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Summary:

If according to *Lumen gentium* 8,2 the 'Catholic Church' of the symbol 'subsists in' the 'Catholic Church', the first mentioned 'Catholic Church' is the universal church or the church as such, and the second mentioned 'Catholic Church' is a particular church in which the first is really and essentially present. This doesn't exclude the presence of the universal church in other particular churches too. Outside the first mentioned 'Catholic Church' one cannot find elements of church, but they can well be found outside of the particular Roman Catholic Church.

THE 'CATHOLIC CHURCH' SUBSISTS IN THE 'CATHOLIC CHURCH'

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The eighth paragraph of Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, speaks of the Church founded by Christ:

This is the one *Church* of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, *catholic* and apostolic, which our Saviour, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd (John 21:17), and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority (see Matthew 28:18-19), which He erected for all ages as 'the pillar and mainstay of the truth' (1 Timothy 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the *Catholic Church*, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.

If you read this text as a whole, putting together the beginning of the first sentence with the beginning of the second, it seems to be saying something very odd indeed: the 'Catholic Church' referred to in the Creed subsists in the 'Catholic Church'.¹ It can only be making sense if 'Catholic Church' is being used in two different senses. What, then

does 'Catholic Church' mean in each case? And which version is intended when *Unitatis redintegratio*, the Council's decree of ecumenism, speaks about people other than Catholics, and says that 'it is only through Christ's Catholic Church, which is "the all-embracing [80] means of salvation", that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation'? (n. 3)

1 It is worth noting that this formulation was taken over verbatim into the *Code of Canon law* (204.2)

In the original draft for *Lumen gentium* distributed to the Council Fathers on 23 November 1962, what is now paragraph 8 had run as follows:

The sacred synod thus teaches and solemnly proclaims that there is only the one true Church of Jesus Christ: the one which we celebrate in the Creed as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church; the one which the Saviour won for himself on the Cross, and bound to himself as body to head, bride to bridegroom, the one which he entrusted after his resurrection to St Peter and his Successors, who are the Roman Pontiffs, to be governed. And therefore it is only the Roman Catholic Church that is rightly called Church.²

2 Acta synodalia sacrosancti concilii oecumenici Vaticani secundi, I . 4. 15.

This preliminary draft seems to envisage a full identification of the Roman Catholic Church with the Church of Christ that is named in the Creed. And at the same time it is disputed that other Christian communities can rightly call themselves Churches at all.

This draft was debated and revised. By the time the final text first appeared on 3 July 1964, a number of changes had occurred. The most significant and striking of these was the replacement of the word 'is [est]' with 'subsists in [*subsistit in*]'. No longer does the text simply identify the Church of the Creed with the Church of Rome; instead the Church of the Creed 'subsists in' the Church of Rome. The report on the draft that was submitted to the Council Fathers included an explanatory comment: the change had been introduced so that the expression 'better correspond to the affirmation that ecclesial elements are also present [*adsunt*] elsewhere'. There was some opposition and discussion, but the text was finally accepted.

'Subsistit in'

What exactly does *subsistit in* mean? We need to be clear from the outset that there is no question of the Church we profess in the Creed being simply an 'idea' which is then subsequently 'made real', or concretised. This Church is from the outset a reality which is [81] 'constituted and ordered as a society in this world'; and it is that already constituted, ordered society which subsequently 'subsists in' the Roman Catholic Church. The final text ascribes this visibility, this concreteness on earth to the Church *before* it goes on to say that this Church of Christ subsists in the Church bound to the Pope.

In the text of *Lumen gentium* as a whole, there are two formulations that seem roughly equivalent to *subsistit in*. In paragraph 26, we read

This Church of Christ is truly present in [*vere adest in*] all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called Churches in the New Testament.

This suggests that 'subsists in' may also simply mean 'is really present in': the Church designated in the Creed as Catholic is really present the Roman Catholic Church.³

³ The report which accompanied the draft rather confirms this interpretation: 'The Church is one single reality, and here on earth she is present [*adest in*] the Catholic Church, even if ecclesial elements are to be found outside her' (*Acta synodalia sacrosancti concilii oecumenici Vaticani secundi*, 3. 1. 176)

The other similar passage in *Lumen gentium* comes at the beginning of paragraph 23:

The individual bishops ... are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular Churches, fashioned after the mode of the universal Church. In these and of these exists the one unique Catholic Church.⁴

⁴ ... in *quibus et ex quibus una et unica ecclesia catholica existit* – translation borrowed from *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, edited by Norman Tanner (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990) – the official Vatican translation, 'comes into being', is misleading. German writers are equally misleading when they render *ecclesia particularis* as *Teilkirche* – 'part-Church'; they should say *Einzelkirche* – 'individual Church'.

'Particular Churches' (*ecclesiae particulares*) is a technical term which needs to be understood carefully. It does not mean 'Churches which are part of a (larger) Church'. We might be tempted to think of the universal Church as a composite reality, the sum of its many different constituent parts. But this is not the way the matter is to be understood here. *Particularis* means 'individual' or 'distinct'. When a ring is made out of gold, this does not mean that the gold is a part of the ring. There exists the one Church of Jesus Christ, but only in the sense that it consists of many 'individual Churches'. But this is not the [82] same thing as saying that it is a composite, with many different Churches as parts. To get the matter right, one must say that the Church of Christ is made up of many individual Churches, in such a way that it is fully present in all of them.

Subsistit in also occurs at two points in *Unitatis redintegratio*, Vatican II's ecumenism decree. In paragraph 4, we read:

... when the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion have been gradually overcome, all Christians will at last, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, be gathered into the one and only Church in that unity which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. We believe that this unity subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose [*quamque inamissibilem in Ecclesia Catholica subsistere credimus*], and we hope that it will continue to increase until

the end of time.

The other passage comes in paragraph 13, where the talk is of different communions separated from the Roman See:

Among those in which Catholic traditions and institutions in part continue to exist [*in quibus [83] traditiones et structurae Catholicae ex parte subsistere pergunt*], Anglican Communion occupies a special place.

Putting these passages together, it appears that *subsistit in* can well be translated by 'is present in', provided, perhaps, that we add an additional nuance to the effect that the true presence in question is something essential, constitutive.

'Catholic'

However, when *est* was replaced by *subsistit in*, this change affected also the words in the immediate context. The fact that many of Council Fathers may not have been fully aware of this does not affect the point. A statement can imply more than what its author consciously and explicitly intended.⁵ When the first draft said that the Church designated as Catholic in the Creed was straightforwardly the Roman Catholic Church, then the two realities were being equated, and no distinction at all was being made between them. But o people started to say that the Catholic Church *subsisted in* the Catholic Church, then this could only make sense if 'Catholic Church' now had two different meanings. The final formula is logically possible only if the two uses of 'Catholic Church' no longer have quite the same sNSE. The point stands, whatever the authors were thinking at the time, and whatever they might have been explicitly intending.

⁵ A German example: when the German Basic Law was formulated in 1949, the authors wrote that everyone was to have a right to the 'free development' of their personality (Article 2). At that point in history, they were certainly not thinking of the right to freedom of movement. But 'free development of the personality' is such a wide-ranging concept that we can correctly today see it as incorporating freedom of movement. The authors of the Law were seeking not to circumscribe the country's future within what they could consciously envisage, but really to pave a way to whatever the future might promise. Anyone invoking this article in support of the right to freedom of movement is perfectly justified in so doing.

'Catholic Church' is evidently being used here in two different senses, a 'transcendental' one and then a 'categorical' one. We begin by talking about the Church as such, the Church in some kind of absolute sense, 'the universal Church'. Then we go on to talk about a 'particular Church'. The universal Church which is designated as Catholic in Creed is fully present in the particular Church that is led by the Pope and by the bishops who are in communion with him. But then this *Roman Catholic* Church is no longer the *universal* Church. Given that *subsistit in* has replaced *est*, the Roman Catholic Church can be [84] understood only as one of the particular Churches in which the universal Church is expressing itself.⁶ The Church designated in the Creed as Catholic subsists in the particular Church which, among the many Christian Churches, happens to be the

one calling itself 'Catholic'.

⁶ The point stands even if there are also 'uniate' Churches in communion with Rome that have their own institutional structures. The Roman Catholic Church is itself a communion of Churches and hence described in the *Code of Canon Law* as an *ecclesia universa*, 'a whole Church' in the sense of being a kind of composite. But this is to be distinguished from *ecclesia universalis*, the universal Church of Christ, the Church as such. Even as a communion of Churches, an *ecclesia universa*, the Roman Catholic Church is still an *ecclesia particularis*. It is not identical with the *ecclesia universalis*.

In 2002, Alexandra von Teuffenbach published a dissertation on the meaning of *subsistit in Lumen gentium* 8 that has become quite influential in certain circles: *Die Bedeutung des subsistit in (LG 8): Zum Selbstverständnis der katholischen Kirche* (Munich: Utz, 2002). She claims that the phrase '*subsistit in*' is equivalent to *est*, on the ground that otherwise the clause in the text, 'although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure [*extra eius compaginem*]', would be meaningless. What she fails to realise is that this clause refers *not* to the Church of the Creed, but only to the particular Church known as the Roman Catholic Church. It is rather doubtful that elements of Christianity can be found outside the Church as meant in the Creed.

Moreover, by calling itself 'Catholic', that particular Church is setting itself under a norm, a challenge. Being Catholic is something it has to live up to. Its proclamation has really to reach *everyone*, to be something intelligible and convincing to everyone. This challenge of universality might well appear uncongenial. Perhaps this is why people normally prefer to stay with 'Catholic' rather than the more normal 'universal' – the meaning of the Greek work remains unknown to many people, and it can function simply as a name. We should also note that the original meanings of the word 'Catholic' (for the whole earth) and 'ecumenical' (for the whole inhabited world) were in effect interchangeable. Perhaps the particular mission of the Roman Catholic Church consists just in serving the unity of all Churches.

The so-called four marks of the Church set out in the Creed – unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity – are characteristics linked *in a way that is quite indissoluble* to the word of God that has come forth in Jesus Christ himself. It is this word that constitutes the Church as such, the *ecclesia universalis*. Faith in Jesus Christ is fundamentally one single reality, a reality that sanctifies and makes holy, a reality which is to be proclaimed to all human beings, a reality which proceeds from the Church established by Jesus on the foundation of the apostles. None of these four characteristics or marks can be separated from the faith. Nor does it make sense to say that faith in Jesus Christ can be [85] more or less one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Rather these characteristics belong to faith in a way that fundamentally admits of no surpassing. Nor is faith something which can be graded and quantified. When the disciples ask Jesus for an increase of faith, Jesus explains to them that faith is not something that can be increased; it is merely a matter of apprehending what one has in fact already received, however little the faith may seem:

'If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, then you would say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea", and it would obey you.'⁷

⁷ Luke 17: 5-6. The standard translation begins, 'If you had faith', a phrase which implies that Jesus is rebuking the disciples for not having faith at all, even though they have asked him to increase their faith. But the Greek verb is in the indicative, not the subjunctive. Jesus is not

questioning the disciples' implicit claim to have faith, but rather endorsing it, and drawing their attention to the fact that it makes no sense to speak of increasing it. They only need to realise that they already have it.

Deficiency of Faith?

The customary ground for denying that a person is in full ecclesial communion is the supposition that the person has 'a deficiency of faith'. At least since Vatican II, Roman Catholics generally recognise that other Christians too, who believe in Jesus Christ, 'have been justified by faith in Baptism' and 'are members of Christ's body' (*Unitatis redintegratio*, 3). Nor is it just individual believers who partake in God's grace; the Holy Spirit in person 'has not refrained' from using their Churches and communities too, 'though we believe them to be deficient ..., as means of salvation'.⁸

⁸ *Etsi defectus illas pati credimus* – but can we really say that it is an object of faith in the full sense that other Churches suffer from lacks? *Credimus* here can only be signifying an opinion, rather than faith in the theological sense.

But then there is an oddity. Neither the fact that we recognise other Christians as members of Christ, nor the fact that their Churches have become instruments of the Holy Spirit, seem to suffice without further ado for such things as eucharistic communion. The point needs to be rethought in the light of Acts 10:47 ('Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?') and 11: 17 ('If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I [86] could hinder God?'). According to these texts, no one can rightly be excluded from communion who, like us, believes that in the Eucharist his or her faith lives from Jesus himself as nourishment.

This kind of idea that other people can have taken on board the Christian faith only to a partial extent depends on the opinion that faith consists of elements that can be added on to each other, and that one's collection has to be as complete as possible. Such a conception arises when faith is made into a kind of catalogue of beliefs, and when one loses sight of the mutual entailments between the beliefs we hold in faith. And this way of thinking is perhaps the chief obstacle to ecumenical understanding: it is like the log in our own eye that we need to remove before we can set about helping to remove the speck in anyone else's (Matthew 7:3). But could it not rather be that all the statements which are truly faith-statements necessarily entail each other, in such a way that they are always merely the unfolding of one and the same fundamental mystery: our communion with God, a communion which consists in our knowing ourselves to be taken up by Jesus into his relationship with the Father? Thus it was that Irenaeus of Lyon taught:

Since faith is one and the same, the person who can say much about it does not have more of it; and the person who can say little about it does not have less of it.⁹

⁹ *Adversus haereses*, 1.10.2.

What holds faith in Jesus Christ together, what makes it numerically one faith, depends on the fact that to believe in Jesus Christ means to know oneself, on the basis of Jesus' word, to be loved by God with that same love through which God is related to Him as His own Son from all eternity. But this is a love that does not find its measure in anything created, and hence does not become greater or lesser depending on particular people's perspectives. One cannot just read off this love of God from any created reality, because this love is not commensurate with anything created. It can only come to our knowledge by its being *spoken* of in a *word*; and it can only be apprehended in faith.

By 'word of God', I mean the word uttered between human beings through which the faith is passed on that first emerged in Jesus of [87] Nazareth, and that can only be transmitted 'from faith to faith' (Romans 1:17) – faith which itself constitutes the Church.

The content of the Christian message can ultimately be nothing other than a clarification of how it can claim in any sense at all to be 'the word of God'. For the claim that a message even *could* be God's word is anything but obvious. How can one possibly claim that the God on whom all else depends, the God who 'dwells in unapproachable light' (1 Timothy 6:16), makes the gift of communion with and of *Himself*? The idea that God's own self is given to the world requires a Trinitarian understanding of God, within which the world is not the confining measure of God's love. God's self-gift to the world occurs within that love which from all eternity is the Holy Spirit: the love of the Father for the Son.

The Christian message is 'the word of God': God's loving address to us revealed in human word. But to be able to speak with full seriousness of 'the word of God', one needs to invoke God's [88] Incarnation. Only in this context does it make sense at all to talk of divine self-communication through the word.

To recognise this love of God which occurs and becomes manifest in 'the word of God' requires a faith which just is the reality of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Given such a faith, it is not then just an additional fact that one happens to be in agreement with all other believers. A person who has faith in this sense is necessarily in agreement with everyone else who does.

All realities of the world are such that our knowledge of them depends on the perspective through which we see them. Other people see those realities differently, and we can never fully coincide with other people's viewpoint. Christian faith, however, is in this respect the very opposite: if, strictly speaking, agreement with others is possible at all, then the agreement has to be complete. For what we believe is something that overshoots earthly perspectives, and is not confined to the measure of anything created. What we believe is one and the same: the eternal love of the Father for the Son into which we are being drawn.

Thus it was that the great theology of the Middle Ages could say 'nothing false can be

the object of faith [*fidei non potest subesse falsum*].¹⁰ This sentence only makes sense if it is understood as entailing the following: it is impossible to make statements of faith in the sense of expressing God's self-communication, which are nevertheless false. For statements of faith in the full sense, statements expressing God's self-communication, must be statements in which there is actually occurring the very reality of which they are speaking: God's loving self-gift to us in the interpersonal word through which faith is passed on. And if the statements can really be understood in this kind of way, then they are necessarily true 'of themselves [*ex sese*]'.¹¹

¹⁰ The phrase is quoted by the Council of Trent in its Decree on Justification, n.9.

¹¹ The formulation comes from Vatican I, *Pastor aeternus*, n.4: if the Pope defines a doctrine in the realm of faith and (its application to) morals (this is the absolutely necessary condition for infallibility) as something to be held by the whole Church, his definitions 'are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable'. 'The application of faith to morals' (see *Lumen gentium*, 25) expresses the truth that only what is done in communion with God can be good before Him—a statement that is nothing other than the doctrine of justification. Moral norms as such (what tradition calls natural law) are the object of reason, and cannot be taught with the infallibility of faith.

Moreover, to claim that other things are matters of faith in the Christian sense of the word is not to make a meaningful claim which is [89] just wrong, but rather a claim that is meaningless, and therefore unintelligible, from the very outset. If a statement *can* be false, then, however well-intentioned it may be, it cannot be understood as expressing God's self-gift. It is on the basis of this principle that faith is maintained in its perfection and purity, not by Church officials checking up on people's orthodoxy and requiring oaths of fidelity.

In *Lumen gentium* 12, we read: 'The entire body of the faithful [*universitas fidelium*], anointed as they are by the Holy One (see 1 John 2:20 and 2:27) cannot err in matters of belief'. When, therefore, the Council at the same time also ascribes true faith in Jesus Christ also other Christians (as we have seen in *Unitatis redintegratio*), then they too must belong to this whole body of believers who, as such, cannot err. Why is it impossible for those who have faith to err? Because faith just is being filled with the Holy Spirit, and it depends on a word that can only be understood as true 'on the basis of itself [*ex sese*]'. This word can only be speaking of something which is actually happening *within itself*: God's loving self-gift to us. This word is not reporting on something else happening outside itself, with the consequence that its truth or falsehood depends on whether it is performing that to correctly. It is speaking about what is happening *in itself* as it is actually spoken, and therefore can only be either true or unintelligible.

'One, holy, Catholic and apostolic' – these are qualities that belong not only to a particular Church but to Christian faith as such, and in a way that admits of no surpassing. And only on the basis of this more fundamental reality can our own Roman Catholic Church attribute these qualities also to itself.

The Church and the Ongoing Transmission of God's Word

The one Church of Jesus Christ, which we profess in faith to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, consists in the ongoing event of this 'word of God' being handed on, this word in which God gives us Himself. For the idea of a 'word of God' only makes sense if we understand it something which cannot be surpassed and cannot be supplemented. The word of God is the event of God's self-imparting in the interpersonal word which is the handing on of faith. From the outset, this event is something communal, indeed ecclesial. No one possess the faith from his or her own resources; everyone has to receive it as

[90] something proclaimed by those who believe already. And the fact that even the faith held by all people together, and thus the faith of the whole community, nevertheless comes from hearing finds its expression in ecclesial ministry: in those who relate to the others as a whole (to the body as such, not just to individuals) in the 'person of Christ as Head [*in persona Christi Capitis*]'. It follows that where there is real and effective Christian faith, the structure of ministry willed by Christ is necessarily being preserved 'unfailingly [*indefectibiliter*]' – to use the expression of *Lumen gentium*, 27,2.

However, this continuing transmission of the word of God occurs in different language-communities. It is not just that people speak different native languages, but also that even within the same native languages different theological languages are used. You can compare this with the use of arabic and roman numerals – they are different, but you can count perfectly with either, even if arabic symbols are easier to handle.

It is in terms of such an analogy that we need to think about the different particular Churches. If they are Churches at all, they are living out of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. It follows that the one Church of Jesus Christ 'subsists in' them. Certainly this Church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Church that calls itself 'Roman Catholic', and this Church can rightly claim to represent the fullness of faith in Jesus Christ. But that does not give the Roman Catholic Church any right to question the 'real presence' of the very same one Catholic Church of Christ also in other Christian communities. For it is simply impossible to believe in Jesus Christ in a deficient way. If faith means belief in God's self-gift, then you either really have it or else you do not have it at all. 'No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.' (1 Corinthians 12:3)

But surely, it might be objected, there remain wide differences of faith between the different Christian Churches. Are there not many Churches which deny claims that the Roman Church makes, for example regarding papal infallibility? Are they not lacking in what the Roman Church sees as necessary for its very existence: the papacy and other such things? And if you answer yes to these questions, it seems [91] that it is only in a diminished form that the one Church of Christ can subsist in Churches separated from Rome.¹²

¹² John Paul II in fact himself wrote of 'the elements of sanctification and truth present in the other Christian Communities' and says that 'to the extent that these elements are found in other Christian Communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them' (*Ut unum sint*, 11).

The only remaining question here is whether there can therefore actually be such a thing as a differentially graded, perhaps only defective, presence of the one Church of Christ in a particular Church? Can there be a true bond in the Holy Spirit between the different Churches (as there is said to be in *Lumen gentium*, 15) that is nevertheless *in itself* deficient?

But there are answers to these objections. If it is really the case that a Church believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God denies what for another Church is a truth of the faith, one can only assume that the same words are being understood by these two Churches in different ways, and that both, when understood in their own terms, are right. To take an example. In the Lutheran Church we find the principle 'scripture alone – *sola scriptura*'; this sounds like a denial of the Catholic principle that the fullness of revelation occurs only through 'scripture, tradition and magisterium' together. But even such a simple word as 'scripture' has a different meaning in the two [92] expressions. 'Scripture' in the Catholic version means 'scripture that still needs to be interpreted properly'. And the meaning of this scripture will be the reality of Church, the event of faith's being handed on, faith that even today has to be proclaimed by a magisterium. In the Lutheran formula, 'scripture' means 'scripture that has already come to be understood in the sense in which it is the word of God'. To scripture understood in this sense, nothing can be added, because 'the word of God' is by definition the ultimate word about all reality.

The only point that Protestant Christians deny regarding papal infallibility is the possible distortion that, so far, has not been officially removed, whereby papal infallibility is automatically already present if the Pope just feels that he has got something right and on that basis lays claim to infallibility. Up till now, the Roman Catholic Church has failed to name the infallibility criteria to which the Pope himself must conform if he is really to be speaking infallibly rather than unintelligibly.

As regards the impression that Protestant Churches completely lack a magisterium and other structures of the Catholic Church, it is also worth employing a way of thinking that is ecumenically helpful. It is certainly the case that many structures in the Catholic Church are, 'of necessity, possible' structures. But one cannot go on from this basis to declare them absolutely necessary. They can thus also remain latent, until some special need reactivates them. Conciliarity, for example, belongs to the essence of the Church, and therefore it is of necessity possible for the Church to hold Councils. But there have been centuries when there was no Council, without this meaning that the Church had ceased to exist.

The different particular Churches, in all of which the one Church of Jesus Christ subsists, obscure the reality of this subsistence to the extent that they fail to acknowledge this subsistence in the other particular Churches. It seems to be precisely this which hinders even the Roman Catholic Church itself – so *Unitatis redintegratio* 4 – from expressing 'in actual life her full catholicity in all her bearings'. It follows that Peter's pastoral primacy, once he himself has been converted (see Luke 22:32), consists in working not for his own recognition, but rather for the recognition of how the one Catholic [93] Church subsists in all communions that believe in Jesus Christ. His own honour comes to be only in the honouring of all Churches.¹³

¹³ Compare Vatican I, *Pastor aeternus*, n. 3, which quotes a letter of Gregory the Great: 'My honor is the honour of the *universalis ecclesia*. My honour is the steadfast strength of my brethren. Then do I receive true honour, when it is denied to none of those to whom honour is due.'

The criterion for Christian unity can only be faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God, as empowering our own communion with God through our participation in his relationship to the Father. 'Whoever is not with me, against me.' (Matthew 12:30) However, in other matters, we have to do with anyone who is not actively struggling against us, and not denying the rightness of our faith, 'whoever is not against us is for us' (Mark 9:40) This passage is making the point that others who are driving out demons in Jesus' name are not to be prevented on the ground that they are 'one of us'. Jesus himself denies his disciples the right to hinder them.

To see the matter in these terms is not to render the Roman Catholic Church less important. For once you stop seeing its grace as confined to itself, and start seeing that grace as making the Roman Catholic Church's reality as a particular Church something that goes beyond itself, as making visible something which ultimately it has in common with all Christian Churches, then its importance and value becomes all the greater.

Something similar happens with the sacraments. In Holy Communion, we are united with Christ in the deepest way possible. But this union does not remain confined to the moment of receiving Communion; rather, the momentary act of Communion expresses a bond we have with Christ that simultaneously expresses how deep our bond with Christ is at every moment. Our faith is always living from his very self, just as our earthly life is being nourished by what we eat and drink. The actual dignity of the Eucharist consists precisely in this pointing beyond itself. And so it is also with our Roman Catholic Church.