

OCCASIONAL EUCHARISTIC HOSPITALITY: REVISITING THE QUESTION

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*The current Roman Catholic discipline regarding sacramental sharing does not seem to express the degree of communion that now exists between and among the churches. After examining the theological implications of the concept of *communio*, some developments in canon law, and some recent diocesan guidelines, the article asks whether the Roman Catholic Church might offer occasional eucharistic hospitality to some non-Catholic Christians, noting that eucharistic hospitality is different from intercommunion in that it is offered not to churches but to individuals in particular circumstances.*

VATICAN II TAUGHT THAT the church is in Christ “like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*Lumen gentium* no. 1). I submit, however, that its sign value is seriously diminished by the inability of Christians to gather together at the Lord’s Table. This often causes misunderstanding by other Christians who attend Catholic eucharistic liturgies, particularly on special occasions—for example, in Catholic universities in the United States, which are remarkably diverse religiously, non-Catholic Christians are encouraged to attend a Mass of the Holy Spirit or a Baccalaureate Mass but then may not receive Communion. They not only feel unwelcome themselves, but they also feel that their churches and ecclesial communities are not respected; the current Roman Catholic discipline fails to express the degree of communion and doctrinal agreement that now exists among and between churches, makes little sense to young Catholics today, and is increasingly ignored by others.

Many Protestant churches welcome all baptized Christians to share in their eucharistic celebrations, arguing that it is the Lord who invites them to

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his Supper. Vatican II encouraged some *communicatio in sacris* with the Orthodox, on the basis of their having true sacraments and, by apostolic succession, the authentic priesthood and the Eucharist (*Unitatis redintegratio* [UR], the Decree on Ecumenism, no. 15), but the Orthodox have been unwilling to welcome eucharistic sharing with Roman Catholics. They believe the term “intercommunion” is inept, as eucharistic communion makes sense only in a fully united church.¹ Walter Kasper argues that the Orthodox lack a clear consensus about the ecclesial and salvific character of the non-Orthodox churches and about the validity of their baptism. The distinction between full and partial communion, so important to Roman Catholic ecumenical theology, is not part of their official teaching.² He cites a remark of Orthodox theologian George Florovsky that Orthodox ecclesiology is still in a “pre-theological stage.”³

Could the Roman Catholic Church reevaluate its current discipline to extend an offer of occasional eucharistic hospitality to some non-Catholic Christians? Note that eucharistic hospitality is different from intercommunion, since it is offered not to churches but to individuals in particular circumstances. It falls considerably short of full communion, which is based on a formal agreement between churches and makes possible concelebration and the exchanging of ministers. To answer this question about extending eucharistic hospitality, I review briefly what Vatican II said about *communicatio in sacris*; look at developments since the council ended, including some encouraging developments in canon law that focus not on relations between churches but on the needs of individuals; and explore the theological implications of the concept of *communio* (*koinōnia*), so important to the council’s thinking. Finally, I consider some diocesan guidelines that make occasional sacramental sharing possible.

VATICAN II

Vatican II’s position on eucharistic sharing is complex. According to UR:

Worship in common [*communicatio in sacris*] is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately [*indiscretim*] for the restoration of Christian unity. There are two main principles governing the practice of such common worship: first, the bearing witness to the unity of the Church, and second, the sharing in the means of grace. Witness to the unity of the Church very generally forbids common worship to

¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2001) 258.

² Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today* (London: Burns and Oates, 2004) 59; see also Geoffrey Wainwright, “The Nature of Communion,” *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy Annual Meeting* (January 1–5, 1999) 21–22.

³ Cited in Kasper, *That They May All Be One* 59.

Christians, but the grace to be had from it sometimes commends this practice. The course to be adopted, with due regard to all the circumstances of time, place, and persons, is to be decided by local episcopal authority, unless otherwise provided for by the Bishops' Conference according to its statutes, or by the Holy See (*UR* no. 8).⁴

The late George Tavard, who helped draft this section and wrote the *relatio* for Bishop Charles H. Helmsing, says that the adverb *indiscretim* was used to indicate the dialectical relationship of the two principles, witnessing to the unity of the church and sharing in the means of grace: "*Indiscretim* does not mean that *communicatio in sacris* may be practiced, not indiscriminately but discriminately or with discretion; it means that the two aspects of communion (means of grace, and expression of unity) cannot be separated."⁵

While the council left concrete cases up to local episcopal authority, subsequent instructions from Rome have forbidden eucharistic sharing in almost all cases involving Protestant churches. However, the council did allow for the possibility of eucharistic sharing between Catholic and Orthodox Christians on the basis of the Orthodox having "true sacraments, above all—by apostolic succession—the priesthood and the Eucharist" (*UR* 15; see also *Orientalium ecclesiarum* nos. 26–29).

POSTCONCILIAR DEVELOPMENTS

Since the council pertinent developments have occurred. According to the 1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, "Catholic ministers may lawfully administer the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and the anointing of the sick to members of the Eastern Churches who ask for these sacraments of their own free will and are properly disposed."⁶ The *Directory* recognizes that baptized members of other churches and ecclesial communities are brought into a real, if imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church (*UR* no. 3). While access to the Eucharist and to the sacraments of penance and anointing of the sick is generally permitted only to those who share oneness in faith, worship, and ecclesial life, by way of exception, Catholic ministers may administer these sacraments to baptized members of other churches and ecclesial communities who are in danger of death and unable to access their own ministers.⁷

⁴ *Unitatis redintegratio*, <http://www.vatican.va>. All URLs cited herein were accessed January 2, 2013. The texts of all Vatican documents referenced herein can be found by searching their titles on the Internet.

⁵ George Tavard, "Praying Together: *Communicatio in sacris* in the Decree on Ecumenism," in *Vatican II: By Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (London: Chapman, 1986) 212–214, at 214.

⁶ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (hereafter *Directory*) (Washington: USCC, 1993) no. 125.

⁷ *Ibid.* nos. 129–31.

In his encyclical on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), Pope John Paul II reiterated that eucharistic sharing is generally impossible, as did Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum caritatis* (2007), his apostolic exhortation on the Eucharist. John Paul stressed that eucharistic sharing and concelebration is not permitted until the bonds of communion in the profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical government are fully reestablished. He did, however, acknowledge that under special circumstances, the Eucharist may be administered to individual persons belonging to churches or ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church to meet a grave spiritual need for their eternal salvation.⁸ Benedict asked that Christians who are not Catholic understand and respect the church's conviction, grounded in the Bible and tradition, "that eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion are so linked as to make it generally impossible for non-Catholic Christians to receive the former without enjoying the latter."⁹ Recently Cardinal Kurt Koch, the current president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), reaffirmed that baptism is an insufficient ground for eucharistic communion,¹⁰ a position he reemphasized at the opening of the International Theology Symposium at Maynooth on the eve of the International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin on June 10, 2012.¹¹ But what else might be said?

In her study of postconciliar legislation on the question of eucharistic sharing, canonist Myriam Wijlens argues that since the council tremendous progress has been made, particularly in regard to the complex situation in the West. While the council spoke only of dialogue, the postconciliar Ecumenical Directories and Codes of Canon Law have differentiated between churches and ecclesial communities, drawn different consequences for individuals belonging to these churches or ecclesial communities, and increasingly attempted to formulate rules on the basis of an existing *communio*. The legislation, however, has not yet taken account of the council's dialectic between the Eucharist as a sign of unity and as a means of grace, but only as a means of grace for individuals belonging to other ecclesial communities, and that by way of exception.¹²

⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* nos. 44–45; see John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* nos. 45–46.

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis* no. 56.

¹⁰ Kurt Koch, "Recent Ecumenical Progress and Future Prospects," *Origins* 41 (2011) 395–402, at 400.

¹¹ Kurt Koch, "The Relation between Eucharist and Ecclesial Communion: An Ecumenical View," <http://blog.radiovatican.de/die-einheit-der-kirche-und-die-gemeinsame-kommunion/>.

¹² Myriam Wijlens, *Sharing the Eucharist: A Theological Evaluation of the Post Conciliar Legislation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000) 364–65; her study examines the 1967 and 1983 Ecumenical Directories, the 1983 Code of

As far as Protestant Christians are concerned, the Catholic Church has raised questions about the validity of their sacraments and the full ecclesial reality of their churches, though progress since the council should make movement forward on these questions possible. Few today would want to limit genuine ecclesiality and sacramental validity to the question of apostolic succession, narrowly understood as a succession of episcopal ordinations considered by itself. John Burkhard includes Yves Congar, Joseph Ratzinger, and Francis Sullivan among those who have serious reservations about this mechanical theory of apostolic succession.¹³ Nor does the question of sacramental “invalidity” seem to be the issue it once was.

Jérôme Hamer has argued that the theological language of the Council of Trent does not permit a conclusion concerning the validity of ministries in the Protestant communities. Trent did not decide this question.¹⁴ Many scholars maintain that Trent considered Protestant orders as illicit but valid.¹⁵ Tavard has argued that a judgment of invalidity is implied as a statement of principle, but was not a conclusion actually drawn by Trent.¹⁶ Similarly, while Vatican II and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s (CDF) *Dominus Iesus* (DI no. 17; see also UR no. 22) seem to imply a judgment of invalidity, as does the practice of reordaining ministers from other communities who want to become Roman Catholic priests, it could be argued that such ordinations are to supply the missing sign of full communion in the apostolic tradition rather than validity itself. But given the fact that the Catholic Church has not authoritatively declared ministry in the

Canon Law for the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church, and the 1991 Code of Canons for the Eastern Church; R. Kevin Seasoltz also recognizes a development toward more open communion in his *God’s Gift Giving: In Christ and Through the Spirit* (New York: Continuum, 2007) 218–23.

¹³ John J. Burkhard, *Apostolicity Then and Now: An Ecumenical Church in a Postmodern World* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2004) 39.

¹⁴ Jérôme Hamer, O.P., “La terminologie ecclésiologique de Vatican II et les ministères Protestants,” *Documentation catholique* 68 (1971) 625–28, at 628.

¹⁵ See Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., “Has the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Exceeded Its Authority?” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001) 805–8. Some might extrapolate from Leo XIII’s judgment in *Apostolicae curae* (1896) that ordinations carried out according to the Anglican rite are “absolutely null and utterly void” (no. 36). In his commentary on John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Ad tuendam fidem*, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger mentioned this judgment as among those truths “to be held definitively” (“Commentary on Profession of Faith’s Concluding Paragraphs,” *Origins* 28 [1998] 116–19, at 119). However, a sidebar (117) notes that Avery Dulles, among others, found this judgment debatable.

¹⁶ George Tavard, “The Recognition of Ministry,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11 (1974) 65–83, at 68; according to Bishop Richard Sklba, Trent left open many questions regarding ministry, not wishing “to resolve issues prematurely or contrary to more ancient opinions in the church” (“Four Important Truths Learned in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue,” *Origins* 30 [2000] 451–52, at 452).

Reformation churches invalid, either at Trent or subsequently, it is difficult to see why it could not recognize the ecclesial status of the Reformation churches in that they are eucharistic communities, joined in a communion with other churches, and with the Catholic Church through the historic creeds and more recent consensus statements on justification, Eucharist, and ministry.¹⁷

Susan Wood cites Ratzinger's 1993 letter to Bavarian Lutheran Bishop Johannes Hanselmann, acknowledging the Lord's presence in the Lutheran Lord's Supper:

I count among the most important results of the ecumenical dialogues the insight that the issue of the eucharist cannot be narrowed to the problem of "validity." Even a theology oriented to the concept of succession, such as that which holds in the Catholic and in the Orthodox church, need not in any way deny the salvation-granting presence of the Lord [Heilschaffende Gegenwart des Herrn] in a Lutheran [evangelische] Lord's Supper.¹⁸

Of course, a personal letter from then-Cardinal Ratzinger is not the same as a statement of the magisterium. Still, it is not insignificant that Cardinal Ratzinger was elected pope.

Wood suggests that John Paul II's judgment in his 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, regarding both the nature of the Lord's Supper in Protestant communities and the nature of their ordinations "seems to be of an all-or-nothing nature."¹⁹ The pope argues that a true eucharistic assembly requires a priest ordained "through episcopal succession going back to the apostles."²⁰ This seems to make both full ecclesial status and sacramental validity depend on apostolic succession, narrowly understood. This was the position of *Dominus Iesus* a few years earlier.

Yet Kasper, in a 2001 report to the PCPCU, has stated that *Dominus Iesus* went beyond the words of the council in stating that the Church of Jesus Christ is "fully" realized only in the Catholic Church. This language does not mean that there is an "ecclesial vacuum" outside the Catholic Church. *Dominus Iesus* "does not state that the ecclesial communities which issued from the Reformation are not churches; it only maintains that they are not churches in the proper sense, which means, positively, that in

¹⁷ See, e.g., Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," *Origins* 28 (1998) 120–27, at 124; Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report* (London: CTS/SPCK, 1982).

¹⁸ Susan K. Wood, "Ecclesia de Eucharistia: A Roman Catholic Response," in *Pro Ecclesia* 12 (2003) 394–400, at 398; see "Briefwechsel von Landesbischof Johannes Hanselmann und Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger über das communio-Schreiben der Römischen Glaubenskongregation," *Una Sancta* 48 (1993) 347–51, at 348.

¹⁹ Wood, "Ecclesia de Eucharistia" 397.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* no. 29.

an improper sense, analogous to the Catholic Church, they are church. Indeed . . . they do not want to be church in the Catholic sense.”²¹

Like Kasper and others, Wood argues that a more developed understanding of ministry, sacramental life, and ecclesiology would translate the *defectus* of UR no. 22 as “deficiency” or “defect,” rather than simply as “lack.”²² The issue is not validity, the *res sacramenti*, but a defect in regard to the sign.²³ Kasper says something similar: “Both Catholic fullness and the *defectus* of the others are therefore sacramental and institutional, and not existential or even moral in nature; they are on the level of the signs and instruments of grace not on the level of the *res*, the grace of salvation itself.”²⁴ However, communion in sacramental grace should be visibly expressed. Sometimes there are good reasons for not seeking intercommunion with another community—for example, with one that has departed significantly from the historic tradition, does not understand the Eucharist as it was understood in the tradition or no longer celebrates it, preaches the prosperity gospel, lacks visible bonds of unity with other churches, or does not consider Catholics to be Christians. Some churches—for example, the Reformed Church in France and some Methodists and Episcopalians in the United States and elsewhere—practice or are moving toward “open communion,” inviting even the unbaptized to receive the sacrament.²⁵ This practice risks reducing the Eucharist to a meal of welcome and fellowship, rather than a profound encounter with the risen Jesus that constitutes the church as church. Thus there remain significant differences that suggest that, in many cases, the time for intercommunion and the full communion it expresses is not yet here. Still, there are some theological reasons for rethinking the current position of the Catholic Church.²⁶ Perhaps the

²¹ Walter Kasper, “Prolusio: Present Situation and Future of the Ecumenical Movement,” PCPCU’s *Information Service* 109 (2002/I–II) 18.

²² Wood, “*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*” 398. See Burkhard’s extended discussion of the concept of sacramental validity, *Apostolicity Then and Now* 218–23.

²³ This is the position of the US Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue Common Statement, *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries* no. 108, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/dialogue-with-others/ecumenical/lutheran/koinonia-of-salvation.cfm>.

²⁴ Kasper, “Prolusio” 18.

²⁵ See Koch, “Recent Ecumenical Progress and Prospects” 401; and Gary Nicolosi, “Guest Reflection: A Case for Open Communion,” *Anglican Journal* (March 7, 2011), <http://www.anglicanjournal.com/nc/other/news-items/archive/2011/03/pa/1/article/guest-reflection-a-case-for-open-communication-9609//abp/167.html>. Mark W. Stamm, in *Let Every Soul Be Jesus’ Guest: A Theology of the Open Table* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006) 39, presents a nuanced argument for a “sacramental exception” that must remain in creative tension with the church’s baptismal norm.

²⁶ See Johannes Brosseder and Hans-Georg Link, eds., *Eucharistische Gastfreundschaft: Ein Plädoyer evangelischer und katholischer Theologen* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 2003).

Roman Catholic Church needs to reflect more profoundly on the meaning of *communio* (*koinōnia*), on what *communio* says about mission, and on its own claim to catholicity.

THE CONCEPT OF *COMMUNIO*

The primary meaning of the Greek *koinōnia* is participation, based on the verb *koinōnein*, to share, to participate, to have something in common. While the word occurs frequently in Paul's letters (1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 1:5, 7; 13:13; Phil 1:5; Phlm 6), perhaps it finds its strongest expression in 1 John and 2 Peter. The author of 1 John speaks of our *koinōnia* or communion with the Father and with his Son, and of the communion with one another that those who accept the church's proclamation will receive (1 Jn 1:3). The author of 2 Peter promises a *koinōnia* or participation in the divine nature to those who have faith (2 Pt 1:4). Ecclesial communion has sacramental roots: baptism into Christ in the one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) and communion in his body and blood unite the disciples into the one body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16–17). Thus the foundation of *koinonia* is always spiritual; it cannot be reduced to unity in doctrine, institutional structures, and authority—in short, to a juridical ecclesiology. *Koinonia* or communion means primarily sharing in the trinitarian life of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, initiated by baptism, nourished by word and sacrament, especially the Eucharist, and expressed through visible signs.

At the same time, *communio* does not mean a superficial inclusiveness that ignores substantive differences in faith or introduces new divisions into the ecclesial community. Visible signs of communion are important; when they are lost, the sense of genuine spiritual communion is usually lost as well, as history has so often shown. Still, that communion in the divine mystery is essentially ecclesial and eucharistic and, when shared, should be given expression.

Partial Communion

Vatican II (*UR* no. 3; see *LG* no. 15) recognized that baptism into Christ brings about a partial or imperfect communion between Christians of different churches and ecclesial communities and the Catholic Church. The 1993 *Directory* sees those churches and ecclesial communities as retaining “a certain communion” with the Catholic Church (no. 18). What does this partial or imperfect communion mean? A close reading of Johannes Feiner's commentary on the Decree on Ecumenism shows that the Council took a number of significant steps in regard to how the relationship between the Catholic Church and other Christians and their churches

should be conceived, breaking new ground in affirming elements of the church present in them.²⁷

First, *UR* avoids the problematic language of *membrum Ecclesiae in voto*, meaning that, while other Christians are not actual members of the Catholic Church, neither are they simply nonmembers. Nor did *UR* use the equally problematic term *vestigia ecclesiae*, previously used in both Protestant and Catholic theology. “The Decree on Ecumenism recognizes in non-Catholic communities more than Calvin does in the papal church, more than mere scanty ‘vestiges’ or miserable ‘relics’; it sees in them essential structural elements of the church.”²⁸

Second, in adapting the concept of “separated from full communion with the Catholic Church” (*a plena communione Ecclesiae seiunctae*), the council signified that the divisions did not mean a complete and total separation. Its concept of communion was not the normal canonical or juridical concept, which does not admit of degrees, but is based rather on the dogmatic concept of *communio*, which recognizes and affirms an incomplete communion. The Latin *seiunctae* is different from *separatae*; its implication of an incomplete separation is not easily captured in English or German.²⁹

Third, even if there are obstacles, primarily institutional, that hinder full communion, baptized non-Catholic Christians are both justified by faith and incorporated into the body of Christ. The Latin text says that they are “*Christo incorporantur*, the concept of the body being retained in the verb,” contrary to Pius XII’s formula in *Mystici Corporis* (1943): “The mystical body of Christ is the Catholic Church.” “If this formula is not understood in its historical context,” it seems to deny any reality to the church outside the Catholic Church.³⁰

Fourth, *UR* clearly affirms that *constitutive* elements of the church are present in those communities separated from the Catholic Church. Without offering a full list of those elements, the decree recognizes the written word of God, the life of grace, the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, other gifts of the Spirit, and certain visible elements, all of which belong by right to the one church of Christ (*UR* no 3).³¹ While the decree speaks of an imperfect communion between the Catholic Church and other Christians, the latter are seen not as isolated individuals but as members of their communities.³²

UR also recognizes that the liturgical or sacramental actions of other ecclesial communities have the power to give grace effective for salvation. If the decree sees the Lord’s Supper in the Protestant churches in a different

²⁷ See Johannes Feiner, “Commentary on the Decree on Ecumenism,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols., ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), “Decree on Ecumenism” 2:57–164, at 69.

²⁸ Ibid. 74.

²⁹ Ibid. 70.

³⁰ Ibid. 73.

³¹ Ibid. 74.

³² Ibid. 69.

light from the validity of all the sacraments in the Orthodox Church, “this does not mean that the Catholic Church denies the effectiveness for grace of the Protestant Lord’s Supper—as indeed it also considers marriage between Protestant Christians as a sacrament effecting grace, even though the Reformation churches do not share this conviction without qualification.”³³ Since the Spirit uses these Christian communities as means to lead their members to salvation, Feiner asks whether the non-Catholic Christian communities should be regarded “as different realizations and different kinds of presence of the one Church of Christ, and therefore be known as (particular) Churches.”³⁴ Francis Sullivan makes the same suggestion in reference to *UR*, arguing that they are at least analogous to particular churches of the Catholic Church.³⁵

In summary, *UR* clearly sees constitutive elements of the church in the non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities, elements that incorporate their members into the body of Christ, link them to other Christians in the communion of the church through the life of grace, and are capable of leading them to salvation. Since the council’s perspective is primarily institutional rather than soteriological, it does not speak of the fullness of salvation in the Catholic Church, but only of the fullness of the *means* of salvation (see *LG* no. 14), an important difference. It is from this point of view that “fullness” is predicated of the Catholic Church, “and consequently it is through the Catholic Church alone that full incorporation into the body of Christ can take place [*plene incorporantur*], in so far as the latter is essentially a visible body.”³⁶

Perhaps the CDF might ponder more deeply the theological implications of the communion that the Catholic Church recognizes as already existing, particularly with respect to its soteriological dimensions. In an article marking the centennial of the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Catherine Clifford argues that those 100 years have seen a reshaping of Christian consciousness, from a narrow, practical collaboration in mission territories to a new sense that “oneness” is of the very nature of the church.³⁷ At the heart of this shift is the recognition of the implications of the concept of *communio* that I have been considering.

Clifford writes: “The church that Christians confess as ‘one’ is the body of all those who are incorporated into Christ through baptism and who through baptism participate in the communion of life that is shared by the divine Trinity. This communion of life is the wellspring of the very mission

³³ Ibid. 75.

³⁴ Ibid. 76

³⁵ Francis A. Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In* (New York: Paulist, 1988) 32.

³⁶ Feiner, “Commentary on the Decree” 79.

³⁷ Catherine E. Clifford, “Unity and Mission One Hundred Years On,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46 (2011) 332–36.

of the church.”³⁸ This understanding of the church as a communion of life is evident in Vatican II’s affirmation that “the Church is in Christ as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate unity with God and of the unity of all humanity” (*LG* no. 1) and in the more recent World Council of Churches’ Faith and Order statement, “The Nature and Mission of the Church”: “The Church is not merely the sum of individual believers in communion with God, nor primarily the mutual communion of individual believers among themselves. It is their common partaking in the life of God (2 Pet 1:4), who as Trinity is the source and focus of all communion.”³⁹ The council recognized that all the baptized have been incorporated into the body of Christ and thus share in the communion that is the life of the Trinity, even if from an institutional perspective that communion is only partial or incomplete.

But the rediscovery of communion has been a mixed blessing. If it has provided the basis for growth toward greater theological consensus, Clifford points out, it has also highlighted the distance between those churches seeking full, visible unity as the ecumenical goal. While churches in Europe and North America struggle for internal cohesion, face marginalization in Western societies, and decline in numbers, the Christian center of gravity has shifted to the Global South. In an era when globalization has broken down traditional barriers and interreligious dialogue has become a new imperative, the churches of the Global South have little, if any, sense of what it means to live and act as a world church. They are unable to speak with one voice, while more conservative Christians continue to pursue a narrow call to personal salvation through belief in Jesus.⁴⁰ Commenting on what is the experience of many of us, Clifford points out that her students, for example, are pragmatic ecumenists, “with little understanding and no little impatience for the deep doctrinal conflicts that continue to vitiate the unity of Christ’s body, and that ultimately undermine the ability of Christians to proclaim a gospel of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation in the world.”⁴¹

Roger Haight argues that partial communion is a fluid historical concept and admits of many degrees. The concept is “tensive,” holding in tension a positive and a negative value. Positively, the basis for partial communion is the experience of a common ecclesial existence, that is, church is experienced as a religious community assembled for worship, in which God is

³⁸ Ibid. 336.

³⁹ Ibid. See “The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement” no. 13, Faith and Order Paper 198 (Geneva: WCC, 2005), http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/FO2005_198_en.pdf.

⁴⁰ Clifford, “Unity and Mission” 336–40.

⁴¹ Ibid. 329.

mediated to church members through Jesus Christ. In spite of different ways of defining church or organizational differences already evident in the New Testament, the members of the different churches “have a deep sense that there is one faith, one Lord, one baptism of membership, and life in one Spirit of God.”⁴² But a communion that is only “partial” has negative connotations; if some church members think that “communion” communicates an ideal, perhaps an eschatological ideal, others are convinced that there are grounds for communion that are often blocked by a failure to acknowledge them. Such grounds include a common apostolic ecclesial life, a legacy of common traditions, and the will to recognize the apostolic ecclesial existence of the other in spite of their otherness.⁴³ Without necessarily subscribing to the transdenominational ecclesiology that is Haight’s goal, he is correct in pointing to the underlying spiritual grounds for communion, even if only partial.

And if the Catholic Church can recognize participation in the life of the Trinity in these churches and ecclesial communities, could not those who want to live in communion with the Catholic Church occasionally be offered hospitality at its Eucharist? As Haight asks:

Does eucharistic practice presuppose a commonly shared theological understanding before it can be celebrated in communion across denominational boundaries? Or does eucharistic practice bind Christians together in a common faith in Christ and in a relationship of love that carries and sustains the different theological reflections on what is going on in this sacrament before complete agreement is reached?⁴⁴

Ecumenical theologians would stress here the difference between substantial agreement or consensus on basic truths and diverse theological formulations coexisting within an underlying consensus in faith.⁴⁵

An Inclusive Catholicity

Another argument for occasionally offering eucharistic hospitality could be made on the basis of a renewed understanding of catholicity. Catholicity cannot be limited to geographical extension; it means universal, in the sense of being oriented toward or embracing the whole—*kath’ holu*—in contrast to what is local or particular. Nor can it be reduced to the fullness of present-day Roman Catholicism. If catholicity means “toward the whole,” the Roman Catholic Church should take its catholicity more seriously. If it is to be truly catholic, there should be an inclusiveness or fullness in its

⁴² Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History*, vol. 3, *Ecclesial Existence* (New York: Continuum, 2008) 280–83, at 282.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 278–80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 215.

⁴⁵ See Thomas P. Rausch, *Towards a Truly Catholic Church: An Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2005) 182–85.

catholicity. It should be willing to embrace all legitimate expressions of life in Christ, even if, from its own perspective, one or another expression is less than full or, in some respects, different.

The Catholic Church does not want to reduce ecclesiality to communion with the bishop of Rome. It already recognizes the Orthodox churches as true churches with valid sacraments. Given that, as I indicated above, the Catholic Church has not authoritatively declared ministry in the Reformation churches as invalid, it is difficult to see why it could not recognize the ecclesial status of the Reformation churches that are eucharistic communities, joined in a communion with other churches, and with the Catholic Church through the historic creeds and more recent consensus statements on justification, Eucharist, ministry, and ecclesiology.

TOWARD EUCHARISTIC *COMMUNIO* IN A GLOBAL CHURCH

While the Catholic Church has not yet realized the conditions for full communion with the Reformation churches, what if it were to reach out to the ecclesial Other, extending an offer of eucharistic hospitality in particular circumstances to members of these churches and ecclesial communities? If the Catholic Church were to acknowledge them as members of the body of Christ and the sacraments of their churches and ecclesial communities as mediating saving grace, why could it not welcome to its Eucharist, by way of exception, members of those communities who recognize Christ's presence in and through the sacramental gifts and want to live in communion with the Catholic Church? Eucharistic faith means recognizing Christ's presence in the meal, in the bread broken and the wine blessed; it does not necessarily require using the same theological formulas. Would not such an offer of eucharistic hospitality better engage the dialectic between the Eucharist as both sign of unity and means toward it? I would suggest considering the possibility of offering eucharistic hospitality as a step toward realizing Vatican II's vision of the church as a sign of unity for the following theological reasons.

(1) As Wijlens notes in her study, postconciliar legislation on the possibility of eucharistic sharing has focused on the needs of "the individual belonging to . . . a Church or Ecclesial Community," the result being that "the explanation governing the rules increasingly attempt to formulate that they are issued based on existing *communio*."⁴⁶ She reminds her readers of John Paul II's call in *Ut unum sint* for the Catholic Church to "enter into what might be called, a 'dialogue of conversion,' which constitutes the spiritual foundation of ecumenical dialogue" (no. 82).⁴⁷ What this suggests

⁴⁶ Wijlens, *Sharing the Eucharist* 364–65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 367.

is that the implications of an already existing *communio* in both grace and life need to be taken more deeply into account.⁴⁸

(2) If eucharistic hospitality with the Orthodox churches is possible in principle (*UR* no. 15), it should also be possible with some churches of the Reformation, since the Catholic Church has not definitively denied their ecclesial status or the validity of their ministries and sacraments, though from its perspective there is a defect on the level of sign of apostolic succession. The Catholic Church and the Reformation churches are already in imperfect communion with each other, and their communion has grown appreciably since the Second Vatican Council. They are united with Christ by baptism, joined in life in the Spirit, nourished by the word, and celebrate other sacraments (*UR* nos. 3, 22; see *LG* no. 15). Bilateral and multilateral consensus statements, liturgical renewal, new attitudes on the part of the faithful, ecumenical communities, covenants on local levels, the desire to live in communion and on occasion worship together—all these are signs of a growing communion. Because their communion is not yet full, it admits of different degrees; as communion cannot be reduced to doctrine and authority, it must also include shared life. The same offer should be extended to the Orthodox, provided that it would be welcomed by their bishops. This is not simply a plea for inclusivity, but a theological argument based on the communion that already exists.

(3) Offering hospitality would be only a first step on the part of the Catholic Church, even if a unilateral one. It should be offered in particular circumstances, involve some discernment, and should not be interpreted as including intercommunion. It presumes a eucharistic faith on the part of Christians from other ecclesial communities congruent with the tradition of the church. Almost 50 years of ecumenical dialogue have brought many Christians to a common eucharistic faith, even if they differ in its expression. Offering occasional eucharistic hospitality should also involve local episcopal authority or national bishops' conferences, as originally provided for by *UR* no. 8, rather than reserving all authority in this area to Rome.

Furthermore, eucharistic hospitality should be an occasional practice, when the growing communion between Christians from different traditions is given special expression—for example, at an ecumenical celebration or when attending an interchurch marriage, or when a Christian occasionally attends Sunday worship in a church of another tradition, or for those on retreat at a Catholic monastery or retreat house or for non-Catholic Christians

⁴⁸ Massimo Faggioli argues that the constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* played a key role in developing the eucharistic ecclesiology that “provides the grounds for the basic direction of Vatican II, that is, rapprochement inside and outside the Church” (“*Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the Meaning of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 71 [2010] 437–52, at 452).

living in a Catholic nursing home. Other occasions where there is a genuine shared life might include living in an ecumenical community, an interchurch family, or non-Catholic students studying in Catholic divinity schools. Excluding these special circumstances, those from another ecclesial tradition who regularly worship and communicate in the Catholic Church may need to consider becoming Catholics themselves.

(4) More can be done within the present parameters of the ecumenical *Directory*. Some dioceses already extend eucharistic hospitality to other Christians in particular circumstances. The Diocese of Saskatoon in Canada, for example, has published “Pastoral Directives for Sacramental Sharing in Particular Circumstances between Catholics and Baptized Christians of Other Denominations” (February 13, 2007).⁴⁹ The document affirms that reserving Holy Communion “to those who are members of the Catholic Church preserves the central place of the Eucharist as the sacramental source and expression of the Church’s visible unity” (no. 10). But it also says that “in particular circumstances, permission for a Christian of another denomination to receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church recognizes the importance of the sacrament as a source of grace for all the baptized” (no. 11). The “Pastoral Directives” encourage someone wishing to receive Communion to meet privately with the pastor to request the sacrament. Or someone who approaches Communion without a prior meeting could be understood to be in serious spiritual need; in this case, “a subsequent discussion with the pastor would be helpful” (no. 12).

“Pastoral Notes for Sacramental Sharing,” published August 22, 2008, as a clarification of the “Pastoral Directives,” states that sacramental sharing is not to be promoted as a means to obtain church unity or as a solution to present divisions. Yet it recognizes that “there are significant events in the lives of individual Christians when requests to receive sacraments from a Catholic minister will be made.”⁵⁰ “Serious spiritual need” is defined, citing

⁴⁹ See Diocese of Saskatoon, “Pastoral Directives for Sacramental Sharing in Particular Circumstances between Catholics and Baptized Christians of Other Denominations” (February 13, 2007), http://www.saskatoonrcdiocese.com/ecumenism/documents/P.D.%20Brochure%20english%20revised%20Sept_22_08.pdf. The “Pastoral Directives” are based on a policy approved by the Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Bishops; though granted no juridical authority, the approval permitted distribution of the “Directives” to the diocesan bishops. For the “Directives” and a commentary, see John M. Huels, “A Policy on Canon 844, §4 for Canadian Dioceses,” *Studia canonica* 34 (2000) 91–118, at 91. See also Archdiocese of Brisbane, “Blessed and Broken: Pastoral Guidelines for Eucharistic Hospitality” (Easter, 1995), <http://liturgybrisbane.net.au/doctypes/eucharistic-hospitality/>. I am grateful to Catherine Clifford for bringing these “Directives” to my attention.

⁵⁰ “Pastoral Notes for Sacramental Sharing with other Christians in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon” (August 22, 2008) 5, <http://www.saskatoonrcdiocese.com/bishop/LettersBishop/Sacramental%20Sharing%20NOTES.pdf>.

the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, as “a need for an increase in spiritual life and a need for a deeper involvement in the mystery of the Church and of its unity,” though the “Pastoral Notes” acknowledge that the person asking for Communion would not likely use this language, nor should a theological justification be required.⁵¹ Under “Principles for the Application of the Policy” it states: “Although canon law requires a ‘grave need’ for another Christian to receive reconciliation, Eucharist or anointing of the sick, this ‘grave need’ must be responded to generously in keeping with the standard principle, ‘favours are to be multiplied, burdens are to be restricted’”—the internal quotation thus traces the axiom to the 13th-century Pope Boniface VIII.⁵²

Though there is no general rule for permitting sacramental sharing and no particular case can be turned into a general rule, occasions for such sharing might include times of confinement in a facility such as a hospital or prison, when spiritual care from a minister of a person’s own tradition is not easily available; or when someone is located in a rural area where one’s own church or congregation is not present; or when someone is in danger of death; or in other cases to be adjudicated by the bishop.

(5) “Interchurch” families often provide another example of a *koinonia* in faith and life; the 1993 ecumenical *Directory* recognizes that while they “share the sacraments of baptism and marriage” (no. 160),⁵³ they remain divided at the altar. The guidelines are encouraging, and signs of progress are evident. According to canonist John Huels, the ecumenical *Directory* is open to the possibility of eucharistic sharing with a non-Catholic party at a Catholic wedding mass, provided that the local bishop gives permission and other requirements are fulfilled (nos. 159–60).⁵⁴ In February 2005, the *Tablet* reported that the Swiss bishops, upon their return from their *ad limina* visit to Rome, announced that they had secured from the Curia the necessary permission “for the Protestant partner in a mixed marriage to receive the Eucharist in a Catholic Church.”⁵⁵ The Saskatoon “Pastoral Notes for Sacramental Sharing” points out that in an interchurch marriage, a couple may be permitted to receive Communion at a wedding Mass and, in exceptional cases, afterward. Such cases might include a baptism; first communion; confirmation; graduation; wedding; an ordination mass of a

⁵¹ Ibid. 6; see Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, On Admitting Other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church IV.2, <http://www.eWTN.com/library/curia/pcucom2.htm>.

⁵² “Pastoral Notes for Sacramental Sharing” 8.

⁵³ *Directory* no. 160.

⁵⁴ John M. Huels, *The Pastoral Companion: A Canon Law Handbook for Catholic Ministry* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan, 1995) 347.

⁵⁵ “Lay Sermons Permitted, Vatican Tells Swiss Bishops,” *Tablet* (February 12, 2005), <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/1646>.

child, grandchild, or family member; major feast days; times of serious illness or approaching death; funerals of one's spouse, child, or grandchild; retreats; Marriage Encounters; parish missions or religious workshops attended with one's spouse; or other special circumstances after consultation with the pastor.⁵⁶

(6) Conditions for a baptized Christian of another denomination to fully participate in the sacrament include a spiritual need such as being without access to a pastor of one's own church or ecclesial community, requesting the sacrament on one's own initiative, manifesting a Catholic faith in the sacrament, and being properly disposed—conditions that are to be met simultaneously.⁵⁷ Saskatoon's "Pastoral Notes" lists other episcopal conferences and dioceses that have also issued policies in keeping with their own histories and local circumstances, though not all are available on the Internet.⁵⁸

(7) What about those from Evangelical communities, including Pentecostals and those in the Free Church tradition, who desire to receive Communion occasionally in a Catholic church? These present a more difficult problem. Many of these communities are rooted in the Radical Reformation; congregational in inspiration, they appeal in matters of doctrine, ministry, and structure not to the great liturgical and sacramental tradition of the church but directly to the New Testament. While some gather for the Lord's Supper frequently, others celebrate it monthly, quarterly, or not at all.⁵⁹ They also vary widely among themselves and in their attitude toward the Catholic Church.

⁵⁶ "Pastoral Notes for Sacramental Sharing" 9–10; see "Pastoral Directives" nos. 19–21.

⁵⁷ "Pastoral Directives" no. 9.

⁵⁸ See "Pastoral Notes for Sacramental Sharing" 5–6. Interchurch Families has published a list of ecumenical and interfaith documents issued by various dioceses around the world since the 1993 ecumenical *Directory* (<http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/journal/2001jan08.html>). The Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon has also published a list of documents issued by various dioceses up to 2008: ecumenism.net/archive/stoon_sacramental_sharing_notes_2008.doc. Among documents issued by dioceses, see: South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Revised Directory on Ecumenism*, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=2746>; Archdiocese of Brisbane, *Blessed and Broken, A Teaching Document on the Eucharist in the Life of the Church, and the Establishing of General Norms on Sacrament Sharing*, <http://liturgybrisbane.net.au/doctypes/eucharistic-hospitality>; Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland, *One Bread One Body: A Teaching Document on the Eucharist in the Life of the Church, and the Establishment of General Norms on Sacramental Sharing*, http://health.cat/open.php?url=http://www.iec2012.ie/downloads/One_Bread_One_Body.pdf.

⁵⁹ According to the WCC's Faith and Order Paper No. 11, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), the Eucharist "should take place at least every Sunday" (no. 31).

Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and many Protestant Christians understand the word “church” differently from the way it is understood in these other traditions. It is difficult to recognize “church” in the full sense in a community that does not understand the Eucharist as it was understood in the great tradition, or that does not seek to live in visible communion with other churches. Theologically, the church is more than a community based on the Word; it is a eucharistic community, made one body through its participation in the body and blood of Christ (see 1 Cor 10:16–17). In the pre-Constantinian period a particular church was seen as authentically church only if it lived in fellowship with other churches.⁶⁰ Can an ecclesial community today truly be church without such relations of visible *communio*?

Thus, from a Roman Catholic perspective, many communities in the Evangelical, Free Church, and Pentecostal traditions correspond more closely to ecclesial communities than to churches in the proper sense. Though some of their members are reluctant to recognize Roman Catholics as Christians, the Catholic Church does not deny the ecclesial status of these communities. They are communities of Christians, disciples of Jesus, consecrated by baptism, nourished by the word, deeply committed to Christ’s mission, living in his Spirit, and rich in spiritual gifts and graces (see *LG* no. 15; *UR* no. 3). Today a number of Evangelical theologians lament the “real absence” or marginal place that the Eucharist holds in many American Evangelical churches and call for a return to the sacramental ontology and eucharistic practice of the great tradition.⁶¹

(8) If catholicity means embracing all legitimate expressions of life in Christ, and if the Catholic Church acknowledges “a certain communion” with other churches and “ecclesial communities,”⁶² why could it not embrace these churches as ecclesial communities with rich apostolic lives, their own traditions, a unique mission, their own structures of governance, and a shared life in the Spirit? Could the Catholic Church not welcome baptized members of the Evangelical and Pentecostal communities to share in its ecclesial life in different ways, even to participate occasionally in its

⁶⁰ See Ulrich Kuhn, “Reception—An Imperative and an Opportunity,” in *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ed. Max Thurian (Geneva: WCC, 1983) 163–74, at 166.

⁶¹ John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010) 113–14; Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); see also Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁶² *Directory* no. 18. According to Hamer, Vatican II included “church” in the phrase “churches and ecclesial communities” in order to include the Old Catholics who, like the Orthodox, were considered to have valid orders and a valid Eucharist (Hamer, “La terminologie ecclésiologique de Vatican II” 627).

eucharistic celebrations, provided that they desired to live in communion with the Catholic Church?

Perhaps Rome fears that if the Protestant churches reached their long-sought goal of mutual eucharistic hospitality, they would settle for the present divided state of the church, as Cardinal Koch suggested in his address at Maynooth before the Dublin World Eucharistic Congress.⁶³ There may indeed be a danger of this. For this reason, among others, I am suggesting occasional eucharistic hospitality for certain persons, not intercommunion between churches. But such a generous gesture on the part of the Catholic Church would be a powerful sign of its desire for full communion.

What would be required of these Evangelical and Pentecostal communities? They should, as a minimum, respect the validity (thus the nonrepetition) of Roman Catholic baptism, refrain from aggressive proselytizing of Catholics,⁶⁴ and be able to recognize the presence of the risen Jesus in the breaking of the eucharistic bread and the sharing of the cup. The conditions outlined in no. 6 above should be respected. The desire of these Christians to live in communion with Catholics would be exemplified by their willingness to enter into dialogue on those questions that continue to remain divisive.

With so much held in common, the qualified inclusion of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians to a greater communion with Catholic Church could enrich the mission of the whole church. While not all Evangelicals desire to live in communion with the Catholic Church, those who do could be welcomed to share occasionally in the Catholic Church's sacramental life and to contribute their unique gifts. If the principle *lex orandi lex credendi* (the law of praying is the law of believing) is valid, might not living again in a more inclusive communion draw the different Christian churches and communities closer together, manifesting the unity of the disciples of Jesus with God and with one another, "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21)?

(9) Finally, there is the difficult question of reciprocity. The Catholic Church has not definitively declared ministry in the Reformation churches as invalid, and it recognizes that their sacramental actions mediate salvific grace (*UR* no. 3). Any defects are in regard to the sign, not the sacramental

⁶³ Kurt Koch, "For not a few Protestant communities it was possible to gain the impression that the ecumenical goal does not consist in the restoration of ecclesial communion but in eucharistic intercommunion, and 'if this is achieved, all the rest could remain as it was'" ("Relation between the Eucharist and Ecclesial Communion").

⁶⁴ On the difficult subject of ethics and evangelization see "Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness: The Report from the Fourth Phase of the International Dialogue 1990–1997 between the Roman Catholic Church and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders," *PCPCU Information Service* 97 (1998/I–II) no. 93; see also John C. Haughey, S.J., "The Ethics of Evangelization," in *Evangelizing America*, ed. Thomas P. Rausch, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 2004) 152–71.

substance, the grace of salvation (*res sacramenti*), as we have seen. If the Catholic Church were to offer eucharistic hospitality to those Christians from other churches and ecclesial communities who wanted to live in communion with the Catholic Church, those Catholics who recognize the Lord in a non-Catholic Eucharist and who for the same reasons might occasionally want to share in their communion should not be prevented.

CONCLUSION

The suggestion to offer occasional eucharistic hospitality, generously interpreted, pushes the envelope in regard to the Catholic Church's discipline. But it finds its grounds, not in desire for inclusivity or in a trans-denominational ecclesiology, seeking a common denominator beyond confessional positions, but rather in a deeper understanding of *communio*, less institutional and juridical. It draws on a theological understanding that recognizes an already existing communion in the divine life through baptism and Eucharist and on a pastoral concern for individuals evident in recent developments in canon law on eucharistic sharing.

Those baptized in the one Spirit and nourished at the Lord's Table with his body and blood have been incorporated into the body of Christ and already share in God's trinitarian life. Their churches and ecclesial communities incorporate constitutive elements of the church and mediate through their liturgical or sacramental acts God's saving grace in Christ, even if they do not always share in all the *means* of grace present in the Catholic Church. If the Catholic Church acknowledges that the Protestant Lord's Supper is a means of grace, and if Catholic theologians are willing to recognize ecclesial communities as analogous to particular churches (Johannes Feiner, Francis Sullivan, Walter Kasper), why could not the communion that already unites them with Catholics be expressed through occasional eucharistic hospitality? Would that not only express a growing unity but also draw members from both the Catholic Church and other churches and ecclesial communities closer together?

As the largest Christian communion in a global church and with its own unique claims to apostolic origins, the Catholic Church has perhaps a special obligation to reach out to other Christian churches and ecclesial communities. They are already recognized as brothers and sisters in Christ, joined in at least partial communion with Catholics through baptism (*UR* no. 3). The Catholic Church's present policy of insisting on full communion as the condition for eucharistic hospitality is too often seen as exclusive rather than welcoming, protecting its own heritage, and placing institutional and doctrinal concerns ahead of a growing communion in life and faith. It is seen by many as a countersign to the communion of disciples that the church should be.

The Catholic insistence that eucharistic communion should not be separated from ecclesial communion is correct. But by offering occasional eucharistic hospitality to those other Christians who share in the life of God as Father, Son, and Spirit, strive to live as disciples of Jesus, and want to live in communion with the Catholic Church, even if the Catholic Church cannot yet recognize their own communities as churches in the full sense, the Catholic Church would be taking a significant step toward unity. It would also be a sign of profound conversion on the part of the Catholic Church and encourage other churches and ecclesial communities to take further steps toward the unity for which Christ prayed.