



## Dialogue *Ad Extra*: The Relevance of *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Nostra Aetate*

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**Abstract:** This article addresses the issue of dialogue *ad extra* based on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially the decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* and the declaration *Nostra aetate* on interreligious dialogue, grounding the analysis on paragraph 8 of the constitution *Lumen gentium* in particular. To this end, we use the conciliar texts, with references to the history of the drafting of the documents, as well as to the problems that arose during the period of reception of the Council, and how some documents on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue have addressed them. We develop this question by first elaborating on religious pluralism, to which the Council attempts to respond. Secondly, we study the ecclesiological background that made the opening to dialogue possible, taking into account particularly ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue. The study allows us to affirm that *Unitatis redintegratio* and *Nostra aetate* are concretizations and extensions of the constitution *Lumen gentium*. Therefore, without the ecclesiological background proposed by the constitution, dialogue *ad extra* as proposed by the Council and developed in the postconciliar period would not have been possible.

**Keywords:** ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, ecclesiology, *Lumen gentium*, *Unitatis redintegratio*, *Nostra aetate*, dialogue *ad extra*

One of the main items of the Second Vatican Council was the dialogue *ad extra* of the Roman Catholic Church: with all the men and women of the world, but in a special way with other Christian denominations and with non-Christian religions. In this article, we explore the importance of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the face of religious pluralism, to which the Second Vatican Council sought to respond. With this purpose, we develop the idea of dialogue as a “sign of the times” and examine the situation of religious pluralism, to which the Church must continue to respond today. Nowadays, the Church continues the evangelization mission in a religiously plural world, and we should look to the main principles of dialogue of the Second Vatican Council. Our reflection focuses on the ecclesiological shift, particularly stemming from paragraph 8 of *Lumen gentium*, which led to the opening of ecumenical dialogue in *Unitatis redintegratio* and interreligious dialogue in *Nostra aetate*. This ecclesiological shift is also useful today to avoid some risks of dialogue: fundamentalism and relativism. We analyze some aspects of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, in particular *Lumen gentium*, *Unitatis redintegratio*, and *Nostra aetate*, with significant references to the discussion of the Council Fathers during the Council but also to the theological discussions in the postconciliar

period. Nowadays, we find some evolution in the way of dialogue begun during the Second Vatican Council, which is why this article tries to show how these theological insights offered by the Council continue to illuminate the current situation and that the path of dialogue is irreversible.

## 1. Religious Pluralism as a “Sign of the Times”

During the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church entered into a dialogue with modernity and with one of its most enduring fruits: religious pluralism. Pluralism had previously been condemned by the Church, but, after the Council, relations with other Christians, with Judaism and Islam, as well as with other religions and non-believers, were redefined in a pastoral and respectful spirit.

Entering into dialogue with modernity does not mean that the Church “became modern.” The Church did not adopt the theses of modernity, but rather she updated herself, or, to use the classic term, underwent an *aggiornamento* or renewal. The Church entered into dialogue with modernity and, in the light of the Gospel, discerned modernity (Poupard 2001, 70). The content of the message remained faithful, but the language changed, as John XXIII proposed in his opening address to the Council: The same doctrine as always, but with a new language, in order to engage in dialogue with modern man (Ioannes XXIII 1962, 790–791), following the logic of the incarnation that governs the economy of salvation. Indeed, dialogue cannot lead to relativizing the identity of the Church in a process of “adaptationism,” but neither can it limit the doctrine of the Church to the “forms” of a past that no longer responds to today’s reality. This “formalism” leads to fundamentalist positions that do not correspond to reality (Houtepen 2002, 213).

During the Second Vatican Council, the Church was able to listen before speaking, which is very important for any good dialogue. Both ecumenism and interreligious dialogue are considered as “signs of the times” through which the Spirit spoke to the Church from “outside.”

It is important to note that ecumenism, as it is understood today, did not arise within the Catholic Church, but rather within Protestantism. The World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh (1910) is considered to be the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, which was later developed in the Life and Work Movement, Faith and Order Movement, and the World Council of Churches (1948). It was later, in the Second Vatican Council, that the Catholic Church joined the ecumenical movement. *Unitatis redintegratio* states:

in many parts of the world, under the inspiring grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ

desires. The Sacred Council exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism. (UR 4)

It is noteworthy that the modification of the first chapter title of *Unitatis redintegratio*, suggested in the discussions of the second session of the Council: The Council Fathers said that it should not be entitled “Principles of Catholic Ecumenism” but “Catholic Principles on Ecumenism.” This change was very significant, since the Church did not want to create a parallel ecumenism but to join the ecumenical movement, enriching it with the Catholic perspective (Vázquez Jiménez 2024, 153–55).

Similarly, the Church discovered the “signs of the times” in interreligious dialogue. The opening up to interreligious dialogue had its immediate antecedent in the Catholic Church’s awareness of the ethnic and religious persecutions motivated by racial, economic, social, and religious issues against Jews in European countries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Messori 2006, 151–56; Sutton 1976; Sombart 1923), which would later be referred to as “anti-Semitism.”<sup>1</sup> The Catholic Church wondered whether a Christian-inspired anti-Judaism would have been promoted inside the Church, which could have justified the anti-Semitism theologically. One of the most important moments that contributed to this awareness was the 1947 Seelisberg Congress (Switzerland), convened by the International Council of Christians and Jews, which brought together 65 leaders from 17 countries, most of them European, of whom almost half were Jewish, 40% Protestant, and the rest Catholic.

The *Ten Points of Seelisberg* was a formal proposal to prevent hatred against Jews motivated by inaccurate and inappropriate presentations in the teaching of Christian doctrine. It pointed to the Jewish background of Christianity, as well as a deeper study of the biblical and postbiblical history of the Jewish people. It suggested the need for correction of any type of publication that could induce anti-Semitism, such as the presentation of the passion of Christ, provoking contempt for the Jewish people for the murder of Jesus, or the idea that the Jewish people were reprobated and cursed. The Seelisberg Conference had a great influence on Catholic documents referring to Jews and on the preparation of the declaration *Nostra aetate* (Stofenmacher 2015, 176–87). The meeting between the French historian Jules Isaac, of Jewish origin, and John XXIII is famous, as it led to the drafting of a document entitled *De Iudaeis*, entrusted to Cardinal Augustin Bea. Based on this document, dialogue would also be opened to other religions.

As Dominican Yves Congar stated in an article written after John XXIII announced his intention to convene a new ecumenical council, the Church had to

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<sup>1</sup> “Anti-Semitism” is a neologism that began to be used in Germany in the late 19th century, even though it is not entirely accurate, since Arabs are also Semites, so the term “anti-Jewish” would be more appropriate. However, it has become established in its meaning of racism against the Jewish people and is also used in *Nostra aetate* (no. 4) (Lovsky 1955, 11–23).

“become aware of the existence of ‘others’ and take an interest in them.” (Congar 1959, 75)<sup>2</sup> This time, the Church should look at “others,” not as adversaries or competitors, as opponents, heretics, or dissidents, not as objects of mission and conversion, but by discovering in these “others” elements of truth and holiness that build the Church herself and broaden the frontiers of catholicity. The Protestant theologian André Birmelé noted that this opening to “others” marked the beginning of a new era in the life of the Church as “a transition from an attitude of monologue to an attitude of dialogue, while maintaining the traditional foundations of Catholicism.” (Birmelé 2000, 223)

## 2. Religious Pluralism Present in Our Days

Religious pluralism, to which the Second Vatican Council responded, is still present in our reality and is essential to understanding the current situation. Although many had predicted the end of religions in the 1960s—as affirmed by the sociologist and Lutheran theologian Peter L. Berger—the reality is quite the opposite. In the late 1990s, Berger recanted his earlier words:

The idea that we live in a secularised world is false. Today’s world, with a few exceptions, is as fiercely religious as it has always been; in some places, it is even more so. This means that a body of work labelled by historians and sociologists as the “theory of secularisation” is, in essence, wrong. (Berger 2001, 22)

This idea was formulated in other works, as in *The Desecularization of the World* (Berger 1999) and repeated by other authors (Beckford 2012).

Multiple and multilateral economic and political relations, migratory movements, the media, social networks, and the growing mobilization of masses have brought peoples, races, and cultures into proximity and into a forced coexistence that was previously unknown. The historical delimitation of Protestant or Catholic countries, or of Islamic, Christian, Buddhist cultures, etc., has gradually been diluted and become irreversible. Now, in the global village, the diversity of cultures and religions is present in every corner of the world, where they coexist with greater or lesser friction. Today, Catholic Christians live their faith in dialogue and confrontation with other salvific alternatives. They are challenged by religious narratives that are not those of their own tradition. Christians coexist with other proposals of truth and salvation that lead them to question the salvific universality of their own tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> All translations are the author’s own.

Pluralism can even be further nuanced. Today, religion is not only pluralistic but also diffuse. The New Age movement, which presented itself as a critical alternative to official religions and institutionalized religious practice, has led to the formation of syncretic neo-pagan religious identities with multiple religious affiliations, inhabiting various sacred spaces, resulting in religious, spiritual, and moral relativism (Houtepen 2002, 210). Cardinal Karl Lehman described this new religious paradigm as “a ‘theoplasm,’ a kind of religious plasticine from which each person moulds their own gods and religious beliefs to their liking.” (Lehman 1999, 640)

Generation Y and Generation Z (born between 1981 and 2012) lack a structured and personalized religious belief system. Many religious elements, previously anchored in a particular religion or philosophical system, appear now uprooted: a mix of mindfulness, tantra, and yoga, reincarnation, karma, chakras, and other types of beliefs in cosmic energies. The spirituality of this generation is shaped by what Berger has called “islands of meaning.” While in the early stages these “islands” fit into a basic belief pattern, they now appear scattered, lacking a basic structure of meaning that gives them coherence (Berger 2016). In this situation, it is difficult to find a broad horizon of meaning, and the youngest generation turns into “postmodern castaways.” (Bergoglio 2006, 10)

In this new context of religious pluralism, the Council continues to be a compass for the Church of the 21st century and for the new face of religious pluralism.

### 3. Ecclesiological Background for Dialogue

This dialogue *ad extra* would not have been possible without a reflection *ad intra*, that is, an interior renewal of the Church understood as a *ressourcement*, or a return to the sources of the Word of God and Tradition, in order to be more faithful to her own identity. From this source, *aggiornamento*, or reform of the Church, was to flow. This introspective view of herself was needed to develop the dialogical ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. Therefore, it is not possible to speak of the dialogue *ad extra* of the decree *Unitatis redintegratio* and the declaration *Nostra aetate* without reference to the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium*, in which the Council Fathers consider the nature and mission of the Church.

The ecclesiological hermeneutical key that opened the Church to dialogue was paragraph 8 of *Lumen gentium*: “This Church ... subsists in the Catholic Church ... 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.” (LG 8) It is therefore that Gérard Philips, one of the main editors of *Lumen gentium*, stated in his commentary on the constitution that “the *subsistit in* contains the heart of the entire ecumenical problem.” (Philips 1968, 105)

Indeed, it was precisely the formulation of *subsistit in* that opened the Church to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. This formulation allows us to acknowledge that elements of truth and holiness proper to the Church of Christ can be found outside the Roman Catholic Church. However, this recognition does not deny the historical concreteness of the Church of Christ in the Catholic Church, led by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him. Thanks to this, the “other” ceases to be a stranger and becomes a brother.

In *Lumen gentium*'s first draft, the text established the identity (using the verb *est* instead of *subsistit in*) between the Mystical Body of Christ, that is, the Church of Christ, and the Roman Catholic Church. This identification was based on the encyclicals *Mystici Corporis* (1943) and *Humani generis* (1950). In the second draft, the text continued to state that “this Church ... is (*est*) the Catholic Church, governed by the Roman Pontiff and by the bishops in communion with him,” but it was added: “outside its entire structure, many elements can be found which belong to the Church of Christ.” (AS II.1, 220) It was important to recognize that these “elements” of sanctification existing outside the Catholic Church are authentic ecclesial elements. With regard to the third draft, the Theological Commission put an important question: How to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable double thesis, namely, that the Church of Christ is the Catholic Church and that there are elements of holiness and truth outside of the Catholic Church? The solution was to change *est* to *subsistit in*. In this draft, the most significant aspect seems to be the search for a balance to identify, on the one hand, the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church and, on the other hand, to emphasize that such identification is not total or exclusive (Madrigal 2023, 572–74).

### 3.1. Ecumenical Dialogue

The formulation *subsistit in* was further developed in the decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, as follows: “For it is only through Christ’s Catholic Church, which is ‘the all-embracing means of salvation,’ that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation,” (UR 3) but the sacred actions (of other Churches and ecclesial Communities) can truly produce the life of grace, and must be considered capable of opening access to the communion of salvation “though we believe them to be deficient in some respects, have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation.” (UR 3) This is what later led John Paul II to state in the encyclical *Ut unum sint*:

It is not that beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community there is an ecclesial vacuum. Many elements of great value (*eximia*), which in the Catholic Church are part of the fullness of the means of salvation and of the gifts of grace which make up the Church, are also found in the other Christian Communities. (UUS 13)

These elements had already been listed in paragraph 15 of *Lumen gentium* (Sacred Scripture, the doctrine of the Triune God, baptism and some sacraments, the episcopate, the life of prayer, etc.). Through them, the Catholic Church is linked in many ways with those who are called Christian. Paragraph 3 of *Unitatis redintegratio* uses the concept of *communio* (perfect or imperfect) to indicate the relationship with other Christian Churches or Ecclesial Communities. This represents a great ecumenical advance because it makes it possible to affirm the existence of a gradual nature of *communio* and to overcome an understanding of “belonging” to the Church that would necessarily lead to exclusion. As Walter Kasper states, “the new and fundamental ecumenical evidence is this: among the baptized there already exists a fundamental unity, or *communio*, so that the difference is not between a perfect unity and a completely nonexistent *communio*, but between a complete *communio* and an incomplete one.” (Kasper 2008, 86)

However, the fullness of the means of salvation is not a guarantee of being saved. Referring to Christians fully incorporated into the Church, *Lumen gentium* states: “He is not saved, however, who, though part of the body of the Church, does not persevere in charity. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but, as it were, only in a ‘bodily’ manner and not ‘in his heart.’” (LG 14) That is why the Church needs continuing reform and conversion. The “other,” in whom the Holy Spirit also acts and in whom these gifts are also found, enriches our identity through exchange. The Reformation helped the Roman Catholic Church to rediscover, among other things, the importance of the Word of God in the life of the Church, or the common priesthood, just as Orthodoxy helped the Roman Catholic Church to discover the importance of the Holy Spirit, the eschatological dimension of ecclesiology, or synodality in recent times. This meant a complete change in the way of understanding the unity of the Church: the call for dissidents to “return” to the true fold of Christ, which was the Catholic Church, was abandoned in favor of a much “more Catholic” experience of catholicity. That means that the Roman Catholic Church, in dialogue with other Churches and ecclesial Communities, becomes “more catholic” in the full sense of the term.

We note the debate established during the Council on the consideration of the ecclesiality of the Protestant Communities. Indeed, the third chapter of *Unitatis redintegratio* makes a distinction between “Churches” and “ecclesial Communities,” thus establishing different degrees of communion between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches and between the Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches. Cardinal Franz König’s intervention was decisive in this regard, arguing that there was an essential difference based on the existence of apostolic succession in relation to the validity of the episcopate, as well as the recognition of the seven sacraments (AS II.5, 554).

In the postconciliar period, theologian Leonardo Boff opened the debate on ecclesiality and the theological significance of non-Catholic Churches through an open

interpretation of *subsistit in* refuted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. According to the theologian,

the Catholic Church..., on the one hand, is the Church of Christ and, on the other, it is not. It is the Church of Christ because it appears in the world through its concrete mediation. But it is not, because it cannot be identified exclusively with the Church of Christ, given that the Church can also subsist in other Christian Churches. (Boff 1982, 142)<sup>3</sup>

The Congregation would respond to this by saying:

But the Council had chosen the word *subsistit*—subsists—exactly in order to make clear that one sole “subsistence” of the true Church exists, whereas outside her visible structure only *elementa Ecclesiae*—elements of Church—exist; these—being elements of the same Church—tend and conduct toward the Catholic Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). (Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith 1985)

The same position was reaffirmed by the Congregation in another document, *Dominus Iesus* (2000). In this way, the Congregation intended to avoid a relativization of the Church and the consideration of the Church as an invisible entity without a specific historical reality.

Regarding this interpretation of the formula *subsistit in*, Kasper says:

That statement is only superficially a radicalization of what the Council affirms. In reality, it can be interpreted as a balanced response. Logically, it means that although the Church of Jesus Christ may not be fully realised outside the Catholic Church, there is at least an imperfect realisation. Therefore, there is no ecclesial vacuum outside the Catholic Church. There, “the” Church is not present, but there is ecclesial reality. (Kasper 2008, 106)

As theologian Avery Dulles defended, we cannot forget that the Council’s orientation with the formula *subsistit in* was that of an inclusive identity of the Church as opposed to an exclusivist substantialism: “The Council interpreted this doctrine inclusively, rather than exclusively, so as to allow that other Christian communities authentically participate in the reality of the Church of Christ.” (Dulles 1972, 233)

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<sup>3</sup> In the same line, we can also consider Hans Küng and Jürgen Werbick, among others (Morales 1998, 753–77).

### 3.2. Interreligious Dialogue

In a similar way and as an extension of paragraph 8 of *Lumen gentium*, the declaration *Nostra aetate* states with reference to relations with other religions:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. (NA 2)

The truth and holiness present in other religions allow us not only to build bonds of unity but also to stop treating the members of other religions as “targets” to be converted.

By appreciating the action of God not only in the faithful of other religions but also in their rites, teachings, or commandments, Catholics are called to appreciate the action of God in other religions. This new attitude also meant a change in the understanding of the mission *ad gentes*, as Mauro Velati observes (Velati 2005). Interreligious dialogue allows us to discover the “seeds of the Incarnate Word” present in other religions and cultures, or the “rays” of that Truth which enlightens all—Jesus Christ.

This led to abandoning the “ecclesiological exclusivism,” based on an erroneous and decontextualized interpretation of the statement *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, attributed to Cyprian of Carthage.<sup>4</sup> As the International Theological Commission stated:

Exclusivist ecclesiocentrism—the fruit of a specific theological system or of a mistaken understanding of the phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*—is no longer defended by Catholic theologians after the clear statements of Pius XII and Vatican Council II on the possibility of salvation for those who do not belong visibly to the Church. (International Theological Commission 1997, no. 10)

The shift to a “Christocentric inclusivism,” that is, the Second Vatican Council proposal for theology of religions, was made thanks to its preparation in the theology of “fulfillment” elaborated by Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac, among others, and the theology of the “inclusive presence of Christ” in the various religious traditions of Karl Rahner and Raimon Pannikar, among others. The “theory of fulfillment” considers that the various religions represent the innate desire of human beings to

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<sup>4</sup> The famous adage *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, attributed to Cyprian of Carthage, appears not exactly like that formulated in his Letter 73, no. 21, but as *salus extra ecclesiam non est* (CSEL 3/2, 795). He uses this statement in his fight against schism and heresy in order to reinforce the unity of the Church. We do not find a fundamental difference between the two formulations, but wish to mention the original sentence.

unite with the divine, incarnated in various expressions specific to each culture and geographical area of the world. Jesus Christ and Christianity would provide a personal response to this universal human aspiration and, hence, fulfillment. Religions, therefore, according to the theory of history of the Church Father Eusebius of Caesarea, have a preparatory value in the face of the absolute novelty of Christianity. On the other hand, the position of those who considered the “inclusive presence of Christ” recognizes in other religions an evangelical *preparatio* by virtue of the active, hidden, and unknown presence of the mystery of Christ in them, thus appealing to the doctrine of the *logos spermatikos* or *semina verbi* of the Church Father Justin Martyr (Vázquez Jiménez 2024, 627–30).

In the conciliar discussions, it was the French bishops who, referring to the members of other religions that appeared in the schema *De Ecclesia*, asked to recognize all that was good and true in them (AS II.1, 299). The Archbishop of Zaragoza, Spain, Casimiro Morcillo González, asked that the Council explicitly declare “the relation and connection of not a few religious truths and moral precepts with the doctrine and moral law preached and promulgated by Christ.” (AS II.1, 350) According to his thought, if there is anything good, true, or beautiful in non-Christian religions, it comes from God. Happily, it culminates in the religion preached by Jesus Christ, Redeemer of all. In this way, a christological foundation was given to the relations of the Catholic Church with non-Christian religions.

The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* from the Congregation for Interreligious Dialogue, on the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the declaration *Nostra aetate*, highlighted not only the christological aspect but also the pneumatological aspect of interreligious dialogue in different conciliar documents. As we can see, the recognition of the presence of positive values is not only in members of other religions but in religions as such:

*Nostra Aetate* speaks of the presence in these traditions of “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all” (NA 2). *Ad Gentes* recognizes the presence of “seeds of the word,” and points to “the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations” (AG 11). Again, *Lumen Gentium* refers to the good which is “found sown” not only “in minds and hearts,” but also “in the rites and customs of peoples” (LG 17).

These few references suffice to show that the Council has openly acknowledged the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions, but also in the religious traditions to which they belong. It attributed these values to the active presence of God through his Word, pointing also to the universal action of the Spirit. (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991, nos. 16–17)

This means a new way of understanding the missionary activity of the Church: Dialogue becomes an essential part of the Church’s missionary activity. Dialogue allows us to appreciate and discover all the good that God has sown in the hearts of

men and in their rites and cultures. The missionaries are people of dialogue who, before proclaiming, listen. They welcome, value, and discern in the light of the Gospel. They approach other religions and cultures with the utmost respect and delicacy. They become aware that the ground on which they stand is sacred ground already inhabited by God.

In the postconciliar period, the theology of religions defended “religious pluralism” or “pluralistic theocentrism,” proposed, among others, by John Hick, Paul Knitter, and Jacques Dupuis. This line of thought criticized “inclusive Christocentrism” because it considered that it did not value other religions in terms of their own truth but rather from Christianity’s interpretation of them. Religions, therefore, were valued as imperfect forms of truth so that otherness could hardly be considered as such. Taken to its extreme, the paradigm of religious pluralism led to a relativization of the truth of religions and a denial of the *unicum* of the incarnation and universal mediation of Christ. Parallel to what had occurred in ecumenism, in interreligious dialogue, the historical concreteness of salvation in one religion, Christianity, was denied in order to affirm that the great religions are “alternative soteriological spaces.” (Hick 1985, 36)

Several documents of the papal magisterium responded by affirming the salvific uniqueness of Christ, including the controversial *Dominus Iesus* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It was a way of affirming the need to be faithful to one’s own identity in all dialogue; one cannot enter into dialogue without allowing each person to show themselves as they are and the body of doctrine that defines their identity. Benedict XVI stated:

While always uniting our hearts and minds in the call for peace, we must also listen attentively to the voice of truth. In this way, our dialogue will not stop at identifying a common set of values, but go on to probe their ultimate foundation. We have no reason to fear, for the truth unveils for us the essential relationship between the world and God. (Benedict XVI 2008)

It is important to recognize the value of the proposal of religious pluralism theology as a new approach to non-Christian religions in a receptive way (Vázquez Jiménez 2025). John Paul II did not close the reflection of the theology of religions; he explained that *Dominus Iesus* just clarified the basic principles for an authentic dialogue with non-Christian religions: “The document clarifies the essential Christian elements, which do not hinder dialogue but show its bases, because a dialogue without foundations would be destined to degenerate into empty verbosity.” (John Paul II 2000, no. 1)

## Conclusion

*Unitatis redintegratio* and *Nostra aetate* are a development and clarification of the ecclesiology of *Lumen gentium*, which, through an *ad intra* reflection, inspires a reform of relationships *ad extra*. The second chapter of *Lumen gentium*, in describing who belongs to the people of God, first speaks of the Catholic faithful, whom it states are “fully incorporated.” (LG 14) It also notes that “the Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian” (LG 15); and finally it adds that “those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God.” (LG 16) As we can see, *Unitatis redintegratio* elaborates on *Lumen gentium* (no. 15), and *Nostra aetate* elaborates on *Lumen gentium* (no. 16). In each of these parts, *Lumen gentium* indicates the elements of communion that exist between them, which makes dialogue necessary, understood not as an exchange of ideas but as an “exchange of gifts,” as John Paul II put it in the encyclical *Ut unum sint* (no. 28).

The documents of the Second Vatican Council led to a complete transformation of the Church’s attitude toward other Christian Churches and communities, as well as toward non-Christian religions. These have borne abundant fruit in the postconciliar period—more visible in ecumenical dialogue than interreligious dialogue, though significant in both. One could say, echoing Paul VI’s encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, that during the Council, “the Church became dialogue, the Church became conversation” (Paulus VI 1964, 639)<sup>5</sup>—and the path begun then is now so deeply rooted as to be irreversible.

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<sup>5</sup> It is translated in a different way in English (at least in [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)): “The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make.” (ES 65) We follow here the Latin original text: “ut eadem veluti speciem et verbi, et nuntii, et colloquii induat.” (Paulus VI 1964, 639) The Italian and Spanish translations are more faithful to the original one: “La Chiesa si fa parola; la Chiesa si fa messaggio; la Chiesa si fa colloquio” (Paolo VI 1964, no. 67); “La Iglesia se hace palabra; la Iglesia se hace mensaje; la Iglesia se hace coloquio.” (Pablo VI 1964, no. 34)

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