certain persons who belong initially and spiritually and in a salutary manner, who do not yet belong corporally, to the Church of Christ. Though just, some form of invincible ignorance nevertheless deprives them of a full relationship with the Church.¹⁰⁸

The Fathers of the Church discuss extraordinary grace as well. St. Ambrose says, citing the book of Wisdom, “the righteous man, though he die early, will be at rest.”¹⁰⁹ Celestine II (1143-1144) and Lucius II (1144-1145) echo Ambrose when they speak on baptism of desire.¹¹⁰ The bulls condemning John Huss in the fifteenth century provide further declaration that the predestined are not necessarily members of the visible Church.¹¹¹

Thus, tradition affirms what Vatican II develops; there are two normal kinds of membership that belong to the Church in a spiritual way, namely, natural and Mosaic.¹¹² In other words, some are saved, albeit extraordinarily, by Christ’s grace given in anticipation; others receive said grace through desire protected by their unknowing.¹¹³ This kind of membership is possible, above all, because God desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.¹¹⁴ As to whether anyone may be saved without

¹⁰⁶ 1 Timothy 2:4-6.

¹⁰⁷ John 1:9, 10:16, 12:32; Mark 9:40; Matthew 2:1, 8:10, 15:28.

¹⁰⁸ “Even hundreds of years ‘after Christ’, from the point of view of history, people may still be living in the historical state ‘before Christ’ and, thus, legitimately in the provisional, preparatory stage.” Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, translated by Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 21; Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, 317.

¹⁰⁹ Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, 318.

¹¹⁰ Innocent II, *Apostolicam sedem*. DH 741.

¹¹¹ Martin V, *Errors of John Huss*, 3. DH 1203.

¹¹² Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, 321.

¹¹³ Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, 321.

¹¹⁴ 1 Timothy 2:4.

belonging to the Catholic Church, the answer must be “yes” and “no.” Journet most aptly summarizes thus, “[T]he Church is at the same time more pure and more vast than we know... She knows that, from the beginning of space and time, there are attached to her by desire... millions of people whom invincible ignorance has impeded from knowing her but who have not refused... the grace of the living faith that God... offers them in the secrets of their hearts.”¹¹⁵ The just, even if they may be outside the unity of the Church's communion, belong to Christ in a secret and already salutary manner.

It is important to note, here, that the normative means for man to receive grace is through the visible Church and its elements. Though God is not limited by any means, it would seem from the examples above that there must be some connection to the one true Church for salvation to be affected. Abraham and Moses might be granted salvation because of their connection to Christ and his Church in salvation history. Likewise, the good thief and those who die without baptism have access to sanctifying grace by their perfect desire. Their salvation is nonetheless mysteriously associated with the grace of the Church, i.e., the ‘elements of salvation.’ In other words, these examples do not prove replacements for the gifts of the Sacrament, but extraordinary means by which the same salvific grace is applied. Nevertheless, if salvation can be obtained extraordinarily in this manner, it ought to be likewise obtainable in elements of the faith that lie outside the Church’s visible bounds.

¹¹⁵ Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, 324.

Chapter 4

“*Subsistit in*” as Discontinuity

Even though Scripture, the Fathers, and conciliar documents support that the Church of Christ is fully identical with the Catholic Church, there are some who maintain that the two are distinct and/or separate. In fact, this was the predominant interpretation of *Lumen gentium* 8 for almost fifty years after the council until the CDF's 2007 intervention.¹¹⁶ The subsequent chapter is an outline of various prominent thinkers whose writings have greatly influenced the interpretation of Vatican II. Many of these influential thinkers who ran contrary to the teaching of the hierarchy were not publicly confronted until almost two decades after the council, although their thinking comes strikingly close to figures like Alfred Loisy, whose theology was condemned almost immediately.

Two particularly prominent thinkers of the conciliar and post-conciliar era are responsible for first identifying the “hermeneutic of discontinuity” in theology, namely Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), and Avery Dulles (later appointed Cardinal).¹¹⁷ Around the same time these theologians were unpacking the Council in the

¹¹⁶ Despite even papal endorsement of the contrary, many could not support the notion of full identity. See Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, 113; Malloy, “*Subsistit In*: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?”, 7-8.

¹¹⁷ See Avery Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 50/3 (September, 1989): 430-31; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 35; Benedict XVI, *Christmas Address of 2005*, www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=4944#. See also O’Malley, “Trent and Vatican II: Two Styles of Church,” 301-321.

1980's, the Extraordinary Synod celebrating the council's twentieth anniversary was coming to a close. Much of what this synod accomplished was a correction of false ideologies surrounding the council's teachings. It is important to note that none of these criticisms concerned the council itself, but acknowledged it as a "grace and gift"; the teaching authority of the Church only wished to clarify "deficiencies and difficulties in the acceptance of the Council."¹¹⁸

Still, several theologians were quick to controversially interpret the Council. Dulles specifically criticizes Edward Schillebeeckx, Richard P. McBrien, and George Lindbeck, whose discontinuity will be examined below. This list certainly is not exhaustive, though, and so it is also significant to briefly mention a few authors not explicitly mentioned on Dulles's list who were instrumental in shifting the hermeneutic of the last half century, namely Hans Küng and Leonardo Boff. Another author who embraces discontinuity, Francis A. Sullivan, develops categories that, in some way or another, reflect the many positions of those listed above. These categories will be examined below as well.

Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009)

Edward Schillebeeckx was a frequently confronted theologian during his long career. Although questioned three times by members of the C.D.F., the first at the time of the council, Schillebeeckx's writings were never officially condemned.¹¹⁹ The tendency

¹¹⁸ Extraordinary Synod of 1985, "Final Report", in *Origins* 15/27 (December 19, 1985): 444-50.

¹¹⁹ Among his more radical beliefs was the questioning of Christ's bodily resurrection, as well as the relation between priesthood and apostolic succession. See Edward Schillebeeckx: *Jesus: An Experiment in*

towards discontinuity was especially apparent shortly after the council, when he moved toward an eschatological and epistemological understanding of the development of dogma. This undertaking, in his own words, necessitates “permanent criticism of the actual situation” to bring “the firm conviction that this building up of a more human world is genuinely possible.”¹²⁰ Schillebeeckx’s interpretation of *subsistit in* is heavily influenced by this hermeneutic. Against an “exclusivist” position, the Dominican envisages a mystical Church much like the one Pius XII had warned against: to *subsistit* indicates an explosive significance, that is, out of the old way of understanding identity.

The mystery of Christ’s Church is present in the Catholic Church “under all kinds of historical veils and distortions,” but it is equally present elsewhere.¹²¹ His main aim, as expressed especially in his ecclesiological text, is to decentralize the Church. Religion is simply mankind grasping at heavenly realities. In other words, Schillebeeckx only identifies the eschatological import of the *subsistit* phrase, as contrasted with an ontological sense, as described above. The Church of Christ may be present on earth, but only insofar as the human person in different historical settings experiences it. In other words, the Church of Christ has a kind of subjective ontology, in an epistemological way. There is no such thing as the true Church of Christ in its fullness until the eschaton.

Richard P. McBrien (1936-2015)

Christology (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 299-340; Edward Schillebeeckx, *God: the Future of Man* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1969), 51-91.

¹²⁰ Schillebeeckx, *God: the Future of Man*, 157.

¹²¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: the Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 193.

The former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America and Notre Dame Professor of Theology, Richard P. McBrien, became well known in the years after the Council, most especially for books like *Catholicism* (1980) and *Do We Need the Church?* (1969).¹²² *Catholicism* was investigated by the Secretariat for Doctrine and Pastoral Practices almost immediately. In 1985, the Committee on Doctrine found a number of problems, including the idea that Christ did not institute the sacraments, as well as the idea that the Church is essentially a service institution with no reason to exist outside of this humanitarian end.¹²³ Again in 1996, the National Council of Catholic Bishops sharpened their critique.¹²⁴

Within his book, *Catholicism*, particularly, McBrien commits himself to presenting a plurality of theological positions. Additionally, he minimalizes the import of magisterial teaching, presenting dogma as one option among many supposedly valid assertions. Moreover, as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops noted, McBrien overemphasizes change and development. In his own words, “in the final accounting, the Enlightenment marks the division between an often precritical, authority-oriented theology and a critical, historically sophisticated and philosophically mature theology.”¹²⁵ McBrien’s admiration of this “mature” theology is in stark contrast to the “premodern” magisterial teaching of the long nineteenth century.

His reading of what it means to subsist are furthered by this troublesome interpretive lens. McBrien is among the foremost pioneers of the notion that churches

¹²² Richard P. McBrien, *Do We Need the Church?* (New York: Harper Collins, 1969).

¹²³ Committee on Doctrine, *Origins* 15 (1985): 130-32; Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 789-99.

¹²⁴ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Review of Fr. McBrien’s *Catholicism*,” *Origins* 26 (1996): 738-744.

¹²⁵ McBrien, *Catholicism*, 641.

outside of the Catholic Church possess “various degrees of catholicity” and that Christ did not intend to establish a new religious organization.¹²⁶ To *subsist* for McBrien can mean that there is but one Church of Christ. All extant churches somehow fit as species under this genus. McBrien therefore concludes that “the Catholic Church is necessary *for the individual* who is called to the Church as such.”¹²⁷ It is possible, according to McBrien, for other Christian communities to carry the same soteriological significance as the Catholic Church. This subjective understanding is very clearly contrary to the Council, which affirms that *all* men are called to Catholic unity.¹²⁸

George Lindbeck (b. 1923)

Though George Lindbeck was a Lutheran scholar, he participated as one of several observers of the Second Vatican Council appointed by the Lutheran World Federation. He also spent much of his career in dialogue with the Catholic Church, and even wrote about the subject of Catholic ecclesiology in his few, brief works. Lindbeck perceives doctrine as nothing more than a way by which adherents are socialized into a particular group. “It is a “deep grammar,” enabling members of the community to think, speak and act as members.”¹²⁹ This theology borrows heavily from philological philosophers like Wittgenstein and is therefore itself more polemical than ecclesiological or ecumenical. The Church, for instance, cannot claim to be immune to sin; its purpose is

¹²⁶ McBrien, *Catholicism*, 4, 577.

¹²⁷ McBrien, *Catholicism*, 733.

¹²⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

¹²⁹ Avery Dulles, “Postmodern Ecumenism”, *First Things* 136 (October, 2003): 57-61.

not to save, but only to witness faithfully. Doctrines are nothing more than precepts for a specific historical context.

Though he does not directly address the *subsistit in* dilemma in his principle work, *The Nature of Doctrine*, his express opinion is evident. Chapter three is entirely a discourse on religious pluralism, through the lens of cultural-linguistic theology.¹³⁰ There is no limit to salvation, no unsurpassable truth. Religion, he supposes, cannot be measured in quantifiable terms, for the mystery of the Church has no ontological reference. That is, in an effort to achieve dialogue without tension, Lindbeck sacrifices the reality of the faith. He seriously “undermines, if he does not dismiss, the propositional truth of dogma.”¹³¹ His position is similar to Schillebeeckx’s in this respect, but intensified. Whereas Schillebeeckx would at least adhere to an eschatological reality, Linkbeck struggles to see even this as quantifiable.

Hans Küng (b. 1928)

Originally a *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council, Hans Küng served as a respected theologian and faculty member at the University of Tübingen. In the late sixties and early seventies, Küng published *The Church* (1967) and *Infallibile?* (1970), which started a lengthy debate between the theologian and the magisterium.¹³² In its initial response to *Die Kirche*, the CDF asks if Küng understands the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, especially

¹³⁰ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 32-58.

¹³¹ Dulles, “Postmodern Ecumenism”, 61.

¹³² John Jay Hughes, “Hans KÜNG and the Magisterium,” *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 368-389.

because he misinterprets “*subsistit*” as “exists.”¹³³ The decade that followed was riddled with conversation between the Commission and Küng seeking to rectify the many errors found in these two books. In 1979 Fr. Küng was stripped of his license to teach as a Catholic theologian after the CDF declared that he “has departed from the integral truth of Catholic faith, and therefore he can no longer be considered a Catholic theologian.”¹³⁴ Over the last fifty years, he has gained the most attention for denying papal infallibility and has had tremendous influence on the aforementioned scholars of discontinuity.¹³⁵

Küng’s reaction to Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam* in his own work, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, is perhaps most telling of his position on the identity of the Church of Christ. In this 1963 encyclical, the Vicar of Christ asserts that the Catholic Church “possesses intact the living heritage of the original apostolic tradition,” and that “dialogue must not weaken our attachment to our Faith. On our apostolate, we cannot make vague promises about the principles of faith and action on which our profession of Christianity is based.”¹³⁶ Paul VI therefore reaffirms full identity in the Catholic Church and that dialogue is ordered toward this end. The Swiss *peritus* responded by calling His Holiness’s exegesis defective, his methodology too Romanistic.¹³⁷ The establishment of the one, true Church, for Küng, involves every church on earth.

¹³³ *The Küng Dialogue: A Documentation on the Efforts of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and of the Conference of German Bishops to Achieve an Appropriate Clarification of the Controversial Views of Dr. Hans Küng (Tübingen)* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1980), 44.

¹³⁴ CDF, *Christi Ecclesia*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/seeaith/documents/rc_con_seeaith_doc_19791215_christi-ecclesia_en.html. More detail can be found in *The Küng Dialogue: A Documentation on the Efforts of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and of the Conference of German Bishops to Achieve an Appropriate Clarification of the Controversial Views of Dr. Hans Küng (Tübingen)*, 3-12.

¹³⁵ Hans Küng, *The Church*, trans. Ray & Rosaleen Ockenden (New York: Burns & Oates, 2001), 444.

¹³⁶ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 48, 91.

¹³⁷ Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry* (Indiana: Doubleday, 1983), 17-37.

That the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, for Küng, would mean that kind of visible versus invisible distinction that Pius XII warns against. The Church exists mysteriously, definitely in its fullness in the eschaton, yet imperfectly here.

Divisions only exist as branches of the same tree. Each grows organically from the same source. There is a reference to the visible Church in this sense, but it is a pluralistic one.

Leonardo Boff (b. 1938)

Leonardo Boff was among the earliest supporters of Liberation Theology, which has been critiqued since its inception for its flattening of the Church's vertical dimension, no doubt thanks to its Marxist inclinations and individualistic leanings.¹³⁸ Like others mentioned here, Boff denies Christ's intention to found the Church and critiques the Catholic tendency to define and clarify its beliefs as "dogmatism," which interferes with the values and freedoms of individual consciences.¹³⁹ He perhaps is most extremely bent on the idea of religion as humanitarianism and would even go so far as to deny Christ's bodily resurrection as an historical event. The Church evolved on its own; Christ did not have it in mind. The Church is simply, in Boff's own words, part of a de-eschatologization, that is to say, she is focused on assuming societal characteristics rather than teleology as it is traditionally understood.¹⁴⁰

Boff's principle work, *Church, Charism and Power*, logically following his denial of the Church's true origins and divinity, affirms that the one true Church is not limited to a particular expression. He asserts that the "true Catholic attitude" would be "to be

¹³⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, "Liberation Theology: Preliminary Notes," in *The Ratzinger Report*, Reprinted in: J.F. Thornton and S.B. Varenne, eds., *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 25-26.

¹³⁹ Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (Spring Valley, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1986), 42.

¹⁴⁰ Boff, *Church, Charism and Power*, 74.

fundamentally open to everything without exception” because the Catholic Church is rooted in its universality.¹⁴¹ Applied to the *subsistit in* discussion, he posits an all-encompassing Church of Christ, of which the Catholic Church is simply an expression. He suggests that the fathers of the council wished to add a pure and simple identification between the Church of Christ and the Catholic Church, so as not to limit itself in exclusion of other Christian communities. The Church of Christ is the whole, while the Catholic Church is one of many parts.

Categories of Rupture

Although many thinkers have expressed new iterations of *subsistit in* over the last half-century, they all fall into the same general divergences. Boff, Küng, McBrien, et al make the same ideological errors in the parameters for the Church’s identity. Four categories of rupture, in particular, distinguish the Catholic Church and the Church of Christ. Each is effectively parried by opposing schools and duly addressed by the CDF.

The first category of rupture supposes that the Church of Christ exists nowhere on earth, but it is only an eschatological reality. Even if all Christian communities were considered together, there could be no totality of Christ's Church on this side of eternity. In other words, there is a strict separation of the spiritual and corporeal Church, and the latter is not fully identical with the true Church of Christ. This is the expression of what it means for the Church to subsist according to Schillebeeckx and Küng, to some degree. It

¹⁴¹ Boff, *Church, Charism and Power*, 77.

cannot be a serious interpretation of Vatican II, however, as has been proved above. All the same, the CDF treats this as a position of concern.

This is the position duly addressed by both Leo XIII and Pius XII before the council and explicitly condemned. It is clear that, though the Body of Christ is mystically united, one cannot affirm that all Christian communities on earth are joined in the same invisible way by some eschatological reality; “they err in a matter of divine truth, who imagine the Church to be invisible, intangible, a something merely “pneumatological.”¹⁴² To be sure, the CDF cites text from the council that leaves no room for this particular interpretation: “Christ “established here on earth” only one Church and instituted it as a “visible and spiritual community.”¹⁴³

More notably, some say that the Church of Christ consists of all extant Christian communities on earth. In other words, all denominations, taken together, form the one true Church of Christ. It is a sort of ecumenical position aimed at solving the problem of disunity. In other words, this position attempts to foster respect for a sort of 'non-realization," or multiplicity, that transforms division into expansion, much like many of the movements above that developed before the council.¹⁴⁴ It is this theory that most duly attempts to address the status of the *elementa*. Some who hold this as truth go so far as to contend that the term “church,” applied to non-Catholic communities, is used for all denominations regardless of the incorporation of the true elements of faith.¹⁴⁵ If

¹⁴² Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 14.

¹⁴³ CDF, *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_en.html; *Lumen gentium*, 8.1.

¹⁴⁴ See Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981), 685; Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1976), 365; Ralph Del Colle, “Toward the Fullness of Christ: A Catholic Vision of Ecumenism,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3 (2001): 201-211.

¹⁴⁵ See Sullivan, “Response”, 400.

contradictions exist, they argue, it is only to shed light on what might be lacking in other communions of Christ's Church. Out of many members, a higher unity is born out of discordance. The CDF evidently rejects this point based on the way the designation "church" should be understood when predicated of such communities:

Communion with the universal Church, which is represented by the Successor of Peter, is not a certain complementing feature of the particular church coming from the outside but one of her internal principles by which she is constituted. Therefore, the situation of [being] particular church that these venerable Christian communities receive is also affected by a wound.¹⁴⁶

Simply retaining connection through the sacraments does not ensure full communion, but only elements of the faith.

The second position would hold that "church" could only be used in a proper and univocal sense, implying that one may be saved *because of* his division, rather than *in spite of* it. It is supposed that the Church's doctrine can be impaired, or its meaning obscured, or worst of all, that even in dogma, the Catholic Church has not yet attained fullness in Christ and may still be purified and perfected from the outside.¹⁴⁷ Yet, magisterial teaching since the council has upheld a use of the term 'church' as analogically proper.¹⁴⁸ Those churches which retain elements of the faith of the Church of Christ while being separated in doctrine might properly maintain the term "church," just not in the sense that they have the fullness of truth. This kind of relationship between proper but analogous churches retains only parts of the unity which makes the faithful members of the same Body. Communion with the Church of Christ must include both a vertical dimension (communion with God) and a horizontal one (communion among

¹⁴⁶ CDF, *Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, 17. DH 4920-4924.

¹⁴⁷ Yves Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians* (Irvine, CA: Chapman, 1964), 101, 120-21. An Instruction of the Holy Office, *On the Ecumenical Movement*, no. 2.

¹⁴⁸ Malloy, "Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?", 23.

men). A Christian understanding of this mystery is essentially a recognition that communion is, above all, a gift from God, a “fruit of God’s initiative” carried out in His sacrifice for man.¹⁴⁹

A third position is that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, but not the Catholic Church alone. It differs from the second position in that different mediations of the Gospel message are distinct and separate, as opposed to a collective and expanding whole. Whereas the second position holds that each ecclesial community differs neither in genus nor degree, the latter supposes churches may differ in kind. There is a polarity that creates tension in the Christian life, namely, the gospel itself and its mediations; neither can stand alone. Catholicism, for instance, would then be realized as a mediation of Christianity, which exists among other mediations that equally benefit the gospel message. Different realizations relay the message of Christ to different peoples. The integral unity of the visible and invisible aspects of the Church, as described above, is obscured. The object of this method is to deemphasize the empirical institution.¹⁵⁰

Against this common reading towards rupture, proponents of continuity argue from the later part of the 8th article, otherwise known as the *licet* clause.¹⁵¹ Elements of truth cannot exist outside of the Church’s visible confines if there are no visible confines. If other concrete realizations of the Church exist, the said *licet* phrase is logically impossible.¹⁵² The response to this reading is similar to the second objection to

¹⁴⁹ CDF, *Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Eduardo J. Echeverria, *Dialogue of Love: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 118-180; George H. Tavard, “The Church, Community of Salvation: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology,” *New Theological Studies* 1 (1992): 133-185.

¹⁵¹ “*licet extra eius compaginem elementa plura sanctificationis et veritatis inveniantur, quae ut dona Ecclesiae Christi propria, ad unitatem catholicam impellunt.*” *Lumen gentium*, 8. DH 4118.

¹⁵² Christopher Malloy, “*Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?*”, 26.

continuity. There is no point in striving for Christian unity if each mediation of the Gospel is equal.

Lastly, there is a category which preserves full identity, but in a non-exclusive way. The Church of Christ exists both (1) fully in the Catholic Church alone, and (2) in lesser and varying degrees, in other Christian churches.¹⁵³ The distinction is between the words *fully* and *only*. If the council fathers meant that *only* the Catholic Church was the Church of Christ, says this analysis, they would not have identified “true and particular churches.”¹⁵⁴ Advocates of this method might support something of a “branch theory” in Christian history, as if during the Reformation, for instance, the true Church remained with Calvinism or Lutheranism as such. The elements of true Christianity sprout from the same seed, and so, as opposed to the third theory, it does not suggest that different communities are distinct and separate. Yet, it does not totally relate to the second proposition either, since churches vary in degree.

Presence and operation are the two working factors within this final position. Magisterial teaching explains being differently. If the Church of Christ has one, sole, self-standing existence, then presence and operation cannot be divorced. The Church of Christ is not fully present and operating in the Catholic Church if it is also operable in other communions. Efficacy of the *elementa* is not given to communities for the sake of being disjoined. Only the Catholic Church, the one Church of Christ established at Pentecost, is capable of dispensing the plenitude of grace entrusted to it. If ecclesial elements are

¹⁵³ The chief data for this position is drawn from *Ut Unum Sint* and *Dominus Iesus*, which both affirm that Christ is present and operative in non-Catholic ecclesial communities. See Christopher Malloy, “*Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?*”, 12; *Ut Unum Sint*, 11; *Dominus Iesus*, 16-17.

¹⁵⁴ Sullivan, “Response”, 406.

presently operative in separated churches, it is only because of their real, albeit imperfect, union with the Catholic Church.¹⁵⁵

Responding to Discontinuity

The problem of all the major thinkers noted above is that they try to divorce the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council from the long-held tradition of the Church. Each maintains the same major themes concerning discontinuity, or rupture. This problem is most commonly made manifest in the identity of the Church of Christ as distinct and/or separate from the Catholic Church. Now past the Council's proclamation of subsistence, which has taken thousands of years to form, the Church faces a one hundred eighty degree turn that threatens to remain for the duration of Her time on this side of eternity. Seven arguments provide ample proof of full identity as the true meaning of the *subsistit in* clause, leaving no room for the false system of discontinuity.

The *subsistit in* controversy was not really a controversy at all until the post-conciliar era. Though various movements and questions may have arisen before the council, in the "long nineteenth century," none of the bishops would have seriously questioned the unicity of the Church at the Council. The *subsistit in* claim bears upon itself the debate of continuity, because if the Church of Christ is not fully identical with the Catholic Church, then hundreds of years of doctrinal development have actually proven to be corruption. The very notion of an immutable tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit, begins to lose credibility. Any of the aforementioned proofs of rupture, if true,

¹⁵⁵ O'Connor, "The Church of Christ and the Catholic Church," 259.

make the last two thousand years of doctrinal development obsolete. Yet the contrary may be argued systematically with several proofs. The promulgation of this complicated phrase was, in fact, a reasonable affirmation of full identity, rather than discontinuity.¹⁵⁶

First, both the historicity of the Council, as well as the text itself, while tangled, do not present an express or implicit revocation of previous teaching. Continuity of doctrine should then simply be the default presumption. In other words, tradition has always held the doctrine of full identity. The burden of proof ought to fall on those who claim rupture, and to this effect, no due evidence has been supplied. The very *Acta* attest that the conciliar assembly did not wish to break with tradition, as Pope John XXIII's opening address and Paul VI's closing address also attest.¹⁵⁷

Hoping to keep Catholics from indifferentism, one bishop even asked that the text of *Lumen Gentium* clarify that everyone has the duty to seek out the Catholic Church to obtain eternal salvation. The secretariat responded that this was sufficiently borne out in the entire text. Much of the conversation surrounding *Unitatis Redintegratio* is applicable as well. In response to the concern that non-Catholic communities would be numbered among the Catholic Church, for instance, the secretariat explicitly states, "It is clearly affirmed that only the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ."¹⁵⁸

Secondly, the identity of the Church of Christ is affirmed as Catholic, both at the Council and in Ordinary Universal Magisterial teaching since then. A text approved on the very same day as *Lumen Gentium*, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, makes clear that the

¹⁵⁶ Malloy employs the following proofs in "*Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?*", 21-44.

¹⁵⁷ John XIII, *Sollemniter Inchoatur*; Paul VI, *Address at the Last General Meeting of the Council*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651207_epilogo-concilio.html.

¹⁵⁸ Malloy, "*Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Total Identity?*", note 121.

“Catholic Church *is* the Mystical Body of Christ.”¹⁵⁹ This identity is affirmed by the role of the episcopacy. The fathers note the bishops as the principle and foundation of unity, which affirm the designation of the Church of Christ as Catholic.¹⁶⁰ In many ways, the council fathers intensify this point, presenting Peter as head of the entire Church. Even in non-Catholic Christian communities, the significance of the capacity to be called “Church” depends on the retention of valid orders. This consistent claim of the council, especially evident in *Lumen Gentium* itself, gives witness to continuity by the constancy of this tradition.¹⁶¹ This claim bears special significance because of the way in which the council fathers express this headship and authority. Peter and his successors exercise supreme authority over all the Catholic faithful. But Peter and his successors also exercise this authority as the pastor of the entire Church of Christ. Therefore, the authority given to Peter and his successors as pastor of the Catholic Church is commensurate with his authority over the Church of Christ. It would seem, then, that full identity remains, and continuity follows.

Thirdly, in addition to the full governing structure of the Church and the full deposit of faith, the entire means of salvation belongs only to the Catholic Church. It may be helpful, here, to more duly examine the *elementa* mentioned in *Lumen Gentium*. These should not be understood as the marks of the Church, for there are only four, not “many.” Rather, the fathers are speaking here of supernatural gifts, many sacramental, that

¹⁵⁹ *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 76; This equivocal pairing of Christ's Body and the Church appears in many places throughout the works of Vatican II. See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7; *Lumen Gentium* 7, 48, and 49; *Gaudium et Spes*, 32; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12; *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3. See also O'Connor, “The Church of Christ and the Catholic Church,” 257.

¹⁶⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 22-23.

¹⁶¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, and 25. See Lateran Council IV, chapter 5. DH 811; Lyons II, *Letter of Emperor Michael to Pope Gregory*, Session 4. DH 861; Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*. DH 872; Council of Florence, *Laetentur caeli*. DH 1307; Vatican I, *Pastor Aeternus*, prologue. DH 3050-3051; Leo XIII, *Satis Cognitum* 13-15; Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 40-41.

somehow exist as part of extant Christian communities while still belonging to the Catholic Church. In other words, Scripture, the sacraments, and other sanctifying graces have been entrusted to the Church alone, and other ecclesial communities only participate in them insofar as they remain Catholic. A baptism, for instance, that retains the form and matter prescribed by Christ and entrusted to His Church, which is Catholic, is considered valid. The Eucharist, too, is present in other churches, but only because of true and unbroken apostolic succession and unicity of doctrine. In some sense, because of the sanctifying grace received, it may be said that those who receive these sacraments belong in some way to the Catholic Church. This is how the elements are “forces impelling toward catholic unity.” If all the means of salvation are found only in the Catholic faith, the Church of Christ cannot possibly be anything outside the bounds of the Catholic Church. Further, *Unitatis redintegratio* claims that through “Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the comprehensive help for salvation, can the fullness of all the means of salvation be attained.”¹⁶²

Fourth, “the people of God” is the Church of Christ, and their membership in this Church is determinedly Catholic. *Lumen Gentium* repeatedly provides evidence for this kind of membership. The people of God, i.e., the members of the Catholic Church, are said to cling to the magisterium, and all either belong to or are ordered toward this unity.¹⁶³ The Church is one in belief, spiritually united as the Body of Christ throughout space and time. As inextricably bound are the four marks of the Church, so too are the people of God bound to the Catholic faith. A parallel is also drawn between God’s chosen

¹⁶² *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.

¹⁶³ *Lumen Gentium*, 12,13,14; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3 confirms this: “all those who already belong in some way to the people of God ought to be fully incorporated.”

people in the old covenant, the Israelites, and the people of God today.¹⁶⁴ For just as Israel was already called the Church of God as a visible sign, so does He buy a visible society through the blood of his new covenant. Furthermore, several characteristics of the people of God clearly distinguish it from all other religions, namely, membership, headship, i.e., Jesus Christ, status, law, mission, and destiny.¹⁶⁵ This people is the seed of hope and salvation for all the world. While other ecclesial communities might share in elements of this faith, it is the Catholic Church which retains it in full.

Fifth, precisely and only the Catholic Church is necessary for salvation. There is no persuasive argument for unity, or mystical communion, with a distinct “Church of Christ” in which non-Catholics can be saved *because of* their non-catholicity. It is communion with the Catholic Church, and the Catholic Church alone, that achieves salvation. Shortly after the *subsistit in* clause, *Lumen Gentium* makes this clear:

“Wherefore, those men could not be saved who – not unaware that the Catholic Church was by God through Jesus Christ made necessary – nonetheless would not will to enter into her or remain in her.”¹⁶⁶ This negative moral norm could not be clearer. Though elements of the faith are made available out of mercy, the path to eternal life is through the Church of Christ.

Sixth, article eight is aiming to solve a difficult problem, namely, addressing the mysterious reality of the one Church composed of two natures. Like Christ, she is both human and divine. Yet, unlike Christ, she bears scars of disobedience from particular

¹⁶⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

¹⁶⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 782.

¹⁶⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

members throughout history. How can it be that this institution of weak, sinful persons is entrusted with eternal truths?

This is the problem that theologians like Küng and Schillebeeckx were hoping to address. Both saw the Church as a kind of historical representation of an eternal or eschatological truth. If the eschaton is the only reality that matters, as in the first category of the previous chapter, the face this representation puts on in this life cannot be of import in the life of salvation. For Schillebeeckx though, the historical representation became entirely divorced from the eschatological kingdom. In this way, there is no significant impetus to remain within the visible boundary of any ecclesiastical structure. The soteriological import of what it means to subsist is reduced to a kind of universalism.

The answer to the question of the divine and human natures of the Church is in full identity and continuity, entrusted in a particular way by the eternal *Logos* himself. This way, the fathers are maintaining inseparable unity between the visible and invisible aspects. Just as the Church cannot be divided into a heavenly Church and an earthly Church, neither can she be broken into true and distinct denominations. If particular Christian communities fail to represent the full visible order of the Catholic Church, they fail to be churches of the Church of Christ.¹⁶⁷

These proofs, taken together, provide due evidence that the Church of Christ is fully identical with the Catholic Church, which is the constant teaching of the magisterium since the time of Christ. Of course, continuity ought to be the automatic response when interpreting Church teaching, but it is especially true when looking through textual

¹⁶⁷ “Societas autem organis hierarchicis instructa et mysticum Christi Corpus, coetus adspectabilis et communitas spiritualis, Ecclesia terrestris et Ecclesia coelestibus bonis ditata, non ut duae res considerandae sunt, sed unam realitatem complexam efformant, quae humano et divino coalescit elemento”, *Lumen Gentium*, 8. DH 4118.

evidence. Even if history can distract with episcopal feuds and theological quandaries, a close look will ultimately reveal that the text is the working of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church is fully identical with the Church of Christ, as has always been maintained. Discontinuity is not defensible in the text of *Lumen Gentium*.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

After the Second Vatican Council the traditional doctrine on the identity of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church was called into question principally by a misunderstanding of *Lumen Gentium* 8's use of the term *subsistit in*. A long list of theologians and historians denied this exclusive identity and further used this change in the traditional wording to support the claim that the Second Vatican Council had fundamentally changed the Church's teaching. *Lumen Gentium*, however, stands at the heart of the conciliar teaching with this claim that Christ's Church was established as one, holy, and apostolic, forever and fully to be identified with the Catholic Church. That the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church is proof of exclusive identity. Neither in a historical-critical, nor in a systematic theological, examination is there any evidence, taken in context, which warrants this reading or a hermeneutic of rupture.

My analysis of primary sources in chapter two shows that the Catholic Church and the Church of Christ are, in fact, identical. Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and other magisterial texts affirm that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church in a unique way. This was affirmed by multiple ecumenical councils and popes. Cyprian, Augustine, and Pelagius II also provide ample evidence that the Church is one and her identity is fully Catholic. This is reaffirmed in the following centuries at Lateran IV,

Vienne, Florence, Trent, and Vatican I. Boniface VIII, Pius IV, Leo XIII, Pius XI, and Pius XII similarly argue that unity can only be found in the Catholic Church.

Given the consistent insistence on this doctrine in the tradition, it is no surprise that Vatican II similarly concluded that the Church of Christ and the Catholic Church are one and the same. The final drafts of *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio* both supply ample evidence that the adaptation of *Lumen Gentium* 8 was simply to clarify the Church's timeless teaching that there is fullness to her identity. This point was uncontested at the council itself, and subsequently the magisterium through the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith has repeatedly reaffirmed it.

That the Church of Christ *subsists in* the Catholic Church is proof of continuity rather than discontinuity in magisterial teaching. That is, the faithful must maintain that the Church of Christ is fully identical with the Catholic Church. Both historical and systematic readings of the council indubitably show this continuity. Furthermore, in each historical period above, examined systematically, there is a well-defined effort to preserve previous teaching. This was, in fact, the foundation of the Second Vatican Council, not some antagonistic position which the fathers sought to root out. Seldom since the council has any theologian proposed an alternative without receiving some kind of censure from the ordinary universal teaching of the Church. Lastly, when comparing categories of rupture with proofs of continuity, the truth of full identity is apparent.

On the occasion of the council's fortieth anniversary, Pope Benedict XVI remarked once more on the hermeneutics of the Second Vatican Council, summarizing the council thus:

The Second Vatican Council, with its new definition of the relation between the faith of the Church and certain essential elements of modern thought, has revised

and even corrected some historical decisions, but in spite of this apparent discontinuity it has maintained and deepened its inner nature and its true identity. The Church is, as much before as after the Council, the same Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic on a journey across time.¹⁶⁸

Vatican II addresses an actual manifestation of the Church of Christ, Catholicity as such.

It is useful here to make a distinction between the accidental features of the Church and the Church's inner essence that will perdure through all eternity. This point is made in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* where the council distinguishes between those "immutable elements divinely instituted" and those "elements subject to change."¹⁶⁹ This is the distinction to which *Lumen Gentium* alludes when it identifies the Church as being "constituted and organized in the world as a society," a distinction retained throughout the history of the Church.¹⁷⁰ The ontological principle is the premise upon which the rest of the phrase is built, reaffirming teachings that have their foundation in Christ Himself, most especially the saving power of the elements of faith. These elements belong by right to the one, true Church of Christ, whose full identity is, in fact, Catholic. The Catholic Church, as has always been assumed, is not merely a set of churches associated with the Church of Christ but is totally a "substantial identity of essence."¹⁷¹

In terms of application, particularly an ecumenical one, this means that the *telos* of communion among Christians must be union with the Catholic Church herself. This is a difficult problem that needs a sensitive solution from all those responding to the great commission. The great commission must continue to call hearts to true conversion. In the

¹⁶⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Christmas Address to the Roman Curia* <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html>.

¹⁶⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 21.

¹⁷⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

¹⁷¹ Ratzinger, "Ecclesiology of the Constitution," 133-139.

Gospel, Christ never changed anyone's heart if that person was not open to following Him. People always wanted to follow him.¹⁷² The same is true today. If seekers do not at least desire change, there will be no communion. Unity in multiplicity is not true diversity, but division; it is not ecumenism, but schism.

At the same time, it can be presumed from a phenomenological perspective that the Church is ever developing.¹⁷³ There is a healing that must take place within the Church, one that depends on the extensive treasures found outside her visible boundaries, though they belong to her by right. As has always been the case, the Church must develop and come to new understandings of spiritual realities. This constant conversion toward new understandings of reality does not rupture the eternal connection with the Word incarnate, whose teaching is preserved, unstained, by his bride, the Catholic Church.

¹⁷² Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-34; Lk. 5:1-11; Lk. 19:1-10.

¹⁷³ See Malloy, "*Subsistit In: Nonexclusive Identity or Full Identity?*", note 153. Richard Schenck, "The Unsettled German Discussion of Justification: Abiding Differences and Ecumenical Blessings," *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology* 44 (2005): 161 and n. 30; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, c. 81.

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