

Dominus Iesus: An Ecclesiological Critique¹

Richard P. McBrien

Crowley-O'Brien-Walter Professor of Theology - University of Notre Dame, USA

(Lecture given at the *Centro Pro Unione*, Thursday, 11 January 2001)

I. Introduction

It is a particular honor for me to be lecturing this evening in such an historic place. I am told that this hall functioned in the 16th and 17th centuries as a music room for the Doria Pamphilj family, and that the great Antonio Vivaldi performed his celebrated and still extraordinarily popular "The Four Seasons" here. It was the Pamphilj family that gave us Pope Innocent X. Four days ago the Pamphiljs would have marked the anniversary of Innocent's death, on January 7, 1655. He had been Bishop of Rome for just over a decade. Innocent's body remained in the sacristy of the Quirinale Palace for a few days after his death because his sister-in-law, Donna Olimpia Maidalchini, refused to pay the funeral expenses. She was a strong-willed woman who had been known around the city as "la popessa" (an epithet that anticipated by three centuries the label given Pius XII's confidant, Mother Pasqualina). Olimpia was also maliciously referred to as "Olimpia" — her name divided into two Latin words meaning "formerly pious".

Innocent X was eventually buried in St Peter's with simple ceremonies, but his remains were transferred in 1730 by a distant nephew, Cardinal Camillo Pamphilj, to the Pamphilj family crypt in Sant'Agnese in Agone, here on the Piazza Navona.

Cardinal Giovanni Battista Pamphilj's election as Bishop of Rome had something in common with the recently protracted presidential election in the United States. Pamphilj was elected on September 15, 1644, at age seventy, in a conclave that lasted thirty-seven days because of the torrid Roman heat and the outbreak of malaria among the cardinals. Cardinal Pamphilj took the name Innocent in honor of his uncle, Cardinal Innocenzo del Bufalo.

It may also be a matter of some interest that Innocent succeeded Urban VIII, a Barberini, and the ninth-longest reigning Pope in history, who was in office for almost twenty-one years to the day. This succession was yet one more instance where a Pope who had a relatively long reign was followed by someone very different from himself, contrary to the conventional wisdom that such popes are succeeded by photocopies of themselves because they had appointed so many of the cardinal-electors. In 1644, the cardinal-electors wanted someone less pro-French than Urban VIII had been. Although Pamphilj's election was opposed by the French crown, Cardinal Jules Mazarin's *veto* arrived too late.

Alas, there was no Federal Express, or modems, or fax machines, or telephones in those days. In yet another parallel with the current pontificate, Innocent X proclaimed a Jubilee Year, in 1650, that proved to be a great success.

¹ Downloaded from <http://sedosmission.org/old/eng/McBrien.htm> on 16 July 2016

This room acquired more recent significance during the Second Vatican Council, as the place where the council's *periti*, or theological experts, met on a regular basis with the Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox observers. Many conferences were held here as well as substantive discussions of theological issues related to the various conciliar documents. Cardinal Jan Willebrands, president emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has said that the concept of a hierarchy of truths, referred to in article 11 of the council's Decree on Ecumenism, emerged from discussions in this very place. My hope is that, even if this evening's lecture should lack the grace and staying power of Vivaldi's masterpiece, it will at least honor the ecumenical commitments of those who labored so long and so successfully here during the historic days of Vatican II.

II. Brief Overview

My presentation this evening is on the topic of the recent Vatican declaration on Jesus Christ, the Church, and salvation. I shall first summarize the principal elements of the declaration "Dominus Iesus": On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church", issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on September 5. In order not to prejudice the subsequent ecclesiological evaluation, I shall rely mainly on the Congregation's own synthesis of its document. Then I shall review a representative sample of the reactions to the document, both within and outside the Catholic Church. In the third, and major, part of the paper I shall offer an ecclesiological critique of the document, indicating some of its strengths as well as its more problematical aspects, and suggesting how the document might have avoided some of the severest criticisms it has received. Finally, I shall *offer an* estimation of the document's shelf-life, and indicate in the most schematic of fashions where the ecumenical and interreligious dialogues should move in the aftermath of *Dominus Iesus*.

III. Dominus Iesus: A Synthesis

Although the declaration *Dominus Iesus* is structured in six sections, it can be divided, for purposes of analysis, into two principal parts. The first pertains to the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions; the second, to the relationship between the Catholic Church and other Christian churches and so-called ecclesial communities (a distinction to which I shall return in due course).

In the first part the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is concerned, according to its own synthesis, with a perceived tendency on the part of some unnamed Catholic theologians to argue that "all religions may be equally valid ways of salvation". (1) The declaration refers to such theories as "relativistic" and "pluralistic" because, among other things, those theories question "the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus, ... the inseparable personal unity between the eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth," the universality of Christ's redemptive work on behalf of the human community, "the universal salvific mission of the Church, the inseparability-while recognizing the distinction-of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ and the Church, and the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church". The document asserts that such theories have become "quite common" in our day, but without offering any specific examples. The declaration's

stated intention is "to reiterate and clarify certain truths of the faith in the face of problematic and even erroneous propositions".

Thus, "against the theory of the limited, incomplete or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ", the declaration insists that "since Jesus is true God and true man, his words and deeds manifest the totality and definitiveness of the revelation of the mystery of God, even if the depth of that mystery remains in itself transcendent and inexhaustible".

"Against the thesis of a twofold salvific economy, that of the eternal Word, which would be universal and valid also outside the Church, and that of the incarnate Word, which would be limited to Christians, the declaration reasserts the unicity of the salvific economy of the one incarnate Word, Jesus Christ "and insists that his paschal mystery is "the sole and universal source of salvation for all humanity". Moreover, the salvific work of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from that of the risen Christ, because there is "a single Trinitarian economy, willed by the Father and realized in the mystery of Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit".

"Against the view that Christ can be separated from his Church, the document insists that there is "a historical continuity between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church". Following the council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 8, the declaration reaffirms the teaching that the one Church of Christ "subsists in" in the Catholic Church. Whatever "efficacy" non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities may have is derived "from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church" (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 3). According to the declaration, to be regarded as a church "in the proper sense" rather than as an ecclesial community, a non-Catholic body must possess a "valid episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the eucharistic mystery...". Such churches are "in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Catholic Church".

While recognizing that the kingdom of God cannot simply be identified with the Church in its visible and social reality, the declaration insists upon "the intimate connection" between them. But modern theories, the declaration asserts, tend to divorce the two realms in order to create an area outside of, and even independently of, the Church where God's saving activity is at work on behalf of non-Christians. While not denying the universal salvific will of God, the declaration argues that such a truth must be maintained together with the equally important truth that "the one Christ is the mediator and way of salvation" for all. We do not know how the salvific grace of God comes to individual non-Christians. The Second Vatican Council limited itself to the statement that God bestows salvation "in ways known to himself" (*Ad Gentes*, n. 7). "At the same time, however, it is clear that it would be contrary to the Catholic faith to consider the Church as a way of salvation alongside those constituted by other religions". Accordingly, "one cannot attribute to these [other religions]...a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they follow from superstitions or other errors constitute an obstacle to salvation".

Therefore, "with the coming of Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument of salvation for all humanity. This truth does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time it rules out in a radical way that mentality of indifferentism" which holds that one religion is as good as another. On the contrary, as the council's Declaration on Religious Liberty proclaimed, "We believe that this one true religion continues to exist in the catholic and apostolic Church, to which the Lord entrusted the task of spreading it among all people" (n. 1).

So much for the Congregation's own synthesis of *Dominus Jesus*. We move now to a consideration of some of the reactions to the document.

IV. Reactions to the Declaration

The least accurate reactions to the declaration were shaped by some initial reports in the media that were apparently based on excerpts rather than the full text of the document or that may have been skewed by the theological limitations and/or biases of the reporters themselves or their sources. In any case, many people, inside and outside the Catholic Church, were led to believe that the Vatican had issued a document repudiating the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and reversing the course of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation that had occurred in the post-conciliar decades. Many thought that the Catholic Church was teaching once again that non-Catholics cannot be saved. Thousands of Catholics were reported to be confused, embarrassed, or angry about the declaration. Their non-Catholic counterparts were troubled at best, resentful at worst.

One of the worst instances of misrepresentation came in a column by an otherwise insightful and well-informed Catholic author, Paul Wilkes. Writing in the Sunday edition of *The Boston Globe* (9/10/00), five days after the release of the document, Wilkes declared that "the document unabashedly proclaims that 'the Church of Christ... continues to exist only in the Catholic Church'. It not only assigns other believers, including Protestant Christian ones-second-class citizenship, but bars them from the gates of heaven, despite their most sincere intentions and good lives. As such, it sends an arrow into the hearts of those who believe that God may indeed have charted a number of paths to him".(2) The declaration may have many problematical aspects, but excluding non-Catholics from salvation is not one of them.

What most of the document's critics complained about both inside and outside the Catholic Church—was its polemical tone and narrowness of vision more than its central doctrinal affirmations. The Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, conceded that "this document breaks no new ground. But neither does it reflect fully the deeper understanding that has been achieved through ecumenical dialogue and cooperation during the past thirty years". The idea that Anglican and other churches are not "proper churches," Archbishop Carey wrote, "seems to question the considerable ecumenical gains we have made". He cited the meeting of senior Anglican and Roman Catholic leaders in Toronto earlier in the year — a meeting he had chaired jointly with Cardinal Edward Cassidy, current president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Carey noted the "striking advances" made at that meeting "in acknowledging substantial agreement on a range of issues and in proposing a new Joint Unity Commission to carry things forward". "Not for one

moment", the Archbishop of Canterbury concluded, does the Church of England or the world-wide Anglican Communion "accept that its orders of ministry and Eucharist are deficient in any way" or that they are not "a part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ, in whose name it serves and bears witness, here and round the world". (3) In a separate, unpublished communique he made clear that ecumenism does not mean "the return of the prodigal to his former home, but the return of us all in humility and penitence to the Lord of a Church which includes us all".

There were similarly critical reactions from others outside the Catholic Church. Martin Marty, emeritus professor of church history at the University of Chicago, a Lutheran and one of America's leading ecumenists, characterized the document as "a missed opportunity". Instead of offering persuasive reasons for its positions, it relies on arguments from authority. And in taking what he calls "polemical swings" at Catholics who are trying to provide new formulations, the Congregation "has not contributed to clarity". While dialogue will continue, Dr. Marty concluded, it will do so "under the sign of regret". Indeed, "*Dominus Jesus* inspires regret, not rage, for the missed opportunity it represents". (4)

In a letter to Cardinal Cassidy, two leading figures in the Disciples of Christ, the Rev. Robert Welsh, president of the Disciples Council on Christian Unity, and the Rev. Paul Crow, co-moderator since 1977 of the Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue, characterized the language of the declaration as "harsh" and its effect as bringing "pain" to members of their denomination. "It seems inconsistent to us," they wrote, "for the Roman Catholic Church to proclaim that ecumenism is central to the Church's life and witness ...and then to issue a statement that does not reflect that basic commitment"(5).

Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the Geneva-based World Alliance of Reformed Churches also wrote to Cardinal Cassidy on behalf of his denomination. So dismayed and disappointed was the Alliance with *Dominus Jesus* that it considered calling off a formal dialogue in Rome scheduled for September 13-19. "This declaration", Nyomi wrote, "seems to go against the spirit of Vatican II as we understand it, and the progress made in relationships and dialogues since then.... Among other things, it raises questions concerning how we can continue in dialogue with integrity-trusting and respecting one another". He expressed greatest concern about the document's statement regarding what constitutes a church in the proper sense of the word, as opposed to an ecclesial community. (6)

Catholicos Aram I, head of the house of Cilicia, based in Beirut, one of the two branches of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and moderator of the central and executive committees of the World Council of Churches indicated that he had no problem with the substance of the document, but he faulted it for its unecumenical language. (7)

Similarly critical reactions were forthcoming from the Jewish community. Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of interreligious affairs of the Anti-Defamation League in the United States, called it "a step backwards in the dialogue relationship". Rabbi Joel Berger, speaking for the German rabbinical conference, wrote that "whereas Judaism had been seen as a sister religion, it has now been thrown out of the family". (8) The

executive director of the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge, Edward Kessler, also characterized the declaration as "a step backwards", accusing it of portraying non-Catholics as "inferior and unworthy". In response, Eugene Fisher, associate director of the U.S. Catholic bishops' committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, conceded that the document is "a public relations disaster of the first order". (9)

But the negative reactions were not limited to non-Catholics.

Cardinal Cassidy himself told Rome's *Corriere della Sera* that "neither the time nor the language of the document were opportune". Bishop Walter Kasper, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said that, while he agreed with the basic principles in the document, it lacked "the necessary sensitivity". (10)

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, Archbishop of Milan, described the document as "theologically rather dense, peppered with quotations, and not easy to grasp". He, too, faulted its tone, which "risks being rather strong". He suggested that the document should be read in the light of "the wider and more encouraging framework" of the 1995 papal encyclical, *Ut unum sint*. Cardinal Roger Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles, also cited the document's tone as a possible source of difficulty. Its tone, he wrote in his weekly column for *The Tidings*, the archdiocesan newspaper, "may not fully reflect the deeper understanding that has been achieved through ecumenical and interreligious dialogues over these last 30 years or more" — a point made earlier by the Archbishop of Canterbury and others. Cardinal Mahony also deplored the distortions of the document reflected in some of the media coverage, citing in particular a headline in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Vatican Declares Catholicism Sole Path to Salvation" (September 6, 2000). (11)

Like Cardinal Mahony, Rembert Weakland, Archbishop of Milwaukee, complained in his own weekly column in his archdiocesan newspaper about the local press coverage. Milwaukee's *Journal Sentinel* carried the headline, "Vatican Insists Only Faithful Catholics Can Attain Salvation". Archbishop Weakland also agreed that the document failed to take into account "the enormous progress made after Vatican Council II in the mutual recognition of each other's baptisms and the ecclesial significance of such recognition". He continued: "What is disappointing about this document is that so many of our partners in ecumenical dialogues will find its tone heavy, almost arrogant and condescending. To them it is bound to seem out of keeping with the elevated and open tone of the documents of Vatican Council II. It ignores all of the ecumenical dialogues of the last 35 years, as if they did not exist. None of the agreed statements are cited. Has no progress in working toward convergence of theological thought occurred in these 35 years?" Archbishop Weakland asked. (12)

To be sure, some other leading figures in the English-speaking hierarchy provided more positive reactions to the document. Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago, applauded its opposition to religious relativism. Cardinal Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston, characterized the document as a reaffirmation of Catholic teaching.(13) One of its strongest defenders, Desmond Connell, Archbishop of Dublin, insisted that the document was not unecumenical nor its language ungenerous.(14) Other bishops were more cautious and more nuanced in their

praise. William Levada, Archbishop of San Francisco, Theodore McCarrick, the newly named Archbishop of Washington, D.C., and Alexander Brunett, Archbishop of Seattle, are cases in point.(15) The Irish bishops conference also issued a generally positive, but guarded, statement.(16)

However, so strong and so widespread have the negative reactions to the document been that the Holy Father himself felt it necessary to respond to them. In remarks during the midday *Angelus* blessing on October 1, John Paul II emphasized that the declaration "does not deny salvation to non-Christians but points to its ultimate source in Christ, in whom man and God are united". He said that "God gives light to all in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation, granting them salvific grace in ways known to himself". Moreover, the Holy Father continued, "if the document, together with the Second Vatican Council, declares that 'the single Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church', it does not intend thereby to express scant regard for the other churches and ecclesial communities". On the contrary, "the Catholic Church... suffers from the fact that true particular churches and ecclesial communities with precious elements of salvation are separated from her. The document thus expresses once again the same ecumenical passion that is the basis of my encyclical *Ut unum sint*. I hope that this declaration, which is close to my heart, can, after so many erroneous interpretations, finally fulfill its function both of clarification and of openness". (17)

In an earlier letter to Cardinal Cassidy, but without explicit reference to *Dominus Jesus*, the pope expressed the hope that "the 'spirit of Assisi' would not be extinguished, but could spread throughout the world and inspire new witnesses of peace and dialogue".(18) Then, in a speech delivered to members of a formal dialogue commission of Catholics and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, meeting in Rome in mid-September, John Paul II pointed out that, in our dialogue with one another, the call to conversion and the examination of conscience is a responsibility for both sides. Moreover, he insisted, "the commitment of the Catholic Church to ecumenical dialogue is irrevocable". (19)

Unfortunately, for many the tone of *Dominus Iesus* obscures the truth and sincerity of that firm and unequivocal papal commitment I move now to an evaluation of the document itself

V. An Ecclesiological Critique

I should say at the outset that this critique of *Dominus Iesus* focuses primarily on its ecclesiological aspects, although it is, for all practical purposes, impossible not to make some references to issues of Christology, Trinitarian theology, and fundamental theology as it applies to the concepts of revelation and faith—all of which topics are addressed in *Dominus Iesus* itself. Given the kinds of criticisms the document has already received, inside and outside the Catholic Church, it should come as no surprise that my own critique will raise some questions about certain aspects of the declaration's ecclesiological approach. I should like to begin, however, with a few positive comments.

A. Positive Aspects

First, for the most part the declaration does simply reiterate not only traditional Catholic teaching, but also the faith-convictions of a broad cross-section of Christian churches and so-called ecclesial communities. Many of the document's critics, both inside and outside the Catholic Church, have pointed this out. It is the tone and the narrowness of vision that especially troubles people, and not so much its central doctrinal and biblically grounded affirmations. Those of us in the mainstream of the Catholic theological tradition can also readily *affirm, with Dominus Jesus* (not to mention the New Testament itself), that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life—the one Redeemer and mediator between God and humankind—and that the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are one and the same. If I may presume to quote a line from one of my own books, *Catholicism*: "No evolutionary or universal Christology is consistent with the Catholic tradition which breaks the unique and definitive connection between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of the cosmos" (p. 531).

Second, *Dominus Jesus* makes a commendably conscious effort to reach out to our Orthodox sisters and brothers when, in its opening article, it reproduces the text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed without the ecumenically divisive "*filioque*". "I believe in the Holy Spirit", the text reads, "the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. [Period.] With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified". The document also refers to the communion of Orthodox churches not only as "particular churches" but also as "true" particular churches. Heretofore, the adjective "true" has been reserved in official documents to the Catholic Church alone.

Third, for the most part if this document had been written and released on the day after the Second Vatican Council adjourned in December 1965, it would probably not have been subject to any significant criticism, except perhaps for its redundancy. *Dominus Jesus* is not simply a throwback to the pre-Vatican II era, as many have charged. It takes into explicit account some of the most ecumenically and interreligiously generous teachings of the council, even if interpreted narrowly rather than broadly, that is, without sufficient regard for the evolution of Catholic thought and pastoral practice over the past thirty-five years.

Fourth, while upholding the inseparability of the kingdom of God and the Church, *Dominus Jesus* also rejects one of the most common ecclesiological errors of the pre-Vatican II period when the declaration insists that "the kingdom of God... is not identified with the Church in her visible and social reality. In fact, 'the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries' must not be excluded" (n. 19).

B. Negative Aspects

First, although *Dominus Jesus* has at least three stated intentions—the setting forth of Catholic doctrine on the matters under consideration, "pointing out some fundamental questions that remain open to further development, and refuting specific positions that are erroneous or ambiguous" — the document ignores the second intention for all practical purposes and lays far too much stress on the third. In the end, it is not a document that invites, much less encourages, further exploration of these difficult issues, but that chooses instead to follow the well-worn path of

rejection and condemnation. It is important to note, however, that the rejections and condemnations are not leveled against any individuals or religious communities outside the Catholic Church, but rather against certain unnamed theologians within it. The polemics are inner-directed, not outer-directed. The objects of criticism are not the pastoral leaders and theologians of the Anglican Communion, or of the separated churches of the East, or of the various Protestant denominations.

It almost as if the authors of this document did not expect anyone outside the Catholic Church to read it. Rather, its unnamed *adversarii* seem to be Catholic theologians such as Jacques Dupuis, Paul Knitter, Raimundo Pannikar, Hans Küng, Leonardo Bof, Tissa Balasuriya, and others like them who have been attempting over these past several years, with varying degrees of success, to reformulate a Catholic understanding of salvation outside the Church in the light of our growing consciousness and experience of pluralism, of globalization, of multiculturalism, of the persistent status of Christianity as a tiny, insignificant minority in large sections of the world, especially in Asia, and of the rapid process of de-Christianization in areas where the Church once thrived, especially in portions of Europe, and not just in Western Europe.

But the tone is not only polemical; it is authoritarian. Where it attempts to construct an argument on behalf of the Church's teaching, it does so on the basis of what some would call a proof text approach to Sacred Scripture, the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and the pronouncements of Pope John Paul II.

The declaration's appeal is almost always to authority and its demand is almost always for obedience. One has only to note the many instances in the text where words are italicized: the complete and definitive character of revelation in Christ "must be *firmly believed*" (n. 5); the proper response to revelation is "*the obedience of faith*" (n. 7); its distinction between theological faith and belief "must be *firmly held*" (n. 7); the doctrine of faith regarding the unicity of the salvific economy "must be *firmly believed*" (nn. 10 and 11); the unicity and universality of our redemption in Christ "must be *firmly believed*" (nn. 13 and 14); the same is said of our acceptance of the unicity of the Church (n. 16); the Catholic faithful "*are required to profess* that there is a historical continuity... between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church" (n. 16); finally, it must be '*firmly believed*' that the Church is necessary for salvation (n. 20). Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, used similar language in his letter of July 28 to the presidents of conferences of Catholic bishops around the world: "such truths require, therefore, irrevocable assent by the Catholic faithful..." (20).

Eugene Kennedy, emeritus professor at Loyola University in Chicago and a prolific author, calls attention to this authoritarian, faith-on-command approach in a column published by the Religious News Service soon after the declaration appeared. "Faith, it would seem from a common sense reading of these italicized statements, is our response to a command by an authority. In this declaration, faith belongs to the imperative rather than the subjunctive mode". Kennedy continues: "One hardly needs to possess a degree in theology to conclude that the object of command is obedience rather than faith. To order belief is to diminish belief'. The declaration's "presumption that humans can be commanded to believe takes it out of the realm of the believable", (21) Kennedy points out.

Second, by not naming names, the document also abdicates its responsibility to give specific examples of what it regards as "erroneous or ambiguous" propositions in the context of the books and articles in which those positions appear, so that others who have read the same texts can judge for themselves whether the criticisms are accurate and fair. Father Francis Clooney, S.J., a specialist on world religions at Boston College, makes the same point with regard to the document's unspecific criticisms of non-Christian religions: "It is reasonable to expect", he writes, "that if religious traditions err, they do so in ways that can be observed."

It would have been useful, then, had the declaration given some examples of those gaps, insufficiencies and errors that make traditions demonstrably deficient. While it is not proper to dwell on the defects of others, once defectiveness has been boldly asserted, we might as well identify more exactly the problems we are told to notice". (22)

Third, beyond its failure to take into account the ecumenical and interreligious developments of the past thirty-five years, reflected not only in various theological writings but also and especially in the joint statements of the various national and international ecumenical consultations, *Dominus Iesus* evidently failed to consult broadly and effectively even within the Roman Curia itself. What kind of input was there from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue? It would seem clear that there was no meaningful consultation with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity or its Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Beyond these three difficulties-its polemical and authoritarian tone, its lack of specificity regarding the objects of criticism, and its apparent lack of broad consultation-the document is problematical, in my judgment, in three ecclesiological areas. The first concerns the way the declaration understands and portrays the distinction between particular churches and ecclesial communities; the second concerns the way it understands and portrays the concept of "Church" itself; and the third problematical area concerns the way the declaration understands and portrays the relationship between the Church and non-Christian religions. I shall take up each of these three issues in sequence.

a. Particular churches and ecclesial communities

Dominus Iesus makes an important distinction between true particular churches and ecclesial communities (nn. 16-17). True particular churches, it says, "while not existing in perfect communion with the Catholic Church, remain united to her by means of the closest bonds, that is, by apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist...". Ecclesial communities, on the other hand, "have not preserved the valid episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the eucharistic mystery," and therefore "are not churches in the proper sense...". All of the churches of the Anglican Communion and all of the Protestant churches are herein de-churchified in one fell swoop. On the other hand, the declaration reaffirms, with Vatican II, that the individual members of these ecclesial communities "are by baptism incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church" (n. 17).

Dominus Jesus does not cite a specific conciliar text in support of its own understanding and portrayal of the distinction between true particular churches and ecclesial communities because no such text exists. Indeed, the position taken by *Dominus Iesus*, namely, that the Church of Christ is present only in so-called true particular churches, is at apparent odds with John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint*, which states: "To the extent that these elements [of sanctification and truth] are found in other Christian communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them". One might argue that the CDF's position is also at odds with that of the council itself if one were to adopt the interpretation given by the council's Doctrinal Commission, namely, that these various non-Catholic Christian communities possess "ecclesiastical elements which they have preserved from our common patrimony, and which confer on them a truly ecclesial character. In these communities the one sole Church of Christ is present, albeit imperfectly". (23)

Father John Hotchkin, executive director of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, pointed out in an address to the Canon Law Society of America this past October that the term "ecclesial communities" is "something of a neologism", coined to cover a span of meanings. Thus, there is no Anglican Church as such, but a communion of churches (the Church of England, the Church of Canada, the Church of Ireland, the Episcopal Church in the USA, for example) which together constitute the Anglican Communion. The same holds true for Lutheranism and the Lutheran World Federation, for Methodism and the World Methodist Council, for the Alliance of Reformed Churches, and so forth.

Indeed, if the council wanted to de-churchify all except the Orthodox and Old Catholics, for example, why did it not refer to the others as simply "Christian" communities rather than "ecclesial" communities? Father Hotchkin cites one of Cardinal Ratzinger's predecessors in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Jérôme Hamer, O.P., who pointed out that there were three variants on the church/community terminology in successive schemata or drafts of the conciliar texts: separated churches and communities (employed in the Decree on Ecumenism, n. 3), Christian communities (used in an earlier draft of the subtitle of the third chapter of the Decree on Ecumenism, and subsequently changed to "churches and ecclesial communities"), and ecclesial communities separated from us (used in the same decree, n. 22). Hamer insisted that the council used this diverse terminology "because it did not wish to prejudge or definitively pronounce on the [validity of the] ordained ministries of those Protestant communities in which it perceived this possible deficiency or defect by stating that they were nonetheless *churches* in the full theological sense of the word. The council did not wish to preempt this question, but to leave it open".(24) Because the council did decide to leave open the question of the validity of Protestant orders, Hotchkin himself concludes that we can "draw no hard and fast distinction between churches and ecclesial communities as we know them at this time". Unfortunately, *Dominus Iesus* makes just such a hard and fast distinction.

b. *The Church and the churches*

Catholic author Paul Wilkes, to whom I referred earlier, asserted in a commentary in *The Boston Globe* that *Dominus Iesus* proclaims that "the Church of Christ... continues to exist only in the Catholic Church". Wilkes, and many others as well, had

mis-read the document. *Dominus Jesus* does *not* say that the Church of Christ continues to exist "only" in the Catholic Church; it says that it is only in the Catholic Church that it continues to exist "fully" (n. 16, my emphasis). As Francis Sullivan, S.J., formerly of the Gregorian University and now on the theological faculty of Boston College, pointed out in a subsequent letter to *The Boston Globe*: "The difference between those statements is the difference between the doctrine of Pius XII and that of Vatican II". (25)

Indeed, it was the teaching of Pius XII, in his encyclicals *Mystici corporis* and *Humani generis*, that the Catholic Church and the Mystical Body of Christ are "one and the same" ("*unum idemque esse*"). (26) This exclusive identification was still being asserted in the first two drafts of the council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*: "The Church of Christ is the Catholic Church". But the council replaced the copulative verb "is" with the ecclesiological and ecumenically broader "subsists in" (n. 8).

The late Aloys Grillmeier, a member of the council's Theological Commission and subsequently named a cardinal by Pope John Paul II, wrote in his commentary on the text: "This means that the Roman Church, as a local church, is only part of the whole Church, though its bishop is head of all the bishops of the Catholic Church". According to Grillmeier, "'ecclesiality' does not simply coincide with the Catholic Church, because ecclesial elements of sanctification and truth can be found outside it".(27)

In changing the verb from "*est*" to "*subsistit in*" the council fathers clearly intended to include non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities in the one, albeit divided, Body of Christ. Otherwise, they would have left the teaching of Pius XII in place and held to the verb "*est*". The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, however, seems to tilt in favor of the defeated minority's position, namely, that the change of verbs in article 8 of *Lumen gentium* in no way altered the earlier teaching. The CDF took this position in its condemnation, or *Notificatio*, concerning Leonardo Boff's book, *Church: Charism and Power*,(28) insisting that the reason for the change of verbs in article 8 was to emphasize that there is "only one 'subsistence' of the true Church, while outside of her visible structure there only exist *elementa Ecclesiae*, which-being elements of that same Church-tend and lead toward the Catholic Church". (29)

This view was being promoted so strongly and so widely in the 1980s that Cardinal Jan Willebrands, at the time president of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, felt it necessary to issue a public corrective. He did so in an address given in 1987 in both Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, Georgia. Although he was careful not to describe the change of verbs as a repudiation of *Mystici corporis* but as only a matter of "opening up somewhat" the position of the encyclical on the question of membership in the Church, Cardinal Willebrands insisted that the meaning of the "*subsistit*" language is that "whoever belongs to Christ belongs to the Church, and hence the limits of the Church are coextensive with those of belonging to Christ".

For Willebrands, the change from "*est*" to "*subsistit in*" was not only ecclesiological, but also Christological-the one inseparable from the other. The two come together in an ecclesiology of communion. "Indeed", Willebrands declared, "if the Church is

fundamentally this communion with the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, we can see that on the one hand the depth of this communion determines the depth of incorporation in the Church, and on the other that it cannot be a question of all or nothing.... *Subsistit in* thus appears, in an ecclesiology of communion, as an attempt to express the transcendence of grace and to give an inkling of the breadth of divine benevolence".(30)

The key point here is that it is not a matter of all or nothing. There are degrees of incorporation into the one, albeit divided, Church of Christ, and those degrees of incorporation or communion apply not only to individuals but to separated churches and ecclesial communities. According to Vatican II, the Church of Christ continues to exist "fully" only in the Catholic Church (because the Catholic Church alone has the Petrine ministry to the universal Church, exercised by the Bishop of Rome), but the one Church of Christ also exists, or "subsists in," these other churches and ecclesial communities.

Moreover, the term "church" does not apply only to those Christian communities with an episcopate and a Eucharist deemed "valid" by the Catholic Church. The ultimate bases for communion with the one Church of Christ are faith and baptism. In the words of the Decree on Ecumenism: "For those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church" (n. 3). *Dominus Jesus* recognizes in principle that there are non-Catholic churches in imperfect communion with the Catholic Church. What *Dominus Jesus* does not explicitly say is that the communion of these other churches is not simply with the Catholic Church but with the Church of Christ as a whole, in which the Catholic Church alone is "fully" incorporated. In other words, *Dominus Jesus* does not seem to do sufficient justice to the real significance of the change of verbs in article 8 of *Lumen gentium*, namely, that the Church of Christ and the Catholic Church are not coextensive. The Church of Christ is larger than the Catholic Church. It "subsists in" the Catholic Church, but is not simply identical with it.

c. The Church and non-Christian religions

Philip Kennedy, a Dominican theologian at Oxford, has pointed out that *Dominus Jesus*, although it cites Vatican II some forty-five times, "fails conspicuously to repeat the council's single most revolutionary statement concerning divine salvation," contained in article 16 of *Lumen gentium*: "Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience-these too may attain eternal salvation". Kennedy has also criticized the declaration for regarding religious pluralism only as a regrettable situation to be overcome rather than an unavoidable fact of reality because of the ineffability, hiddenness, and limitlessness of God. "The fullness of the Trinity," he writes, "is not incarnate in Jesus. Consequently, there is more to God, so to speak, than has been shown in Jesus Christ. God remains a *Deus absconditus*...".(31)

Gerald O'Collins, S.J., of the Gregorian University, has made a similar point. In one sense, to be sure, Jesus Christ embodies and communicates the fullness of revelation, but in another sense he does not. The final vision of God is still to come,

as we are reminded in 1 John 3:2 ("...what we shall be has not yet been revealed") and 1 Corinthians 13:12 ("At present we can see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face"). As for God's acting salvifically outside the Church, O'Collins cites *Dominus Jesus* itself in acknowledging that God becomes present to people through the "spiritual riches" that their religions essentially embody and express (n. 8). The "elements of religiosity" found in the diverse "religious traditions" come "from God" (n. 21). Religious pluralism, therefore, does not simply exist in fact, as the declaration insists, but also in principle.

"After rejecting one meaning of 'pluralism in principle' (that which argues for separate and equal paths of salvation)", O'Collins observes, "the declaration appears to finish up endorsing another meaning of pluralism in principle, that which maintains that God's saving initiatives can be seen not only in Christianity but also in the religions of the world". (32) Father O'Collins suggests, however, that we might all do well to abandon the language of pluralism altogether. He writes: "We are better off thinking in terms of the incredible love poured out on all humanity by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...".

One senses here a theological kinship with Cardinal Willebrands' appeal to an ecclesiology of communion, found also in Bishop Walter Kasper's recent address to an international missionary conference meeting here in Rome this past October. Bishop Kasper, citing John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, points out that "The Spirit of God is present and at work everywhere, limited by neither space nor time". The Spirit "can be at work outside the visible Church and... in diverse ways... does act in a hidden manner". Vatican II, Bishop Kasper reminds us, "rejected the old, exclusionary theory and practice, according to which, since Jesus Christ is the one and only mediator of salvation, outside of acknowledging him, i.e., 'outside the Church,' there is no salvation...".

"The most profound reason that profession of faith in the one God does not prescind from diversity but rather includes it to a certain extent", Walter Kasper points out, "lies in the Trinitarian confession of one God in three persons.... It means that the one and only God is not a solitary God, but from eternity is self-giving love in which the Father communicates with the Son, and the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit". It is this self-renunciation and selfless communication on the part of Jesus Christ that is the basis of his invitation to the other religions "to reach their own fullness and completion". (33)

Perhaps the most serious problem with *Dominus Iesus*'s approach to other religions, however, is its refusal to acknowledge the existence of true theological faith (as opposed to "belief") in these other religions. Faith and "Christian" faith are not coextensive. If one truly believes in God, who is the one and only object of faith, it is because that person has somehow received the gift of faith from God, even if it should have no explicit reference to Jesus Christ. Moreover, in making this hard and fast distinction between theological faith and belief, the declaration tends to muddy its own waters. The declaration uses the words "belief" and "believe" at least twenty-five times with reference to what Christians do. "If belief has multiple meanings", Francis Clooney asks, "is it possible to stipulate that *faith*, by contrast, has only a single meaning?". (34)

"Learning from other religions", Father Clooney concludes, "does not change the timeless truths of our faith, but it certainly does enrich and deepen our way of following Jesus, driving out not only relativism and indifferentism, but also arrogance and ignorance". *Dominus Iesus*, Clooney writes, "appears oddly inarticulate when we wonder how specifically to confess the Lord Jesus ...in this new millennium". (35)

VI. Looking Toward the Future

How could *Dominus Iesus* have been improved and thereby avoided some of the sharpest criticisms it has thus far received? First, by adopting a more positive, less adversarial, tone-something more in line with the historic address of Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council in October 1962, when he pointed out that the more effective way for the Church to meet the needs of the present day is "by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations".

Second, the declaration should have taken into explicit account the ecumenical and interreligious developments of the past thirty-five years, reflected especially in the agreed statements of the various bilateral consultations and in other joint statements issued by representatives of the various Christian churches, including the Catholic Church, as well as in the growing number of statements regarding the relationship between the Church and non-Christian religions, and with Judaism in particular.

Third, the Congregation should have consulted more widely before issuing this declaration, not only with Catholic scholars and non-Catholic pastoral leaders and theologians, but also with other sections of the Roman Curia itself, and not least the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Had the Congregation taken these three procedural steps, the three areas of greatest ecclesiological concern-on the distinction between particular churches and ecclesial communities, on the relationship between the Church and the churches, and on the relationship of the Church with non-Christian religion-might have been more carefully balanced and nuanced, and therefore less open to criticism.

Predictions are easy to make, and most people forget them once they are uttered. However, it seems safe to say that this declaration is not likely to have a long shelf-life. It may continue to be studied for many years as part of the corpus of official pronouncements given in the decades immediately following Vatican 11, but there is reason to question whether the declaration will serve as a practical guideline for ecumenists and those engaged in interreligious dialogue well into this new century.

However, *Dominus Iesus* will surely have served a higher and more long-term purpose if it stimulates and challenges those engaged in these dialogues to work even harder at transcending out-dated and inadequate assumptions, and in developing more pastorally and theologically compelling formulations that truly address and illuminate the new realities that confront the Church in our time. If *Dominus Iesus* should prove to have been a catalyst for such developments, it will have succeeded eminently in one of its own stated intentions, that is, to "help theological reflection in developing solutions consistent with the contents of the faith and responsive to the pressing needs of contemporary culture" (n. 3). Indeed, that is a task for all of us.

Notes:

1. The synthesis is available in *Origins* 30, 14 (14 September, 2000) 220-22.
2. "Only Catholics Need Apply", p. fl.
3. Public statement issued on 5 September, 2000. There was a similar reaction from Robin Eames, primate of the Church of Ireland, in *The Irish Times* (December 19, 2000) 16.
4. "Rome & Relativism: 'Dominus Iesus' & the CDF", *Commonweal* 27, 18 (20 October, 2000) 12-13.
5. "Disciples of Christ Leaders Criticize *Dominus Iesus*", *National Catholic Reporter* (17 November, 2000) 11 .
6. "Reformed Churches Official Questions Catholic Ecumenical Commitment", *Origins* 30, 16 (28 September, 2000) 255-56.
7. "Vatican Document Still Raising Ire", *The Gazette* (Montreal) (21 October, 2000) 17.
8. "Negative Reaction to *Dominus Iesus* Continues", *America* (7 October, 2000) 5.
9. E. KESSLER & E. FISHER, "A Dialogue of Head and Heart", *The Tablet* (18 November, 2000) 1557, 1558.
10. "Negative Reaction to *Dominus Iesus* Continues", *America* (see n. 8, above).
11. "Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue Will Continue", *The Tidings* (15 September, 2000).
12. R. WEAKLAND, "On the Document's Ecumenical Impact", *Origins* 30, 17 (5 October, 2000) 267.
13. See F. GEORGE, "Opposing Religious Relativism" and B. LAW, "What 'Dominus Iesus' Reaffirms", *Origins* 30, 15 (21 September, 2000) 228, 229-31.
14. "Connell Says Document is Authentic", *The Irish Times* (October 5, 2000) 2.
15. See W. LEVADA, "The Place of Religious Discourse in American Democracy", T. McCARRICK, "Ways of Misunderstanding This Document", and A. BRUNETT, "Understanding This Document's Context and Intent", *Origins* 30, 15 (21 September, 2000) 231-34.
16. "Statement of Episcopal Conference", *The Irish Times* (12 October, 2000) 3.
17. JOHN PAUL II, "The Purpose of 'Dominus Iesus'", *Origins* 30, 19 (19 October, 2000) 299. Cardinal Ratzinger also defended the document against its many critics. In an interview published in the October 8th issue of *Osservatore Romano*, the Cardinal expressed "sadness and disappointment that public reactions, with some praiseworthy exceptions, have completely ignored the true theme of the declaration.... The document is meant to be an invitation to all Christians to open themselves again to the recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord and, in that way, to give the Holy Year a profound significance". Even if its tone and language were problematic, "the text should be explained, not despised," he insisted. See "Ratzinger Defends *Dominus Iesus*", *National Catholic Reporter* (October 20, 2000) 10.
18. JOHN PAUL II, "Message to Cardinal Cassidy: Interreligious Dialogue", *op. cit.*, 298.
19. JOHN PAUL II, "Commitment to Ecumenism Called Irrevocable", *Origins* 30, 16 (28 September, 2000) 256.

20. J. RATZINGER, "Letter to Bishops' Conferences," *Origins* 30, 14 (14 September, 2000) 220.
21. Religious News Service, 20 September, 2000.
22. "*Dominus Iesus* and the New Millennium", *America* (28 October, 2000) 17.
23. Cited by Francis A. SULLIVAN, "The Impact of *Dominus Iesus* on Ecumenism", *America* (20 October, 2000) 10-11. Archbishop Rembert Weakland also opposes the interpretation given by *Dominus Iesus*. "In my opinion", he writes, "the documents of Vatican Council II made the role of baptism much more significant [than a valid episcopate and a valid Eucharist] as entrance into the body of Christ and thus into the Church". Weakland cites the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 3, and also the Decree on Ecumenism's application of the word "churches" to characterize the Reformation communities (n. 19). See "On the Document's Ecumenical Impact", *Origins* 30, 17 (5 October, 2000) 267.
- 24 J. HOTCHKIN, "Canon Law and Ecumenism: Giving Shape to the Future", *Origins* 30, 19 (19 October, 2000) 294-95. Hamer's article, "La terminologie ecclésiologique de Vatican II et les ministères Protestants", appeared in *Documentation catholique* 68 (4 July, 1971) 625-28.
25. 12 September, 2000 (Letters to the Editor).
26. See *Mystici corporis Christi*, n. 14, and *Humani generis*, n. 44. Pius XII had actually use the term "Roman" Catholic Church.
27. "The Mystery of the Church", in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (NY/London: Herder and Herder/Burns & Oates, 1967) 150.
28. Trans. John Diercksmeier (NY/London: Crossroad/SCM Press, 1985).
29. Cited by Francis SULLIVAN, "The Impact of *Dominus Iesus* on Ecumenism", 9.
30. J. WILLEBRANDS, "Vatican II's Ecclesiology of Communion", *Origins* 17, 2 (28 May, 1987) 32.
31. "Rome & Relativism...", *art. cit.*, 15.
32. "Watch Your Language" (review of Gavin Costa's *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*), *The Tablet* (November 4, 2000) 1490.
33. W. KASPER, "Relating Christ's Universality to Interreligious Dialogue", *Origins* 30, 21 (2 November, 2000) 325, 326, 327.
34. "*Dominus Iesus* and the New Millennium", 17.
35. *idem*