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OF EQUAL DIGNITY
An Interpretation of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*

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Abstract

Resisting a reduction of the conciliar event to an arbitrary power struggle between liberals and conservatives, Ormond Rush proposes a three-fold conciliar hermeneutic. First, a diachronic reading studies the development of ideas and documents before and during the council. Then, a synchronic reading analyzes a particular passage in relation to other conciliar texts. Finally, a hermeneutic of reception identifies the reception of the text into the life of the Church. This essay will apply only the first two readings to section 3 of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. The following will exegete this passage through a description of the relationship between Eastern and Western churches preceding the Council, an analysis of the development from the preparatory schema *De Ecclesiis Orientalibus* to the final draft of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, and the relationship of this passage to other conciliar texts related to the themes of local and universal Church, catholicity, and ecumenism.

Reflecting upon the transformative consequences of the Second Vatican Council, Karl Rahner asserted that this decisive ecclesial

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event was the “Church’s first official self-actualization as a world Church.”¹ While European and North American churches were aware of Eastern Catholic churches prior to Council,² the West habitually operated within a universalist framework that rarely engaged others with equal dignity. If they had relations, it was often in a proselytizing manner that imposed the Roman faith as an exported commodity amidst colonial endeavours. For the first time in modern history, the Council enabled a “reciprocal influence”³ among the churches through a latent rediscovery of a theology of the local church. Even prior to discussions on unity in diversity, catholicity, or inculturation, the bishops existentially experienced these realities by participating in the diverse liturgies of the Eastern churches and by sitting among bishops with different ecclesial patrimonies, cultural perspectives, and pastoral concerns.⁴

Yet, we must also recall the transitional nature of the Second Vatican Council. Even a cursory rhetorical analysis of the conciliar documents reveals numerous instances of the older universalist vision juxtaposed next to an emerging *communio* ecclesiology. This latter ecclesiology sought to balance the vertical dimension of unity between God and humanity with the horizontal dimension of community. Because of the presence of differing ecclesiological visions, scholars have advocated the use of Ormond Rush’s three-fold conciliar hermeneutic in order to limit ideological interpretations that appeal to particular texts at the expense of others.⁵ Resisting the reduction of the conciliar event to an arbitrary power struggle between liberals and conservatives, this hermeneutical approach presents a more balanced understanding of the whole. First, a diachronic reading encourages a hermeneutic of authors by studying the development of ideas and documents during the pre-conciliar, preparatory, and conciliar phases. Then, a synchronic reading encourages a hermeneutic of texts through an analysis of a particular passage in relation to other conciliar texts. Finally, Rush encourages a

¹Karl Rahner, “Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* (1979) 717.

²Unless otherwise noted, “East” and “Eastern church” will specifically refer to those in communion with Rome.

³Rahner, “Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” 717.

⁴Richard Gaillardetz, “Conversation Starters: Dialogue and Deliberation during Vatican II,” *America* (Feb. 13, 2012) 14-18.

⁵Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2004.

hermeneutic of reception, which identifies how the text has been received, or not, into the life of the Church.⁶

Due to a lack of space, this essay will apply only the first two readings of this threefold hermeneutic to section 3 of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (on the Eastern Churches):

These individual Churches, whether of the East or the West, although they differ somewhat among themselves in rite (to use the current phrase), that is, in liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline, and spiritual heritage, are, nevertheless, each as much as the others, entrusted to the pastoral government of the Roman Pontiff, the divinely appointed successor of St Peter in primacy over the universal Church. They are consequently of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others as regards rite and they enjoy the same rights and are under the same obligations, also in respect of preaching the Gospel to the whole world (cf. Mark 16: 15) under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff.⁷

This paper will be dedicated to an exegesis of this passage through a description of the relationship between Eastern and Western churches preceding the Council, an analysis of the development from the preparatory schema *De Ecclesiis Orientalibus* to the final draft of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, and the relationship of this passage to other conciliar texts related to the themes of local and universal Church, catholicity, and ecumenism.

1. Pre-Conciliar Background

Caught within the matrix of colonialism, the Counter-Reformation, and modernism, the Roman church from the 16th to the 19th centuries envisioned the renewal of communion with the Eastern churches as an act of *submission* of the latter to the one, true Catholic Church,

⁶Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*; diachronic reading, see 1-34; synchronic reading, see 35-51; hermeneutics of reception, 52-68.

⁷*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, 3. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decree_19641121_orientalium-ecclesiarum_en.html

Note: I chose the Vatican translation of OE, 3 as opposed to the Flannery translation because the former preserves the phrase “of equal dignity,” intended by “pari dignitate” (Flannery translated this as “of equal rank”). The Vatican translation suggests a sense of intrinsic mystery equally given by God to each of the churches, whereas the Flannery translation has a more juridical connotation. Moreover, the Vatican translation connects with a specific trajectory of how the Roman church has described Eastern churches since Pope Leo XIII’s 1894 encyclical *Orientalium dignitas*, (The Dignity of the East). Second, the original Latin opens this section with the phrase “Huiusmodi particulares Ecclesiae,” which I understand to place the English translation “individual” within the same genre of “particular” and “local” churches.

which was identical to the Latin church *sui iuris*. The West often maintained a domineering attitude, which Pope Benedict XIV succinctly captures in his 1755 encyclical *Allatae sunt*: “since the Latin rite is the rite of the Holy Roman Church and this Church is mother and teacher of the other Churches, the Latin rite should be preferred to all other rites.”⁸ Especially prevalent among Roman missionaries, this attitude led to numerous ecclesiological abuses known as “latinizations.” These abuses conformed Eastern liturgies and disciplines to the Roman standard. John Madey argues that this predominant Western vision conflicted with the vision of many Eastern hierarchs and faithful. Despite suffering ridicule from the Orthodox churches and ignorance from the Latin churches, many were motivated by a sincere desire for the “*perfection of the koinoinia or communion desired by Christ.*”⁹ This Eucharistic vision of the Church, visibly discernible within an Eastern ecclesiology, would not be rediscovered in the West until just prior to the Second Vatican Council.¹⁰

The Western universalist vision also influenced papal encyclicals to approach Eastern churches with an overly paternalistic tone. Whether Pope Leo XIII asserted that the Eastern rites were “worthy of glory and reverence... in virtue of those extremely ancient, singular memorials that they have bequeathed to us”¹¹ or Pope Pius XII held the Eastern rites to be “in equal esteem and equal honor, for they adorn the common Mother Church with a royal garment of many colors,”¹² these encomiums did not encourage a reciprocity of ecclesial life. Rather, they characterized the Eastern churches as static museums of ancient Christianity and as ornaments that superficially embellished the Church with an exotic diversity. They also elevated the distinctiveness of the liturgical rites, while expecting Roman

⁸Benedict XIV, *Allatae sunt*, On the Observance of Oriental Rites, 20; English trans.: *Vatican Documents on the Eastern Churches: Papal Encyclicals and Documents Concerning the Eastern Churches*, vol. I, Fairfax, VA.: Eastern Christian Publications, 2002, 16.

⁹John Madey, “Catholic Oriental Churches — A General Introduction,” *Catholic Eastern Churches: Heritage and Identity*, ed. Paul Pallath, Rome: Mar Thoma Yogam, 1994, 12. (italics in original).

¹⁰Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Vatican II and the Aggiornamento of Roman Catholic Theology,” *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*, ed., James C. Livingston and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, 238.

¹¹Leo XIII, *Orientalium Dignitas*, On the Churches of the East, 1. Papal Encyclicals Online, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/I13orient.htm>.

¹²Pius XII, *Orientalis Ecclesiae*, On Saint Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, 27, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_09041944_orientalis-ecclesiae_en.html

conformity (i.e. *submission*) in all other areas of discipline, dogma, and spirituality.¹³

Nevertheless, we must note an important shift beginning to occur in the nearly two hundred years that separated Pope Pius XII from Pope Benedict XIV. Pope Pius XII claimed that the Eastern rites were to enjoy “equal esteem and equal honor” with the Roman rite. This advance suggested an emerging consciousness of the inherent and equal dignity of the different traditions. This subtle, but significant shift in the relationship between Rome and the Eastern churches, as we will see, played an important role in the conciliar document *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*.

On the eve of the council, however, the Greek Melkite synod and the Indian episcopate were wary of the more dominant Western vision that had consistently concealed their lived experiences of catholicity and communion. Upon invitation to offer points for discussion in preparation for the Council, Greek Melkite Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh called the bishops to a synod in Lebanon from August 24-29, 1959. After collaborating on a detailed *vota* that made recommendations in areas of dogma, pastoral care, liturgy, and discipline, Maximos articulated their anticipated participation in the Council with a dual mission:

- (1) To fight for the elimination of Latinism meaning Catholicism and to fight so that Catholicism remains open to any culture, any genius, and to any organization that is compatible with the unity of Faith and Love.
- (2) to bring Orthodoxy, through their example, to admit that one can unite with the great Western Church, with the See of Peter, without renunciation of Orthodoxy or anything else from the spiritual wealth of the Apostolic Patristic East that is open to the future as it is to the past.¹⁴

From this excerpt, it is obvious that, unlike many of their Roman counterparts, the Greek Melkite hierarchy did not expect a rubber-stamp council.¹⁵ They prepared for the council with the intention of restoring the Church to its original ecclesiological vision of communion. From this perspective, belonging to a communion of churches did not enforce uniformity, but rather celebrated a unity in faith through a diversity of expressions.

¹³Madey, *Catholic Oriental Churches*, 12.

¹⁴Saba Shofany, *The Melkites at the Vatican Council II: Contributions of the Melkite Prelates to Vatican Council II*, Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2005, 44.

¹⁵Melissa J. Wilde, *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 16.

Meanwhile, the Indian episcopate, emerging within a newly independent nation, was the largest in Asia and the seventh largest in the world. It was uniquely composed of three Catholic churches: the Roman Church, the Syro-Malabar Church, and the Syro-Malankara Church, all of whom thrived as a minority within a predominantly Hindu context.¹⁶ In preparation for the council, the Indian bishops individually sent sixty-three proposals that covered numerous topics. These topics include salvation outside of the Church, relations with separated brethren, plural jurisdiction, use of the vernacular, and mission.¹⁷ These proposals reflected a particularly rich ecclesial context that not only revealed issues of inter-ritual significance, but also ecumenical and interreligious concerns. A major point of polarization among the Indian bishops dealt with the issue of multiple jurisdictions within a single area. Latin domination often created a “minority complex” among the Oriental churches by limiting the presence of the latter among their faithful outside the state of Kerala.¹⁸ Therefore, on the cusp of the council, the Indian episcopate appeared beleaguered by the various limitations imposed by the post-colonial Roman presence, while the Melkite Greek hierarchy intentionally and proactively prepared to redefine the relationship between the Eastern and Western churches.

2. Hermeneutic of Authors

With a better grasp of the perspectives leading up to the Council, we now turn to an analysis of how these perspectives influenced the development of the preparatory schema *De Ecclesiis Orientalibus* into the final draft of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. The Preparatory Commission for Oriental Churches, chaired by Amleto Cardinal Cicognani, had representation from nearly all the Eastern churches in communion with Rome. Combining eleven schemata into the preparatory draft *De Ecclesiis Orientalibus*, the Commission focused on the relationship between the Catholic and Orthodox churches.¹⁹ Cicognani presented the draft during the first session of the Council on November 26, 1962 and Fr Athanasius Welykyj outlined the document as follows:

¹⁶Paul Pulikkan, *Indian Church at Vatican II: A Historico-Theological Study of the Indian Participation in the Second Vatican Council*, Trichur, Kerala: Marymatha Publications, 2001, Iviii.

¹⁷Paul Pulikkan, *Indian Church at Vatican II*, 78-90.

¹⁸Paul Pulikkan, *Indian Church at Vatican II*, 84; 130.

¹⁹Paul Pulikkan, *Indian Church at Vatican II*, 230.

Part I: Theological unity of the Church modelled after governmental unity

Part II: Practical means for this unity

Part III: Road to reconciliation with the Orthodox

Part IV: Christ's prayer for unity²⁰

De Ecclesiis Orientalibus faced serious criticism during its short duration on the floor, especially from the Eastern Fathers.²¹ Patriarch Maximos argued that in order for the document to be truly catholic, all forms of "Roman absolutism" must be removed. Rather than a governmental model that emphasized the papacy as a detached head, the document must emphasize the collegial nature of the episcopate prior to mentioning the papacy. When the papacy is mentioned, it should be as the foundation and centre for collegiality.²² Syro-Malabar Archbishop Joseph Parecattil argued against the excessive ornamental language used to repeatedly defend the existence of the Eastern churches. He claimed that such defence was unnecessary precisely because these churches existed either "directly or indirectly from the Apostles and therefore, from Christ."²³ This origin alone serves as a sufficient justification for their existence. He also advocated the use of mixed episcopal conferences in order to deal with plural jurisdictions within a single area. He argued for the need of plural jurisdictions on the basis of reunion with Orthodox counterparts, who would prefer to return to a church in the area with a similar ecclesial heritage.²⁴ In response to these critiques, the assembly motioned to terminate discussion on the topic and to incorporate some of the draft's elements into other documents, including the decree *On Ecumenism* proposed by the Secretariat for Christian Unity.²⁵

Because many of the draft's concerns were incorporated into the decree *On Ecumenism*, a profoundly reduced version of the document was presented during the third session of the council on October 15, 1964.²⁶ While the Latinizing tendencies of the former draft were less

²⁰Paul Pulikkan, *Indian Church at Vatican II*, 230-231.

²¹John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008, 153.

²²Paul Pulikkan, *Indian Church at Vatican II*, 231.

²³Vatican Council (2nd: 1962-1965), *Acta synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol I/3, Vatican City: Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970, 627-629.

²⁴Vatican Council (2nd: 1962-1965), *Acta synodalia...*, 827-828.

²⁵John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 153.

²⁶Richard Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, New York: Paulist Press, 2006, 39.

visible, a condescending tone still prevailed in many sections. Minor debates also revealed polarizations among the Eastern Fathers. While some wanted to promote a revival of their authentic traditions, others continued to prefer Roman theological and administrative patterns.²⁷ This lack of internal consistency among the more than one hundred Eastern Fathers, in addition to a general lack of interest by a majority of Council Fathers on the “Eastern” subject, provided for little resistance on the floor.²⁸ The schema was retitled “The Decree on Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite” and approved on November 21, 1964.

Despite the shortened length of the document, major developments were advanced. The title of the document alone shifted the focus from liturgical rites to their full ecclesial recognition as Catholic churches. Article 3 expands the concept of “rite” beyond liturgical rubrics in order to acknowledge the integrity of each church as a significant expression of theology, spirituality, history, discipline, etc.²⁹ Second, the offensive nature of “Roman absolutism” was ameliorated through an emphasis on the equal dignity of the Eastern churches with the Roman church. This equality was guaranteed by ensuring the pastoral guidance of the successor of St Peter, who had primacy over the universal Church in conjunction with the college of bishops. Article 3 also reversed a static representation of the Eastern churches by compelling them to preach the Gospel and to flourish through missionary work.³⁰ These developments will be further discussed in the next section through a synchronic reading of OE, 3 with other conciliar documents.

3. Hermeneutic of Texts

The gradual transition from a universalist framework to a communion of churches is further illuminated by a reading of texts from *Lumen Gentium* (on the Church), *Christus Dominus* (on Bishops), *Dei Verbum* (on Divine Revelation), and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (on Ecumenism). By reading these texts synchronically with OE, 3, the following will examine the overarching conciliar themes of local and universal Church, catholicity, and ecumenism.

²⁷Paul Pulikkan, *Indian Church at Vatican II*, 382-383.

²⁸Paul Pulikkan, *Indian Church at Vatican II*.

²⁹John Madey, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum: More than Twenty Years After*, Paderborn: Eastern Churches Service Publications, 1987, 20.

³⁰John Madey, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum...*, 33-34.

3.1. Universal and Local

Upon a closer reading of OE, 3, we see a twofold assertion that the individual Eastern churches are equal in dignity with the Western churches and that the head of the Western church, as the successor of St Peter, is the head of the universal Church. Implicit in these ideas is the assertion of the simultaneous existence of local churches and the universal Church. *Lumen Gentium*, 23 describes the relationship between these two realities by stating that, "Individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular churches, which are modelled on the universal church; it is in and from these that the one and unique catholic church exists."³¹

Two points of clarification emerge from this passage. First, the bishop of a local church, whether of an Eastern eparchy or a Western diocese, is the source of unity for all the individual parishes that reside within his jurisdiction. The relationship between the bishop, his assistant clergy, and the local church parallels the relationship of the Pope, the college of bishops, and the universal Church. The bishop of Rome, as successor of Peter and head of the college of bishops, is therefore assigned the responsibility of safeguarding unity among the entire communion of churches. Second, the universal Church exists "in and from" these local churches. The relationship between the two ecclesiological realities is one of "mutual interiority."³²

Christus Dominus, 11 further elaborates upon the relationship between a bishop and the local church by defining a diocese as

a section of God's people entrusted to a bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of his clergy so that, loyal to its pastor and formed by him into one community in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes one particular church in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Christ is truly present and active.

Bearing in mind that the relationship between the bishop, assisting clergy, and the local church is modelled after the relationship between the pope, the college of bishops, and the universal Church, we understand that the elements that are common to both ecclesial realities include the living presence of the Holy Spirit and the binding force of divine revelation, encountered through both the Gospel

³¹English trans., Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1996, 31. Note: All subsequent quotations from conciliar documents will be taken from the Flannery translation.

³²Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 65.

(scripture) and the Eucharist (tradition). In this sense, we realize that the equal dignity of the individual Western and Eastern churches is not rooted in a humanitarian incentive to remove discrimination and marginalization. Rather, the equal dignity of the local churches results from the fact that each church is a co-bearer “of an integral divine revelation.”³³ For the universal Church to maintain the fullest reception of divine revelation across time and space, it requires a diversity of local churches. By continuing to live the Gospel and partake in the Eucharistic tradition, the local churches reveal complementary theological and spiritual insights that flow “from the same divine well-spring...[and] move towards the same goal.”³⁴ These local insights preserve the fullness of the faith, which is protected by the pastoral guidance of the Pope and the college of bishops.

3.2. Catholicity

Through a renewal in the understanding of local and universal church, the Second Vatican Council also revived the ecclesial dimension of catholicity. With the Eastern churches in particular, LG, 23 explicitly states that

in the course of time, different churches set up in various places by the apostles and their successors joined together in a multiplicity of organically united groups which, while safeguarding the unity of the faith and the unique divine structure of the universal church, have their own discipline, enjoy their own liturgical usage and inherit a theological and spiritual patrimony... This multiplicity of local churches, unified in a common effort, shows all the more resplendently the catholicity of the undivided church.

This passage further reinforces the equal dignity of the churches not only by emphasizing the apostolic patrimony evoked by Archbishop Parecattil during the first conciliar session, but also by equating diversity with authentic catholicity. This re-evaluation of diversity is a noticeable advance over pre-conciliar views that regarded it as a superficial ornamentation to a uniformly Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, catholicity is no longer determined by a geographical quantification of a single ecclesial tradition, but the qualitative breadth of six distinctive rites (Roman, Alexandrian, Antiochene, Armenian, Chaldean, and Constantinopolitan) shared by

³³Khaled Anatolios, “The Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*,” *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 348.

³⁴*Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 9.

more than 20 churches constituting the Catholic Communion. Catholicity characterizes the communion of churches because, while the Catholic churches differ considerably by these six patrimonies, they are also shaped by specific socio-cultural contexts that reveal different insights about the common faith.³⁵ For example, while the Chaldean Catholic and Syro-Malabar Catholic churches share the same East Syrian liturgy, the former is fashioned by a Mediterranean milieu, while the latter is deeply rooted in an Indian culture.

LG, 13 further expands upon this internal richness within the Catholic communion by stating that, “in virtue of this catholicity, each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and the whole Church.”

Thus, the richness of one tradition is meant for the nourishment of another in a mutual manner. Through this synchronic reading, we can see that the Melkite episcopate, along with the other Eastern bishops, successfully mitigated the equation of Catholicism with Latinism. We now consider the second part of the proposed dual mission of the Greek Melkite hierarchy — the relationship of the Eastern Catholic churches with their non-Catholic counterparts.

3.3. Ecumenism

Earlier, we read that the Melkite synod not only wished to educate the Roman Church about the depth and breadth of catholicity, but also intended to model for the Orthodox churches the possibility of being in communion with Rome without losing their distinctive heritage. Moreover, a diachronic reading revealed that the original schema regarding the Eastern Catholic churches was intimately linked to the discussion of reunion with the separated Eastern brethren. These sections, however, were removed and added to *Unitatis Redintegratio*. The following, therefore, will examine UR, 17 in relation to OE, 3.

UR, 17 beautifully expresses the necessity of full communion with the Eastern Orthodox³⁶ churches by reiterating the principle of “legitimate variety” in the “differences in theological expression of doctrine” and stating that it is

hardly surprising, then, if sometimes one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other,

³⁵Paul Pallath, “Introduction,” *Catholic Eastern Churches: Heritage and Identity*, ed. Paul Pallath, Rome: Marthoma Yogam, 1994, 2-3.

³⁶Note: Unless otherwise noted, I will use “Orthodox” indiscriminately to describe all those Eastern churches who are not in communion with Rome.

or has expressed them better. In such cases, these various theological formulations are often to be considered complementary rather than conflicting.

No longer is the Catholic Church envisioning communion with its separated brothers and sisters in terms of *submission* to a standard Roman dogma. Rather, the Catholic Church, expressed through a variety of local churches of equal dignity, readily admits its dependence upon the Orthodox churches for a greater grasp of revelation. Moreover, this passage implicitly extends the recognition of equal dignity to the Orthodox churches by indicating that their theological formulations, indeed their entire ecclesial reality, is “complementary, rather than conflicting” with the Catholic Church.

This passage is given particular credibility when, only a year later, Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople mutually lifted the bans of excommunication that had severed communion between them for over nine hundred years. This document and its resulting fruits paved the way for ecumenical dialogue and reignited the hope for reconciliation with the Orthodox churches.³⁷ The immediate events following the council would only be suggestive of the numerous ways in which the conciliar event would impact the future of the Church.

Conclusion

In the power struggles that emerged between liberal and conservative debates in the post-conciliar era, the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches has largely been underappreciated or ignored.³⁸ The synchronic and diachronic readings of the text offered in this essay, however, reveal key insights that can greatly contribute to contemporary ecclesiological questions regarding *catholicity* and *communion*. The fundamental contribution of OE, 3, in particular, is the realization that the equal dignity of the Eastern churches is rooted in the fact that each church is a co-bearer of a single and integrated divine revelation. A closer examination of the history, theology, spirituality, and lived experiences of Eastern Catholic churches, therefore, is necessary as we grapple with these ecclesiological questions.

Moreover, in the fifty years since the initial promulgation of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, globalization and migration have enabled

³⁷Aidan Nichols, OP, *Rome and the Eastern Churches*, 2nd ed., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010, 356.

³⁸John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 3.

unprecedented encounters between the faithful from each of the autonomous churches in the Catholic communion. With a possibility for “reciprocal influence,” we are in a unique position to experience the continued self-actualization of the Church “as a world Church.”³⁹ This current situation, if experienced as a gift and approached with candour and humility, can bear much fruit for the Church of the third millennium.

³⁹Rahner, “Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” 717.