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Yes it is Ecumenism

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NCR Today

I am distressed at the way many Catholics are responding to the Vatican's initiative regarding Anglicans seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. The latest is in these pages, below, where my colleague Ken Briggs assertion that the proposed apostolic constitution is a "slap in the face" to the churches of the Reformation and decidedly not an instance of ecumenism.

Also critical was James Carroll, who writes in the *Globe*, "Last week's anti-Anglican salvo from Rome shows how far the Catholic leadership has fallen from the heights of Vatican II." Actually, the Pope who approved the apostolic constitution, who in fact puts the "apostle" in "apostolic" was also at Vatican II. Now, it is not unknown in the history of our civilization that some people rise with their years and others diminish, but where is the evidence for this fall Carroll sees?

Carroll repeats all the typical accusations against an entrenched Vatican that he believes has turned it back on the Council. My favorite from his current essay is this: "While the Vatican just says no, the rest of us see the link between triumphalist rejection of pluralism and the intolerance that undergirds most of the world's violence." Triumphalist rejection of pluralism? How does creating a new rite in the West constitute a rejection of pluralism?

Carroll considers the outreach to Anglicans a "cruel assault on a fellow Christian communion that is valiantly struggling to strike a balance between liberal and conservative impulses." The Anglican communion is struggling because it sees its problems in precisely these terms, in political terms of striking a balance. This weekend I interviewed many traditional Anglicans for an upcoming article in *The Tablet*. None of the people I interviewed brought up the issues of gay rights or female clergy that have dominated the concerns of many on the Catholic Left. They spoke about fidelity to Christ and to the apostolic tradition, not how "striking a balance" was the primary goal, but finding the truth.

What is most important in terms of the ecumenical dimension of the Vatican's outreach is that it is occasioning a dialogue that is necessary, among Anglicans, among Catholics and among those who are not sure whether all roads lead to Rome or to Canterbury. Not every dialogue ends up in harmonious agreement, to be sure. Sometimes differences are clarified not resolved. But, I do not think the Vatican would be reaching out as it has done if it had come to an appreciation of the many ways Anglicans are faithful to the apostolic tradition, and yes, that is a fruit of the ecumenical dialogue of the past decades. Can anyone really imagine Pius XII doing what Benedict has done?

Finally, we are all entitled to agree or disagree with a decision such as the one the Vatican has made, but the unwillingness to assume the good faith of the Pope is very disturbing. A similar hostility has been shown in discussions about the apostolic visitation of women's religious orders. Maybe I missed it, but I have not seen Mr. Carroll or others even note the fact that there was an apostolic visitation of Mother Anglica's order in 2000, and no one of the left raised any protest then. Indeed, the fears expressed by some of my liberal friends when Benedict was elected have simply not been confirmed by his actual governance of the universal church. Indeed, the complaints about his governance have come mostly from the right-wing bleachers. Maybe I am missing something, but it sure seems to me that the forthcoming apostolic constitution fits squarely within the Petrine mandate of creating unity of faith among the followers of Christ. Some who are close are bidden to come closer. Why is that sinister?

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