

Comment

Document on one, true Church advances ecumenism

By Dr. C.S. Morrissey

This week, as usual when covering the Vatican, the media invented a story and missed the real one. The problem, to my mind, is that reporters don't know Latin any more. They lack the Vatican's, and Latin's, unchanging precision.

The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued a clarification on July 10 about its Catholic teaching on the Church. The heart of this new doctrinal document is five responses given to five theological questions.

The official Latin text of the five responses (and an English translation) was immediately available on the Web, but news reporters, in search of a story, seized instead on an old phrase from the English of the CDF's additional accompanying commentary (which has no official Latin version): "the wound is still more profound."

Picking up on a Reuters story, the headlines blared: "Non-Catholic churches 'wounded,' Vatican says" (Globe and Mail) and "Other Christian churches are 'wounded,' Vatican says; Protestants troubled" (National Post).

As usual, the media approached their coverage with good instincts. They rightly saw that a Vatican statement about "ecclesial communities originating from the Reformation" and "the wound (defectus) which they suffer" could be newsworthy.

The real story here, however, was that while the Vatican used the word "wound" (albeit only in the English commentary), the Vatican also took pains to spell out

the official Latin term this English word refers to: "defectus."

However the Vatican's new document didn't say "wound," because this word doesn't translate any word in the official Latin text!

If reporters knew Latin, they would know "defectus" is not Latin for "wound" (that would be "vulnus"), and they would then have a hot lead on the real story here.

This would be what? that the Vatican doesn't know how to translate its Latin any more? that Pope Benedict XVI, who just set in motion more widespread offering of the Mass in the older Latin form, makes Latin mistakes?

Not at all. A Latin-savvy reporter would notice that earlier Vatican documents, when speaking about ecumenical relations with other Christians (for example, Unitatis Redintegratio from 1964 and Communio in Notio from 1992), made use of precisely the same Latin term: "defectus."

So then, is the real story here that the Vatican is plagiarizing itself, mindlessly recycling Latin gibberish? fudging a changing teaching in English by keeping the same old Latin terms around?

Not at all. The Latin text is the official text for a reason. The Latin term "defectus" has a unique precision that no single English term can capture.

True, we get the English word "defect" from it, but this signification of "deficiency" does not fully capture the Latin term's meaning, which is twofold. In Latin, the one term (from the verb "deficio") connotes both a "revolt"

and a "lack." The Latin dictionary describes the verbal action: "to do less than one might; to fail."

Remember this is Latin, so call to mind a Roman army in order to grasp the concrete, dual meaning implied here. If a portion of the army "rebels," then the portion thereby becomes "weakened" or "enfeebled" because it has cut itself off from the whole.

One day a Protestant friend jokingly commented, "You think I belong to a defective church; it hurts me you would think that." He was being witty because, theologically astute, he had read previous Vatican documents speaking in Latin of "wound." Jocularly, he was bringing up for discussion any wounds that have been inflicted by Catholics and Protestants on one another. I therefore bought him lunch.

That kind of conversation (and lunch) is eminently worth having. To advance the discussion, I would say my preferred translation of "defectus" is "self-wounding." This best translates, I think, the "attenuated" state brought about by anyone's "rebellion" from a healthy unity. Cut off a limb: get the idea?

In a more formal way, the CDF this week advanced the discussion. The story that almost everyone missed is that the CDF clarified its use of the hard-to-translate "defectus."

In the CDF's new doctrinal document (five questions, five answers), the word "defectus" is used three times, but none of these times does the English translation use the word "wound." Instead, it varies three times, trying to flesh

Couple celebrate 50 years



Special to The B.C. Catholic

Ligorio and Lucia De Souza of Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Burnaby celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with their seven children, their spouses, and 20 grandchildren, as well as four priests. Their secret for a happy marriage: "Jesus and our Blessed Mother at the heart of the family, love, respect, and trust."

out the hard-to-translate "defectus": "defect," "lack," "absence." Yes, the commentary uses the word "wound" thrice (in English); but the main text (in Latin) itself pointedly does not.

In other words, the headlines got the story backwards. They wrongly focused on the one English commentary word that links the new CDF document to an old CDF document. They missed the new development in nuance regarding the technical Latin term "defectus." They missed the import of the new document's new Latin formulations.

Compare the old Latin texts with the new. Section 17 from Communio in Notio, the CDF's document from 1992 (issued by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict, under Pope John Paul II), is heavily paraphrased in this week's CDF document.

Correspondences between the two Latin texts are so close that, if a student submitted such Latin work, I would say that it was plagiarized. Of course it makes no sense to accuse the Vatican of "plagiarizing" itself, and the whole point of the new document is to reiterate the

constant, unchanging teaching of previous documents!

Many phrases are very similar, but the main difference is the use of the term defectus where vulnus had been used before. In other words, the real story here is that the Vatican "plagiarized" itself in order to clarify what the term "wound" (old news from 1992) really means.

That clarification, in my opinion, gently and deftly steers the discussion away from the topic of vulnus ("who wounded whom") to the topic of defectus ("self-wounding"): i.e., the lack of unity consequent upon Christians "failing" and "doing less than they might."

As the Vatican put it this week, "What Christ willed, we also will. What was, still is." As Jesus Himself put it, "fient unus grex, unus pastor" (John 10:16): "they will become one flock with one shepherd."

No doubt that's something all Christians of good will can agree on, even if reporters will shrug off my call for more Latin in their regimen. Dr. C.S. Morrissey teaches Latin at Redeemer Pacific College, the Roman Catholic college at Trinity Western University in Langley. □

**IN JULY 1932
TWO FRIARS ARRIVED
IN VANCOUVER.**



Bro. Fabian Gibbons, TSA & Fr. Benedict Quigley, SA at Japanese mission

**75 YEARS LATER
THE FRANCISCAN FRIARS
OF THE ATONEMENT
ARE STILL HERE.**



Parish celebrates 60 Years in 2009!

*To the People of
Vancouver & Richmond,
Thank You
for your warm welcome
& continuous support.
Join us as we celebrate
our 75th Anniversary in
the Diocese of Vancouver.*

*Fr. David Poirier, SA
Fr. Art Gouthro, SA
Fr. Bill Linakis, SA
Bro. Hugh MacIsaac, SA
Bro. Timothy MacDonald, SA*

Where We Have Served

St. Paul's on Cordova Street · Lulu Island
The Door is Open · Port of Vancouver
Star of the Sea Parish · Holy Cross Parish
Guardian Angels Parish · Diocese of
Nelson - Greenwood, Canal Flats, Grand Forks

We Continue to Serve at

George Pearson Centre
Providence Health Care
St. Joseph the Worker Parish

THE FRANCISCAN FRIARS OF THE ATONEMENT
UNITED STATES ITALY CANADA ENGLAND JAPAN

604-277-8353 www.stjworker.org • www.atonementfriars.org 845-424-3671



**SCHOOL BUS / MOTORHOME / TRUCK
& AUTOMOTIVE SERVICE CENTRE**

DAWSON TRUCK REPAIRS LTD.

**4970 Still Creek Ave.
Burnaby BC V5C 4E4
Fax: 604-291-8550**

291-6151

KOINONIA CHRISTIAN..BOOKS

1119 Blanshard St. Victoria, B.C. V8W 2H7
(across from St. Andrew's Cathedral)

*Picks of
the Month:*

**1... "JESUS of NAZARETH"
Pope Benedict XVI [S\$32.00]**

**2... "FINDING GOD in EACH MOMENT"
Carol Ann Smith, SHCJ & Eugene F. Merz, SJ**

Prompt Mail Orders

**Tel: (250) 382-5814 or 1-800-663-6290
Fax: (250) 382-5844 Email: Koinonia@shaw.ca**