



> **Italiano**

> English

> **Español**

> **Français**

> **All the articles of Settimo Cielo in English**

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Everyone remembers Fr. Thomas G. Weinandy for the open letter he sent to Pope Francis last summer, and which he himself made public on November 1 on Settimo Cielo:

> **A Theologian Writes To the Pope: There Is Chaos in the Church, and You Are a Cause**

Today, Saturday February 24, he returns to the fray with the conference that he gave this morning in Sydney, organized by University of Notre Dame of Australia.

In it, Fr. Weinandy describes and denounces the attack of unprecedented gravity that some of the “pastoral” theories and practices encouraged by Pope Francis are carrying out against the “one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic” Church and in particular against the Eucharist that is “source and summit” of the Church’s very life.

Settimo Cielo offers here below to its readers, in four languages, the crucial passages of Fr. Weinandy’s indictment. But

those who may wish to read his conference in its entirety, in the original English, can find it on this other webpage:

> The Four Marks of the Church: The Contemporary Crisis in Ecclesiology

Fr. Weinandy, 72, is one of the most widely known and esteemed theologians, and lives in Washington at the Capuchin College, run by the Franciscan order to which he belongs. He is still a member of the international theological commission that supports the Vatican congregation for the doctrine of the faith, having been appointed to it in 2014 by Pope Francis.

He has taught in the United States at various universities, at Oxford for twelve years, and in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

It's his turn now.

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THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH AND THE EUCHARIST

by Thomas G. Weinandy

Granted the post-Vatican II Church was rife with divisions – disputes over doctrine, morals and the liturgy. These disagreements continue still. However, at no time during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI was there ever any doubt as to what the Church teaches concerning her doctrine, morals, and liturgical practice. [...] Such is not the case, in many significant ways, within the present pontificate of Pope Francis.

Challenge to the Church's Oneness

[...] At times it would appear that Pope Francis identifies himself not as the promoter of unity but as the agent of division. His practical philosophy, if it is an intentional philosophy, seems

to consist in the belief that a greater unifying good will emerge from the present bedlam of divergent opinions and the turmoil of the resulting divisions.

My concern here is that such approach, even if unintentional, strikes at very essence of the Petrine ministry as intended by Jesus and as continuously understood by the Church. The successor of St. Peter, by the very nature of the office, is to be, literally, the personal embodiment and thus the consummate sign of the Church's ecclesial communion, and so the principle defender and promoter of the Church's ecclesial communion. [...] By seeming to encourage doctrinal division and moral discord within the Church the present pontificate has transgressed the foundational mark of the Church – her oneness. How, nonetheless, does this offense against the Church's unity manifest itself? It does so by destabilizing the other three marks of the Church.

Challenge to the Church's Apostolicity

Firstly, the apostolic nature of the Church is being undermined. As has often been noted by theologians and bishops, and most frequently by the laity (those who possess the "sensus fidelium"), the teaching of the present pontiff is not noted for its clarity. [...] As seen in "Amoris Laetitia", to re-conceive and newly express the previously clear apostolic faith and magisterial tradition in a seemingly ambiguous manner, so as to leave confusion and puzzlement within the ecclesial community, is to contradict his own duties as the successor of Peter and to transgress the trust of his fellow bishops, as well as that of priests and the entire faithful.

Ignatius [of Antioch] would be dismayed at such a situation. If, for him, heretical teaching espoused by those who are only loosely associated with the Church is destructive to the Church's unity, how much more devastating is ambiguous teaching when

authored by a bishop who is divinely charged to ensure ecclesial unity. [...]

Moreover, [...] to appear to sanction an interpretation of doctrine or morals that contravenes what has been the received apostolic teaching and magisterial tradition of the Church – as dogmatically defined by Councils and doctrinally taught by previous popes and the bishops in communion with him, as well as accepted and believed by the faithful, cannot then be proposed as magisterial teaching. [...] In the matter of faith and morals the teaching of no living pope takes apostolic and magisterial precedence over the magisterial teaching of previous pontiffs or the established magisterial doctrinal tradition. [...] That Pope Francis' ambiguous teaching at times appears to fall outside the magisterial teaching of the historic apostolic ecclesial community thus gives cause for concern, for it, as stated above, fosters division and disharmony rather than unity and peace within the one apostolic Church. [...]

Challenge to the Church's Catholicity

Secondly, [...] the universality of the Church is visibly manifested in that all of the particular Churches are bound together, through the college of bishops in communion with the pope, by professing the same apostolic faith and by preaching the one universal Gospel to all of humankind. [...] This mark of catholic oneness is also presently challenged.

Pope Francis' espousal of synodality has been much touted – the allowance of local geographical Churches more self-determinative freedom. [...] As envisioned, however, by Pope Francis and advocated by others, this notion of synodality, instead of ensuring the universal oneness of the Catholic Church, an ecclesial communion composed of multiple particular Churches, is now employed to undermine and so sanction divisions within the Church. [...]

We are presently witnessing the disintegration of the Church's catholicity, for local Churches, both on the diocesan and national level, are often interpreting doctrinal norms and moral precepts in various conflicting and contradictory ways. [...] The Church's mark of oneness, a unity that the pope is divinely mandated to protect and engender, is losing its integrity because her marks of catholicity and apostolicity have fallen into doctrinal and moral disarray, a theological anarchy that the pope himself, maybe unwittingly, has initiated by advocating a flawed conception of synodality. [...]

Challenge to the Church's Holiness

Thirdly, this brings us to the fourth mark of the Church – her holiness. This mark is equally under siege, most especially, but not surprisingly, in relationship to the Eucharist. [...]

To participate fully in the Church's Eucharist, [...] one must embody the four marks of the Church, for only in so doing is one in full communion with the Church so as to receive communion – the risen body and blood of Jesus, the source and culmination of one's union with the Father in the Holy Spirit. [...]

The first issue [...] pertains specifically to holiness. While one must profess the Church's one apostolic faith, faith itself is insufficient for receiving Christ in the Eucharist. Referencing Vatican II, John Paul II states that “we must persevere in sanctifying grace and love, remaining within the Church ‘bodily’ as well as ‘in our heart’” (Ecclesia de Eucharistia 36). At the beginning of the Second Century, Ignatius, made this same point – that one can only receive communion “in a state of grace” (Ad. Eph. 20). Thus, in accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Council of Trent, John Paul confirms: “I therefore desire to reaffirm that in the Church there remains in force, now and in the future, the rule by which the Council of Trent gave concrete expression to the Apostle Paul's stern warning when it

affirmed that in order to receive the Eucharist in a worthy manner, ‘one must first confess one’s sins, when one is aware of mortal sin’” (ibid.). In accordance with the doctrinal tradition of the Church, John Paul, therefore, insists that the sacrament of Penance is “necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice” when mortal sin is present (ibid. 37). While he acknowledges that only the person can judge his or her state of grace, he asserts that “in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved” (ibid.). John Paul intensifies his admonition by quoting Canon Law. Where there is “a manifest lack of proper moral disposition,” that is, according to Canon Law, when persons “obstinately persist in manifest grave sin,” they are “not to be permitted to Eucharistic communion” (ibid.).

Here we perceive the present challenge to the Church’s holiness and specifically the holiness of the Eucharist. The question of whether divorced and remarried Catholic couples, who engage in marital acts, can receive communion revolves around the very issue of “outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm,” and, therefore, whether they possess “a manifest lack of proper moral disposition” for receiving communion.

Pope Francis rightly insists that such couples should be accompanied and so helped to form properly their consciences. Granted that there are extraordinary marital cases where it can be rightfully discerned that a previous marriage was sacramentally invalid, even though evidence for an annulment is unobtainable, thus allowing a couple to receive communion. Nonetheless, the ambiguous manner in which Pope Francis proposes this pastoral accompaniment permits a pastoral situation to evolve whereby the common practice will swiftly ensue that almost every divorced

and remarried couple will judge themselves free to receive Holy Communion.

This pastoral situation will develop because moral negative commands, such as, “one shall not commit adultery,” are no longer recognized as absolute moral norms that can never be trespassed, but as moral ideals – goals that may be achieved over a period of time, or may never be realized in one’s lifetime. In this indefinite interim people can continue, with the Church’s blessing, to strive, as best as they are able, to live “holy” lives, and so receive communion. Such pastoral practice has multiple detrimental doctrinal and moral consequences.

First, to allow those who are objectively in manifest grave sin to receive communion is an overt public attack on the holiness of what John Paul terms “the Most Holy Sacrament.” Grave sin, by its very nature, as Ignatius, Vatican II and John Paul attest, deprives one of holiness, for the Holy Spirit no longer abides within such a person, thus making the person unfit to receive holy communion. For one to receive communion in such a, literally, disgraced state enacts a lie, for in receiving the sacrament one is asserting that one is in communion with Christ, when in actuality one is not.

Similarly, such a practice is also an offense against the holiness of the Church. Yes, the Church is composed of saints and sinners, yet, those who do sin, which is everyone, must be repentant-sinners, specifically of grave sin, if they are to participate fully in the Eucharistic liturgy and so receive the most-holy risen body and blood of Jesus. A person who is in grave sin may still be a member of the Church, but as a grave-sinner such a person no longer participates in the holiness of the Church as one of the holy faithful. To receive communion in such an unholy state is, again, to enact a lie for in such a reception one is publicly attempting to testify that one is a graced and living member of the ecclesial community when one is not.

Second, and maybe more importantly, to allow those who persist in manifest grave sin to receive communion, seemingly as an act of mercy, is both to belittle the condemnatory evil of grave sin and to malign the magnitude and power of the Holy Spirit. Such a pastoral practice is implicitly acknowledging that sin continues to govern humankind despite Jesus' redeeming work and his anointing of the Holy Spirit upon all who believe and are baptized. Jesus is actually not Savior and Lord, but rather Satan continues to reign.

Moreover, to sanction persons in grave sin is in no manner a benevolent or loving act, for one is endorsing a state wherein they could be eternally condemned, thus jeopardizing their salvation. Likewise, in turn, one is also insulting such grave-sinners, for one is subtly telling them that they are so sinful that not even the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to help them change their sinful ways and make them holy. They are inherently un-savable. Actually, though, what is ultimately being tendered is the admission that the Church of Jesus Christ is not really holy and so is incapable of truly sanctifying her members.

Lastly, scandal is the public pastoral consequence of allowing persons in unrepentant manifest grave sin to receive Holy Communion. It is not simply that the faithful members of the Eucharistic community will be dismayed and likely disgruntled, but, more importantly, they will be tempted to think that they too can sin gravely and continue in good standing with the Church. Why attempt to live a holy life, even a heroic virtuous life, when the Church herself appears to demand neither such a life, or even to encourage such a life? Here the Church becomes a mockery of herself and such a charade breeds nothing but scorn and disdain in the world, and derision and cynicism among the faithful, or at best, a hope against hope among the little ones.

The Four Marks of the Church: The Contemporary Crisis in Ecclesiology



by **Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM., Cap. ***

Sydney, University of Notre Dame (Australia), February 24, 2018

The Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed (381 AD) professes that we believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Each mark, in its fullness, must be properly conceived and articulated, and yet only together, in their perichoretic relationship, do they form the theological foundation of the Church's authentic self-understanding. Without them the Church's own self-identity would become opaque, possessing no discernable defining character, and so would be exposed to any and every imposed guise – either by herself or from without. Moreover, these four ecclesial marks are most fully expressed and most abundantly nurtured within the Eucharist liturgy.

In this talk I will argue for the above in the following way. First, I will examine, at some length, St. Ignatius of Antioch's

seven letters. Second, I will examine, more briefly, Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. Each text perceives the Church's revealed identity within these four defining marks. Lastly, with the aid of St. John Paul II's encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, I will contend that these four defining ecclesial marks are presently at risk. This threat comes not only from within the Catholic theological community, but even and regrettably from within Church leadership. Because of this danger I will conclude by advocating the need to mount a robust defense and clear advocacy of the Church's four marks. Without such an apology, the Church's identity – what she truly is – will become disordered, and so will enfeeble her ability to live and to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This enfeeblement, then, will also be most visibly enacted within the Eucharistic liturgy which will not only cause scandal but also, and more importantly, demean the Eucharistic liturgy as the supreme enactment of the Church being One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

St. Ignatius of Antioch: The Eucharistic Oneness of the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church

You may be wondering why I have chosen Ignatius of Antioch as my starting point since he lived almost two millennia before the Second Vatican Council and John Paul II. I have done so because I consider Ignatius to be one of the most prophetically advanced theologians within the Church's long theological tradition. Actually, as an Apostolic Father (d. 107) who was acquainted with much of the written New Testament, Ignatius helped to initiate what would become the Church's theological tradition (1). Importantly, for our topic, Ignatius is the first to bear witness to the distinctive hierarchical structure of the Church – the existence of bishops, priests, deacons and laity. He did not argue for this ecclesial arrangement, but presumed that it had faithfully and naturally developed from within the earliest

apostolic churches – the nascent Christian communities of which he was himself a participating bishop member. What Ignatius did do within his seven letters was develop an ecclesiology that embodied the four ecclesial marks, though he would not have thought to employ that theological designation. As we will see, in so doing, Ignatius was prophetically anticipating Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, as well as John Paul II's encyclical concerning the foundational supporting and nourishing inter-relationship between the Church and the Eucharist.

Unity, for Ignatius, is the Church's supreme present expression as well as her definitive goal. Ignatius exhorts Bishop Polycarp: "Give thought especially to unity, for there is nothing more important than this" (*Ad Poly.* 1) (2). To the Magnesians Ignatius writes: "I pray for their [all of the churches] corporate as well as their spiritual unity – both of these are the gifts of Jesus Christ, our never-failing Life" (*Ad Mag.* 1). He closes his letter with this final appeal: "Farewell. See that there is a godly unity among you, and a spirit that is above all divisions; for this is Jesus Christ" (*Ad Mag.* 15). Ignatius assures the Philadelphians that he did his "part as one dedicated to the cause of unity; for where disunion and bad blood exist, God can never be dwelling" (*Ad Phil.* 8). The Smyrnaeans, since they live in Christ and in communion with the Holy Spirit, participate "in the Divine Unity" (*Ad Smy.* 12). Unity is Jesus' utmost gift for it is the gift of himself in whom the Church is assumed into the divine intimacy of the Trinity.

If unity is the Church's aim, faith, for Ignatius, is the justifying source of that oneness. He exalts in the Smyrnaeans: "Glory be Jesus Christ, the Divine One, who has gifted you with such wisdom. I have seen how immovably settled in faith you are; nailed body and soul, as it were, to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and rooted and grounded in love by His blood. You hold the firmest convictions about our Lord" (*Ad Smy.* 1). In particular it is the faith of the Apostles that establishes the Church's

oneness. Ignatius tells the Ephesians that “Christians who in the power of the Jesus Christ have ever been of the self-same mind as the Apostles” (*Ad Eph.* 11; cf. *Ad Phil.* 4). Moreover, Jesus Christ, as already seen in the above quotes, is the sole source of this ecclesial unity for through faith in him all are united to him and to one another, and together, in communion with the Holy Spirit, are united to the one God and Father of all. Echoing Paul, Ignatius professes that Christians are one new man in Christ since they are “united in faith” and so become one in him (*Ad Eph.* 20; cf. *Ad Smy.* 4; *Ad Mag.* 12). The ultimate and greatest effect of faith is that all “be one with Jesus and the Father” (*Ad Mag.* 1).

This ecclesial oneness through the unity of faith in Jesus Christ is witnessed in the faithful being united to their bishop in whom this unity of ecclesial faith is personified. For Ignatius, there is a hierarchal unifying sequence. To honor the bishop is not so much to respect him as to esteem “the Father of him who is the Bishop of us all, Jesus Christ” (*Ad Mag.* 3). As one would obey the supreme bishop, Christ, so one is to obey him who is a bishop of the Bishop, Christ himself (cf. *Ad Mag.* 3, 6-7; *Ad Tral.* 2; *Ad Phil.* 3; *Ad Smy.* 8-9). Ignatius tells the Ephesians how privileged they are: “If I myself reached such an intimacy with your bishop in a brief space of time – an intimacy that was less of this world than of the Spirit – how much more fortunate must I count you, who are as inseparably one with him as the Church is with Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ with the Father; so constituting one single harmonious unity throughout” (*Ad Eph.* 5). Here we perceive again a logical sequence of causal unity. To be united to the bishop is to be unity with the Church and to be united to the Church is to be in unity with Jesus and to be united to Jesus is to be in unity with his Father. And this oneness is founded, as Ignatius states above, upon the intimacy of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Ignatius encourages the Magnesians:

“Do your utmost to stand firm in the precepts of the Lord and the Apostles, so that everything you do, worldly or spiritual,

may go prosperously from beginning to end in faith and love, in the Son and the Father and the Spirit, together with your most reverend bishop and that beautifully-woven spiritual chaplet, your clergy and godly minded deacons. Be as submissive to the bishop and to one another as Jesus Christ was to his Father, and as the Apostles were to Christ and the Father; so that there may be complete unity, in the flesh as well as in the spirit" (*Ad Mag.* 13) (3).

For Ignatius, then, the bishop is the cornerstone of this ecclesial and apostolic unity for "where the bishop is to be seen, there let all of his people be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is present, we have the world-wide [catholic] Church" (*Ad Smy.* 😊) (4). Moreover, "we can have no life apart from Jesus Christ; and as he represents the mind of the Father, so our bishops, even those in the remotest parts of the world, represent the mind of Jesus Christ" (*Ad Eph.* 3). Ignatius employs the analogy of an orchestral symphony and choir. Priests are to be attuned to their bishop "like strings on a harp" that results in praise of Jesus for their "minds are in unison" and their affections are "in harmony." Therefore, the laity are to "come and join this choir, every one of you; let there be a whole symphony of minds in concert; take the tone all together from God, and sing aloud to the Father with one voice through Jesus Christ, so that he may hear you and know by your good works that you are indeed members of his Son's Body. A completely united front will help to keep you in constant communion with God" (*Ad Eph.* 4).

This ecclesial oneness in Christ and in his Church, in turn, empowers Christians to perform the deeds of holiness, for only holy Christians within the holy Church are able to accomplish holy acts of love. Ignatius assures the Ephesians: "Men who are carnal are no more capable of acting spiritually, nor spiritual men of acting carnally, than deeds of unbelief are possible for the faithful, or deeds of faith to the unbelieving. But

with you, even what you do in the flesh is spiritual, for your actions are all done in Jesus Christ" (*Ad Eph.* 8).

Furthermore:

"Given a thorough-going faith and love for Jesus Christ, there is nothing in all this that will not be obvious to you; for life begins and ends with those two qualities. Faith is the beginning, and love is the end; and the union of the two together is God. All that makes for a soul's perfection follows in their train, for nobody who professes faith will commit sin, and nobody who possesses love can feel hatred. As the tree is known by its fruits, so they who claim to belong to Christ are known by their actions; for this work of ours does not consist in just professions, but in a faith that is both practical and lasting" (*Ad Eph.* 14).

The Church is the fount of all holiness for its source is Jesus, who as the Christ, pours out his Holy Spirit upon all who believe in him. In this Spirit all of the faithful enact the holy deeds of love.

What we perceive in all of the above is Ignatius's clear perception that as the Trinity of persons constitutes the one holy God, so within the economy of salvation the Father through his Son, Jesus, and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, establishes the one, holy, catholic Church. This Church comprises all who believe in Christ. Being one in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, Christians thus become children of the Father. This oneness finds its ecclesial apostolic expression in the faithful being united to their bishops, the successors of the Apostles, and with the priests and deacons, for to be in communion with the Bishop and his apostolic council is to be united to Jesus in the Spirit and so born into the life of the Father – the fount and consummation of all oneness.

This ecclesial oneness of apostolic faith, for Ignatius, is supremely expressed and enacted within the Eucharist, for here all the faithful are united around their one bishop to celebrate one sacred liturgy whereby all become most fully one in Christ Jesus

and so made holy in communion with his Eucharistic presence. Though he did not articulate it explicitly, Ignatius grasps that the Eucharist supremely embodies and so most fully makes actual all four marks of the Church.

Because those who espouse erroneous doctrines cast themselves outside of the Church and her Eucharistic assembly, Ignatius urges the Philadelphians:

"Make certain, therefore, that you all observe one common Eucharist; for there is but one Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with his Blood, and one single altar of sacrifice – even as also there is but one Bishop, with his clergy and my own fellow-servitors the deacons. This will ensure that all your doings are in full accord with the will of God" (*Ad Phil.* 4).

Ignatius warns the Ephesians that no one should “be under any illusion; a man who excludes himself from the sanctuary is depriving himself of the bread of God, for if the prayer of one or two has such efficacy, how much more powerful is that of the bishop together with his whole church. Anyone who absents himself from the congregation convicts himself at once of arrogance and becomes self-excommunicate” (*Ad Eph.* 5; cf. *Ad Smy.* 8). Only those who are “in a state of grace” and are “united in faith” and so one “in Christ Jesus” are ready “to share in the one common breaking of bread – the medicine of immortality, and the sovereign remedy by which we escape death and live in Jesus Christ for evermore” (*Ad Eph.* 20; cf. *ibid.* 13).

Significantly, Ignatius does not extol the ecclesial importance of the Eucharist without simultaneously speaking of those who are incapable of joining in the Eucharistic assembly. By its very nature the Eucharist is a living enactment of Church’s oneness, a unity founded upon the one universal apostolic faith through which the faithful are united to their bishop, and so in communion with Jesus Christ, the head of his body the Church. Only those, therefore, who are in a state of grace, and so conjoined to the Church, are able to participate in this supreme sacrament of

faith. Heretics, those who reject the apostolic faith of the one, holy, catholic Church of Christ, literally ex-communicate themselves from being in communion with the Church, and so render themselves incapable of receiving Jesus in communion. Only those in communion with the Church are able “to go to communion” within the Eucharistic liturgy. The Gnostics bear witness to this for “they even absent themselves from the Eucharist and the public prayers, because they will not admit that the Eucharist is the self-same body of our Savior Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins and which the Father in his goodness afterwards raised up again” (*Ad Smy.* 7).

Heresy, for Ignatius, is thus fundamentally destructive: it destroys the oneness of the Church by denying the universal apostolic faith, the very universal apostolic faith that constitutes the oneness of the Church. Thus, Ignatius is adamant: “No man who is responsible for defiling a household can expect to share in the kingdom of God...; how much more when a man’s subversive doctrines defile the God-given faith for which Jesus Christ was crucified. Such a wretch in his uncleanness is bound for the unquenchable fire, and so is anyone else who gives him a hearing” (*Ad Eph.* 16). Ignatius constantly warns the faithful to guard themselves “carefully against such men of that sort” and especially to “close your ears, then, if anyone [the Gnostics] preaches to you without speaking of Jesus Christ” who was truly born in the flesh, truly suffered and died in the flesh and is truly risen in the flesh (*Ad Tral.* 7 & 9). “Flee for your very life from these men; they are poisonous growth with a deadly fruit, and one taste of it is speedily fatal. They are not of the Father’s planting” for they deny the passion, cross and death of Jesus and so deny that he is the head of his body, “for the promise that we have from God is the promise of unity, which is the essence of himself” (*Ad Tral.* 11). For Ignatius, heresy is absolutely detestable precisely because it abolishes the unity of the Church, and it does so by denying the Church’s one, catholic and apostolic faith.

In concluding our study of Ignatius of Antioch, I want to make two final points. First, Ignatius wrote to six churches, five of which had compassionately sent their bishop and representatives to visit him while he made his martyr's journey to Rome. He likewise wrote a letter ahead of himself to the church of Rome. He did so for the sole purpose of discouraging that church from meddling in and so obstructing his imminent martyrdom. He wrote his seventh letter to his good friend, Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna. While all of these were individual local churches with their own presiding bishop, Ignatius clearly presumed that they all believed the same apostolic doctrine; that they all participated in the same sacramental practice; and that they all taught and upheld the same moral precepts. Thus, these individual churches were in universal communion with one another. Not only did each bear witness to their being one, holy, catholic and apostolic, but together they also bore communal witness to these same ecclesial marks. No one church possessed a distinctive doctrinal or ethical defining difference from the others. They all enjoyed the same identifying ecclesial characteristics that were evident to all – both within and outside the Christian faith. This ecclesial communion among the individual local churches, along with what makes them one in themselves and among themselves, will be important when we examine the present ecclesial crises surrounding the four marks of the Church (5).

Secondly, Ignatius was acutely aware of the destructiveness of heretical teaching, for such erroneous teaching eliminated the very ecclesial marks that defined the Church. He, nonetheless, appears to be naïve in that he strongly gives the impression throughout his letters that bishops, by the very nature of their office, could never be heretics themselves. We see this in his constant emphasis and adamant demand that the faithful unwaveringly be obedient and loyal to their respective bishops. What is to be made of such seeming naiveté? Ignatius may have been in the enviable position of never having encountered a

heretical bishop, but if he ever did chance upon one, he would have had a ready response at hand. He would clearly have argued in the same manner that we have observed in our above study. For a bishop to espouse heretical teaching, whether concerning doctrine, morals, or pastoral and sacramental practice which bears upon doctrine and morals, Ignatius would have contended that such a bishop no longer was in union with the catholic ecclesial community for he no longer professed the one apostolic faith of the Church and thus rendered himself incapable of exercising fully his office as bishop. He could no longer teach and govern as an authentic successor of the Apostles, nor could he preside over the Eucharistic liturgy in a manner that bore witness to and enriched the oneness of the holy catholic Church. Simply put, such a heretical bishop would no longer bear within himself as a bishop the four defining marks of the Church and, therefore, he could no longer justifiably act as an ecclesial member within the Church. He may continue to act outside the Church, or even within the Church, but his actions would lack a genuine ecclesial character, for the essential and indispensable four marks of the church would be absent within his specious ministry. Such, I believe, would be Ignatius' rejoinder to a heretical bishop. And an argument I will similarly employ in face of our contemporary ecclesial crisis.

The Second Vatican Council: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and the Four Marks of the Church

Now we will examine the Church's four marks within the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – *Lumen Gentium*. Before we do, however, we need to remember that concern for the Church's oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity did not jump from Ignatius to Vatican II. Such attention was always present, and markedly came to the fore with

Pius XII's encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*. For him, the one Body of Christ is founded upon the harmony of her apostolic faith and the universality of her calling to make all humankind holy. Pius's encyclical, then, was the direct prelude to Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. What may seem surprising, then, is that *Lumen Gentium* does not allocate a specific treatment to the marks of the Church, but rather speaks of them within various ecclesial topics. Nonetheless, their importance is evident throughout, and, not unexpectedly, in accord with the thought of Ignatius of Antioch.

From the very onset, the Constitution, like Ignatius, emphasizes the foundational mark of oneness. For the Council, Christ is the light of the world and his light visibly shines forth in the Church. Therefore, "the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and the unity among men" (*LG*. 1) (6). While contemporary humankind is drawn together ever more closely, "it still remains for them to achieve full unity in Christ" (*ibid.*). Having established the foundational ecclesial theme of unity, the Constitution allots a paragraph to each of the persons of the Trinity, and in so doing brings to the fore the other defining marks of the Church.

First, the Father determined, from the time of Adam, and specifically in his making a covenant with Abraham, "to *call together* in a *holy* Church those who should believe in Christ" (*ibid.* 2). This summons will find its completion at the end of time when all the elect "will be *gathered together* with the Father in the universal Church" (*ibid.*). Second, concerning the Son, the Father sent the Son into the world precisely *to restore all things in him* (cf. Eph. 1:4-5). Therefore, all "are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, towards whom our whole life is directed" (*ibid.* 3). In the Eucharist, then, "the *unity of believers* is both expressed and brought about" (*ibid.*). Third, concerning

the Holy Spirit, Jesus, the incarnate Son, having completed his salvific work sent for the Holy Spirit “that he might continually *sanctify* the Church, and that, consequently, those who believe might have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father” (ibid. 4). Through the “*hierarchic and charismatic gifts*,” the Spirit constantly renews the Church and leads her “*to perfect union with her Spouse*” (ibid.). Having summarized the work of each person of the Trinity, the council concludes: “Hence the *universal Church* is seen to be ‘a people *brought into unity* from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (ibid.) (7).

The Council, in these three paragraphs, has articulated the four marks of the Church, and in so doing has echoed Ignatius. The source and end of the Church’s oneness is founded upon the unity of the Trinity. Within the economy of salvation this unity is achieved in the Father uniting all believers in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, as the Body of Christ, the Church embodies and fosters this communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the mark of perfect oneness also resides in the marital relationship of the Church being the Spouse of Christ. As the Constitution progresses, it not only re-affirms what it articulated concerning the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit but also expands its teaching. As the Head of his Body, Jesus, as the Christ, bestows the mark of holiness upon his Church, for the Holy Spirit “functions as the principle of life, the soul” (ibid. 7) and, thus imbues the Church with a life of holiness. As the Savior and Lord of all, Jesus also confers upon his Church the mark of universality for “all men are called to this catholic unity which prefigures and promotes universal peace” (ibid. 13). The Council further states: “For by communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body those brothers of his who are called together from every nation” (ibid. 7). Likewise, through the hierarchic and charismatic gifts, Jesus, through the Spirit, gives to the Church an ecclesial structure that bears the mark of apostolicity, a mark that ensures that all of the Spirit’s gifts and

graces flourish for the up-building of his Body (cf. *ibid.*). The Constitution emphasizes that the “foundation of the Church is built by the apostles (cf. I Cor. 3:11) and from it the Church receives solidarity and unity” (*ibid.* 6). Specifically, “the Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of bishops and of the whole company of faithful” (*ibid.* 23). Moreover, “in order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided he [Jesus] put Peter at the head of the apostles, and in him he set up a lasting and visible source and foundation of the unity both of faith and communion” (*ibid.* 18; cf. 19 and 20). This unity among the episcopate is principally exercised within counsels and synods (cf. *ibid.* 23 and 25). Moreover, episcopal conferences also contribute to “safeguarding the unity of the faith and the unique divine structure of the universal Church,” “for all bishops have the obligation of fostering and safeguarding the unity of faith and of upholding the discipline which is common to the whole Church...” (*ibid.* 23). This ecclesial unity of doctrine and morals, which manifests the four marks of the Church, are expressed and nurtured within the sacraments, especially within the Eucharist. In this sacrament Jesus most fully unites himself to his earthly Church, his Body, and confers upon her his universal and apostolic holiness (cf. *ibid.* 7) (8).

The Council also accentuates, in the light of some Reformation erroneous views, that the holy Church of Christ is both visible and invisible and not two separate realities; as if the visible is of human origin and the invisible is of divine origin. This truth pertains to the Church’s sacramentality, for in and through her visible structure and sacramental acts, the grace of Christ is endowed upon the faithful and the world. Thus, as in the Incarnation where the visible humanity is one with and so manifests the divinity of the Son, so the visible Church is one with and so manifests all of her invisible graces. The Constitution accentuates that the one visible and invisible Church “is the sole

Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic..."(ibid. 8). Moreover, it deems that "this Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him" (ibid.). The four marks of the Church are, then, most spiritually present and most visibly manifested within the Catholic Church for in her they fully subsist. These ecclesial subsisting four marks of the universal Church are realized and manifested not only within the Church as a whole but also within each of the individual local churches. In communion with the local apostolic bishop, especially within the celebration of the Eucharist, "these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is constituted" (ibid. 26). In this light the Council clearly designates and defines those who are fully members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

"Fully incorporated into the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all of the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who – by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesial government, and communion – are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not however persevere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but 'in body' and not 'in heart'" (ibid. 14) (9).

To be a full member of the Church demands that one share the faith of the visible Church, participate in the visible sacraments of the Church and be in communion with and be governed by the visible structure of the Church, for only in so doing does one live within the one, universal, and apostolic Church of Christ in which the full means of the Spirit's holiness

resides. Significantly, the Council notes that, if one does not persevere in charity because of sinning gravely, one is still a member of the Church, but one no longer partakes of the Church's life; for one no longer shares in her oneness, holiness, universality and apostolicity – for these are the means, the bond, and the fruit of ecclesial love (10).

Having examined the four marks of the Church within the teaching of Ignatius of Antioch and Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, I now want to address the crisis that I perceive presently exists within the Church – a crisis in which the four marks of the Church are under subtle, but well-defined, attack. I will do so in reference not only to Ignatius and *Lumen Gentium*, but also to John Paul II's encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, for here he already identifies some of the assaults on the four marks of the Church and clearly responds to them.

The Contemporary Challenge to the Four Marks of the Church and its Eucharistic Impact

Prior to and following upon Vatican II, St. Pope John XXIII and Blessed Paul VI, in their respective encyclicals, *Mater et Magistra* and *Ecclesiam Suam*, stressed the importance of the Church's teaching office – a ministry that fostered and upheld the apostolic faith so as to assure the one, universal, holiness of God's people. John Paul II, then, not only follows upon Ignatius and Vatican II, but places himself squarely within the immediate preceding papacies. Thus, John Paul steadfastly holds that oneness is the fundamental and indispensable mark of the Church. He writes in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*:

"The Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 saw in the concept of an 'ecclesiology of communion' the central and foundational idea of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The Church is called during her earthly

pilgrimage to maintain and promote communion with the Triune God and communion among the faithful. For this purpose she possesses the word and the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, by which she 'constantly lives and grows' and in which she expresses her very nature. It is not by chance that the term *communion* has become one of the names given to this sublime sacrament (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 34) (11).

Granted the post-Vatican II Church was rife with divisions – disputes over doctrine, morals and the liturgy. These disagreements continue still. However, at no time during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI was there ever any doubt as to what the Church teaches concerning her doctrine, morals, and liturgical practice. Both recognized that what truly made the Church one is her unalterable apostolic and universal faith, and her sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as fount and means of her holiness. They, therefore, faithfully taught, clearly developed, and ardently promoted the Church's doctrinal and moral teaching, and her authentic sacramental practice – all for the sake of guaranteeing and fostering her ecclesial communion. Such is not the case, in many significant ways, within the present pontificate of Pope Francis.

Challenge to the Church's Oneness

Much of Pope Francis's pontificate is admirable and praiseworthy. One only needs to observe, to note a few, his defense of the sanctity of life, his concern for the poor and the marginalized, and his encouragement to the young. At times, nonetheless, it would appear that Pope Francis identifies himself not as the promoter of unity but as the agent of division. His practical philosophy, if it is an intentional philosophy, seems to consist in the belief that a greater unifying good will emerge from the present bedlam of divergent opinions and the turmoil of the resulting divisions. My concern here is that such approach, even

if unintentional, strikes at very essence of the Petrine ministry as intended by Jesus and as continuously understood by the Church. The successor of St. Peter, by the very nature of the office, is to be, literally, the personal embodiment and thus the consummate sign of the Church's ecclesial communion, and so the principle defender and promoter of the Church's ecclesial communion. Thus, a manner of proceeding that allows and even encourages doctrinal and moral divergences undermines the whole of Vatican II's teaching on ecclesial communion, as well as that of the entire magisterial and theological tradition going back to Ignatius. By seeming to encourage doctrinal division and moral discord within the Church the present pontificate has transgressed the foundational mark of the Church – her oneness. How, nonetheless, does this offense against the Church's unity manifest itself? It does so by destabilizing the other three marks of the Church.

Challenge to the Church's Apostolicity

Firstly, the apostolic nature of the Church is being undermined. As has often been noted by theologians and bishops, and most frequently by the laity (those who possess the *sensus fidelium*), the teaching of the present pontiff is not noted for its clarity (12). As the one most responsible for the unity of the Church, the pope is the one who is most responsible for ensuring the bond of faith. To be in full ecclesial communion with the apostolic Church, whether it is the pope or the newest convert, it is necessary to believe what the Apostles handed on and what the apostolic Church has consistently taught. For Pope Francis, then, as seen in *Amoris Laetitia*, to re-conceive and newly express the previously clear apostolic faith and magisterial tradition in a seemingly ambiguous manner, so as to leave confusion and puzzlement within the ecclesial community, is to contradict his own duties as the successor of Peter and to transgress the trust of

his fellow bishops, as well as that of priests and the entire faithful. Ignatius would be dismayed at such a situation. If, for him, heretical teaching espoused by those who are only loosely associated with the Church is destructive to the Church's unity, how much more devastating is ambiguous teaching when authored by a bishop who is divinely charged to ensure ecclesial unity. At least heresy is a clear denial of the apostolic faith and so can be clearly identified and as such properly addressed. Ambiguous teaching, precisely because of its murkiness, cannot be clearly identified, and so is even more troublesome for it fosters uncertainty as to how it is to be understood and thus how it is to be clarified.

Moreover, for Pope Francis to then take sides in the ensuing debate, a debate for which he himself is responsible, concerning the proper interpretation of the uncertain teaching is disingenuous. He has now allowed others to be the arbiter of what is true, when it is precisely the apostolic mandate of the pope to be the one who confirms the brethren, both episcopal and laity, in the truth. Furthermore, to appear to sanction an interpretation of doctrine or morals that contravenes what has been the received apostolic teaching and magisterial tradition of the Church – as dogmatically defined by Councils and doctrinally taught by previous popes and the bishops in communion with him, as well as accepted and believed by the faithful, cannot then be proposed as magisterial teaching. The magisterium simply cannot fundamentally contradict itself concerning matters of faith and morals. While such teaching and confirmation may be enacted by a member of the magisterium, such as the Pope, such teaching and confirmation is not magisterial precisely because it is not in accord with previous magisterial teaching. To act in such a manner, the pontiff, or a bishop for that manner, is acting in a manner that places himself outside the magisterial communion of previous pontiffs and bishops, and so is not a magisterial act. To act in a magisterial manner one has to be, including the pope, in

communion with the entire ever-living magisterial tradition. In the matter of faith and morals the teaching of no living pope takes apostolic and magisterial precedence over the magisterial teaching of previous pontiffs or the established magisterial doctrinal tradition. The magisterial and apostolic import of a present pontiff's teaching lies precisely in its being in conformity with and so in living-communion with the abiding historical magisterial and apostolic tradition. That Pope Francis' ambiguous teaching at times appears to fall outside the magisterial teaching of the historic apostolic ecclesial community thus gives cause for concern, for it, as stated above, fosters division and disharmony rather than unity and peace within the one apostolic Church. There appears to be, as a consequence, no assurance of faith.

Challenge to the Church's Catholicity

Secondly, as we saw in examining the ecclesiology of Ignatius and especially Vatican II, all of the bishops throughout the world, who are in communion with the pope, are together responsible for the apostolic oneness of the Church. The universality of the Church is visibly manifested in that all of the particular churches are bound together, through the college of bishops in communion with the pope, by professing the same apostolic faith and by preaching the one universal Gospel to all of humankind. We saw this clearly expressed in Ignatius' letters. Traditionally, this catholic oneness is most clearly exercised within universal councils and extraordinary synods. Moreover, as *Lumen Gentium* acknowledges, national bishops' conferences, while attending to pastoral issues that pertain to their own culture and locale, also exercise this catholicity by safeguarding and promoting the universal doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church as well as insuring that the universal sacramental and liturgical disciplines of the Church are properly observed. Thus, as exemplified in

Ignatius and Vatican II, the entire visible hierarchical governance of the universal Church is structured precisely to maintain and promote ecclesial communion – a communion that embodies the one apostolic faith. This mark of catholic oneness is also presently challenged.

Pope Francis' espousal of synodality has been much touted – the allowance of local geographical churches more self-determinative freedom. On one level this decentralization is welcomed for it encourages national bishops' conferences and local ordinaries to take more governing responsibility. As envisioned, however, by Pope Francis and advocated by others, this notion of synodality, instead of ensuring the universal oneness of the Catholic Church, an ecclesial communion composed of multiple particular churches, is now employed to undermine and so sanction divisions within the Church. This rupture is not simply on matters of local and national significance, but on issues that bear upon the doctrinal and moral integrity of the one Church of Christ. We are presently witnessing the disintegration of the Church's catholicity, for local churches, both on the diocesan and national level, are often interpreting doctrinal norms and moral precepts in various conflicting and contradictory ways. Thus, what the faithful are instructed to believe and practice in one diocese or country is not in conformity with what the faithful are instructed to believe and practice in another diocese or country. The Church's mark of oneness, a unity that the pope is divinely mandated to protect and engender, is losing its integrity because her marks of catholicity and apostolicity have fallen into doctrinal and moral disarray, a theological anarchy that the pope himself, maybe unwittingly, has initiated by advocating a flawed conception of synodality. To put this erroneous notion into practice, then, is to violate the catholicity of the Church herself.

Challenge to the Church's Holiness

Thirdly, this brings us to the fourth mark of the Church – her holiness. This mark is equally under siege, most especially, but not surprisingly, in relationship to the Eucharist.

For John Paul, Eucharistic communion “confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ” (ibid. 23; cf. 24). Because “the Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist, it follows that there is a profound relationship between the two, so much so that we can apply to the Eucharistic mystery the very words with which, in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, we profess the Church to be ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic’” (ibid. 26). Of all the sacraments, therefore, it is “the Most Holy Sacrament” (ibid.). Likewise, it is apostolic for Jesus entrusted it to the Apostles and to their successors (cf. ibid. 27). “The Eucharist thus appears as the culmination of all the sacraments in perfecting our communion with God the Father by identification with his only-begotten Son through the working of the Holy Spirit” (ibid. 34). Since the Eucharist conveys and nurtures most fully the four marks of the Church, John Paul insists:

"The celebration of the Eucharist, however, cannot be the starting-point for communion; it presupposes that communion already exists, a communion which it seeks to consolidate and bring to perfection. The sacrament is an expression of this bond of communion both in its *invisible* dimension, which, in Christ and through the working of the Holy Spirit, unites us to the Father and among ourselves, and in its *visible* dimension, which entails communion in the teaching of the Apostles, in the sacraments and in the Church's hierarchical order. The profound relationship between the invisible and visible elements of ecclesial communion is constitutive of the Church as a sacrament of salvation" (ibid. 35) (13).

In this proclamation, John Paul confirms, as seen above, the teaching of Vatican II, as well echoes, inadvertently, Ignatius' Eucharistic ecclesiology. To participate fully in the Church's Eucharist, a liturgy that embodies and cultivates the four marks of the Church, one must also embody the four marks of the Church, for only in so doing is one in full communion with the Church so as to receive communion – the risen body and blood of Jesus, the source and culmination of one's union with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Quoting from a document promulgated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, John Paul insists: "In fact, the community, in receiving the Eucharistic presence of the Lord, receives the entire gift of salvation and shows, even in its lasting visible form, that is the image and true presence of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" (ibid. 39) (14). In the light of this, John Paul proceeds to address those issues that contravene this doctrinal understanding of the Eucharist and the reception of Holy Communion.

The first issue John Paul addresses, and the one that concerns us here, pertains specifically to holiness (15). While one must profess the Church's one apostolic faith, faith itself is insufficient for receiving Christ in the Eucharist. Referencing Vatican II, John Paul states that "we must persevere in sanctifying grace and love, remaining within the Church 'bodily' as well as 'in our heart'" (ibid. 36) (16). At the beginning of the Second Century, Ignatius, as we saw, made this same point – that one can only receive communion "in a state of grace" (*Ad. Eph.* 20). Thus, in accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Council of Trent, John Paul confirms: "I therefore desire to reaffirm that in the Church there remains in force, now and in the future, the rule by which the Council of Trent gave concrete expression to the Apostle Paul's stern warning when it affirmed that in order to receive the Eucharist in a worthy manner, 'one must first confess one's sins, when one is aware of mortal sin'" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 36) (17). In accordance with the

doctrinal tradition of the Church, John Paul, therefore, insists that the sacrament of Penance is “necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice” when mortal sin is present (ibid. 37). While he acknowledges that only the person can judge his or her state of grace, he asserts that “in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved” (ibid.). John Paul intensifies his admonition by quoting Canon Law. Where there is “a manifest lack of proper moral disposition,” that is, according to Canon Law, when persons “obstinately persist in manifest grave sin,” they are “not to be permitted to Eucharistic communion” (ibid.) (18).

Here we perceive the present challenge to the Church’s holiness and specifically the holiness of the Eucharist. The question of whether divorced and remarried Catholic couples, who engage in marital acts, can receive communion revolves around the very issue of “outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm,” and, therefore, whether they possess “a manifest lack of proper moral disposition” for receiving communion. Pope Francis rightly insists that such couples should be accompanied and so helped to form properly their consciences. Granted that there are extraordinary marital cases where it can be rightfully discerned that a previous marriage was sacramentally invalid, even though evidence for an annulment is unobtainable, thus allowing a couple to receive communion. Nonetheless, the ambiguous manner in which Pope Francis proposes this pastoral accompaniment permits a pastoral situation to evolve whereby the common practice will swiftly ensue that almost every divorced and remarried couple will judge themselves free to receive Holy Communion. This pastoral situation will develop because moral negative commands, such as, “one shall not commit adultery,” are no longer recognized as absolute moral norms that can never be

trespassed, but as moral ideals – goals that may be achieved over a period of time, or may never be realized in one’s lifetime (19). In this indefinite interim people can continue, with the Church’s blessing, to strive, as best as they are able, to live “holy” lives, and so receive communion. Such pastoral practice has multiple detrimental doctrinal and moral consequences.

First, to allow those who are objectively in manifest grave sin to receive communion is an overt public attack on the holiness of what John Paul terms “the Most Holy Sacrament.” Grave sin, by its very nature, as Ignatius, Vatican II and John Paul attest, deprives one of holiness, for the Holy Spirit no longer abides within such a person, thus making the person unfit to receive holy communion. For one to receive communion in such a, literally, disgraced state enacts a lie, for in receiving the sacrament one is asserting that one is in communion with Christ, when in actuality one is not. Similarly, such a practice is also an offense against the holiness of the Church. Yes, the Church is composed of saints and sinners, yet, those who do sin, which is everyone, must be repentant-sinners, specifically of grave sin, if they are to participate fully in the Eucharistic liturgy and so receive the most-holy risen body and blood of Jesus. A person who is in grave sin may still be a member of the Church, but as a grave-sinner such a person no longer participates in the holiness of the Church as one of the holy faithful. To receive communion in such an unholy state is, again, to enact a lie for in such a reception one is publicly attempting to testify that one is a graced and living member of the ecclesial community when one is not.

Second, and maybe more importantly, to allow those who persist in manifest grave sin to receive communion, seemingly as an act of mercy, is both to belittle the condemnatory evil of grave sin and to malign the magnitude and power of the Holy Spirit. Such a pastoral practice is implicitly acknowledging that sin continues to govern humankind despite Jesus’ redeeming work and his anointing of the Holy Spirit upon all who believe and are

baptized. Jesus is actually not Savior and Lord, but rather Satan continues to reign. Moreover, to sanction persons in grave sin is in no manner a benevolent or loving act, for one is endorsing a state wherein they could be eternally condemned, thus jeopardizing their salvation. Likewise, in turn, one is also insulting such grave-sinners, for one is subtly telling them that they are so sinful that not even the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to help them change their sinful ways and make them holy. They are inherently un-savable. Actually, though, what is ultimately being tendered is the admission that the Church of Jesus Christ is not really holy and so is incapable of truly sanctifying her members.

Lastly, scandal is the public pastoral consequence of allowing persons in unrepentant manifest grave sin to receive Holy Communion. It is not simply that the faithful members of the Eucharistic community will be dismayed and likely disgruntled, but, more importantly, they will be tempted to think that they too can sin gravely and continue in good standing with the Church. Why attempt to live a holy life, even a heroic virtuous life, when the Church herself appears to demand neither such a life, or even to encourage such a life? Here the Church becomes a mockery of herself and such a charade breeds nothing but scorn and disdain in the world, and derision and cynicism among the faithful, or at best, a hope against hope among the little ones.

Conclusion

My conclusion will be brief. Much of what I have said, as you may have gathered, has been stated by others. Some will dismiss it as excessive or even mean-spirited. But that is not my intent or spirit at all. As stated earlier there is much in the character of Pope Francis to admire, and we owe him our daily prayers for strength in facing the burdens of his ministry. However, that cannot excuse us from speaking the truth in love. Anyone

experienced in religious life – or for that matter, in a marriage – will understand that sometimes the truth must be spoken bluntly – not out of bitterness, but out of fidelity to the persons involved and to safeguard the purpose they share.

What I have attempted to do, and I hope has been helpful, is place the contemporary crisis within the Church in its proper theological and doctrinal setting, that is, within the Church's four defining marks. Only when we grasp that the Church's very oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are at stake, what makes the Church truly herself, can we fully appreciate the degree and the consequence of the present crisis. The Church's very identity, our ecclesial communion, is being assailed, and because she is the Church of Christ, Jesus himself is being dishonored along with his saving work. What is presently being offered in its place is an anemic Church, a Church where the Holy Spirit is enfeebled, and so a Church that is incapable of giving full glory to God the Father.

By attempting to manifest the perilous nature of the crisis, my goal was not simply to make this misfortune known, but to encourage all of us, bishops, priests and laity alike, to embark on an adequate response. Such a response cannot be merely negative, a rebuttal of all the erroneous views and ambiguous arguments, though such is necessary, but rather it must also be a response that is robustly positive. From the time of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the time of the Second Vatican Council and St. John Paul II the Church has continually proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ and so the good news of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, a Church he conceived through his death and resurrection and to which he gave birth to in his sending forth the Holy Spirit. This constructive proclamation is what will renew the Church and so restore the fallen world to life in Christ.

Moreover, we must defend and promote a proper knowledge of and love for the Eucharist, for here, as we saw, the four marks of the Church are most fully expressed and abundantly nourished.

In the Eucharist above all the Church's identity is most clearly enacted and made visible. For in the Eucharist we are made one with Christ and one with one another as together we profess and joyfully acclaim our one apostolic and universal faith, a faith that is imbued with the holiness of the Spirit, and so as one ecclesial community we worship and glorify God the Father – the source and end of all. Within the Eucharist, then, the Church's four marks most beautifully shine.

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(1) Within his seven letters, for example, Ignatius so argued against those who denied that the Son of God existed as an actual fleshly man but only appeared (*docens*) or seemed to do so, that is, the Docetists, so as to anticipate the doctrinal teaching of the Council of Chalcedon over three hundred years later (451 AD). For Ignatius, Jesus is the one and the same person of Son of God who existed from all eternity as God and who came to exist truly as man in time. Because of this incarnational reality all that pertains to the divine Son's humanity – such as birth, suffering, and death, could rightly and properly be predicated of that one divine Son.

See T.G. Weinandy, "The Apostolic Christology of Ignatius of Antioch: The Road to Chalcedon," in *Jesus: Essays in Christology* (Sapientia Press: Ave Maria University, 2014), pp. 59-74. This essay was first published in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. A. Gregory and C. Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 71-84.

(2) All quotations from Ignatius's letters are taken from *Early Christian Writers*, trans. M. Staniforth, (Penguin Books: Baltimore, 1968).

(3) For Ignatius, bishops, priests and deacons form an "Apostolic circle" or "council" and so only those who possess "these three orders" can rightly be named a "church" (*Ad Tral.* 3). The Trallians must always be in unity "with Jesus Christ and your bishop and the Apostolic institutions" (*ibid.* 7). Bishops, priests

and deacons are ultimately “appointed” by Jesus Christ and “confirmed and ratified, according to his will, by his Holy Spirit” (*Ad Phil*, greeting).

(4) Ignatius is the first to employ the term “catholic.” Here it refers to the universality of the Church. Only around 200 AD did it become a title – “the Catholic Church,” which designated it as the universal Church and so distinct from localized heretical sects.

(5) Not without significance Ignatius makes reference to the other churches within his letters to the individual churches, especially at the conclusion of each of his letters. This referencing of the other churches testifies to their being in communion with one another and so to their individually and communally possessing the defining ecclesial characteristics – that of being one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Cf. *Ad Eph.* 21; *Ad Mag.* 15; *Ad Tral.* 12-13; *Ad Rom.* 9-10; *Ad Phi.* 10-11; *Ad Smyrn.* 11-13; *Ad Poly.* 7-8.

(6) All quotations are taken from *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, (Scholarly Resources Inc.: Wilmington, 1975).

(7) The Constitution footnotes St. Cyprian, *De Orat. Dom.* 23; St. Augustine, *Serm.* 71, 20, 33; and St. John Damascene, *Adv. Iconocl.* 12. In the above paragraph I have placed in italics those words and phrases that speak of the four marks of the Church, though not designating them as such.

(8) The Council does articulate an important aspect of the four marks of the Church that, while hidden in Ignatius’s theology, is never openly expressed, that is, the eschatological nature of these four ecclesial marks (cf. *Ibid.* 5). The Church fully becomes the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church only when Christ returns in glory. Then, his Body, the universal and apostolic Church, will be fully one with him in the Holy Spirit, thus sharing fully in his holiness. Again, as the Council later states: “While she slowly grows and matures, the Church longs for

the completed kingdom and, with all her strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with her king” (ibid. 5).

(9) The Constitution footnotes St. Augustine, *Bap. C. Donat. V. 28, 39*: "*Certe manifestum est, id quod dicitur, in Ecclesia intus et foris, non in corpore cogitandum.*"

(10) For a more concise teaching on the four marks of the Church, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, numbers 811-835.

(11) John Paul quotes *Lumen Gentium*, 26.

(12) Pope Francis consistently uses the term “doctrine” in a negative manner – as being bookish and lifeless, far removed from the pastoral concerns of daily ecclesial life. This pitting doctrine and pastoral practice against one another is a false and dangerous dichotomy. The truths of doctrine are the guides and guardians of wise pastoral practice. Without doctrine, pastoral practice has no objective authentic anchor, and so is subject to sentimentality, pop-psychology, and the prejudices of contemporary culture.

(13) At times one gets the impression that Pope Francis, as with the notion of doctrine, perceives the visible Church in a negative light. For the pope, the visible Church appears to assume the character of an impersonal governmental bureaucratic institution – created to make rigid rules and harsh regulations that often, again, have little bearing on the daily pastoral life of the Church – where the *real* Church exists in all its human tangled complexity. This view also comprises a false dichotomy. Yes, as with any big organization, there can be ecclesial bureaucratic red tape that is far from being constructive and helpful, and even pastoral, but the visible Church is, nonetheless, the sacramental sign and effective means by which, in which, and through which Jesus, through Holy Spirit, works his salvific wonders as Lord and Savior to the glory of God the Father. For this, love of the visible Church is not simply obligatory but a cause for rejoicing.

(14) Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion, *Communio Notio* (May 28, 1992).

(15) He later addresses the issues of inter-communion with Protestant denominations, as well as the norms governing communion in relationship to the Eastern Orthodox Churches (cf. 43-46).

(16) John Paul is quoting *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

(17) John Paul is referencing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1385 and the Council of Trent, DS 1647 and 1661.

(18) John Paul is quoting Canon 915.

(19) This understanding that negative moral norms are no longer absolute but goals to be achieved can be applied not only to those who commit adultery, but also to those who commit any other grave sin – fornication, homosexual acts, contraception, the molestation of children, stealing, etc. – and even murder. As long as they are attempting to do their very best, they can obtain the Church's blessing and receive Holy Communion. Obviously such a pastoral practice is morally absurd.

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