“When Margaret O’Gara was welcomed at the eternal banquet of our Lord on August 16, 2012, we lost a treasured colleague at the tables of ecumenical dialogue. As we remember her with thanksgiving, we are grateful that she gives us now in No Turning Back an insightful legacy—a legacy that calls us and our churches to embracing in both faith and practice the prayer of Jesus that they may all be one.’

“She understood that persistent prayer is at the heart of the ecumenical movement. She recognized that the nurturing of mutual trust is essential for the ongoing quest. And she was concerned—as are so many others at dialogue tables—over the procrastination of our churches in receiving the ecumenical discoveries that already have emerged.

“With personal gentleness and profound conviction, Margaret demonstrated ecumenical imagination in searching for new insights on lingering issues of division. She was persistent in the quest for ways to reflect more deeply the unity that we have been granted in Christ through baptism. She recognized that the unity of the church is not ours to create. It is a gift.

“Most in the first generation and many in the second generation of scholars in a half-century of profound ecumenical dialogues have been called by their Creator and Redeemer to eternal life. Now others must come to those crucial tables. Dr. O’Gara offers superb guidance for them, reminding our churches that, indeed, there can be no turning back.”

— Rev. Lowell G. Almen
Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1987–2007

“During the eight years I was privileged to be Margaret O’Gara’s colleague in Canada, I experienced her deep passion for Christian unity and her relentless pursuit of it through theological research, ecumenical dialogue, and (not least) humble prayer. I am convinced that readers of No Turning Back will experience something of what I did.”

— Prof. Pablo Argarate
Institute for Ecumenical Theology, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Patristics
University of Graz, Austria

“No Turning Back shows Margaret O’Gara’s great command of the ecumenical literature, especially in ecclesiology. Her essays are well organized and thorough. She is honest, insightful, even-handed, occasionally provocative, and always lucid.”

— Rev. John W. Crossin, OSFS
Executive Director, Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
“Drawing on decades of experience, and writing at times in strikingly personal terms, Margaret O’Gara introduces the reader to the practice of ecumenical dialogue, a practice that she readily qualifies as a form of asceticism rooted in common prayer, attentive listening, and rigorous theological study. With a clear vision and penetrating insight, she surveys the often-neglected achievements and complex challenges facing the next generation of ecumenical scholars. This highly readable book by one of North America’s most accomplished ecumenists is required reading for anyone interested in ecumenical theology and ecclesiology.”

— Prof. Catherine E. Clifford
Saint Paul University, Ottawa
Anglican–Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada, 1993–present

“No Turning Back reflects the breadth and depth of Margaret O’Gara’s ecumenical experience, gifts and passion. In its convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the Commission on Faith and Order proposes that a ‘certain kind of authority’ can be recognised in ecumenical dialogues ‘when they reflect a common search for and the discovery of the truth in love, urge believers to seek the Lord’s will for ecclesial communion, and invite ongoing metanoia and holiness of life.’ This ‘certain kind of authority’ shone in Margaret O’Gara’s teaching, writing, and engagement in ecumenical dialogue. And it shines through the pages of this book.”

— Rev. Canon John Gibaut
Director, Commission on Faith and Order
World Council of Churches, Geneva

“No Turning Back is a fitting memorial to Margaret O’Gara’s committed life and work, especially because of her deeply engaged and creative contribution to ecumenism. Through the gentle force of her personality and in the clear grace of a vocation, she illumined what ecumenism must mean as an imperative shaping the church and expanding the horizons of Catholic faith. In a world where meetings can be onerous, documents dry, and exchanges paper thin, she will ever be remembered as a bright spirit, bringing warmth and clarity to everything she touched. Thanks be also to her husband, Michael Vertin, for his editor’s introduction—a loving appreciation of Margaret along with judicious selection from her mature writings. Readers can nourish the memory of Margaret through the beautiful portrait included in this book, while her writings live on as an essential reference for those who, in shared hope, pray with her in the communion of saints, that we may be one. With her gone before us into the Light, there can be no turning back.”

— Rev. Anthony J. Kelly, CSsR
Australian Catholic University
International Theological Commission, 2004–present

*(endorsements continued on page 255)*
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Foreword by  
Bishop Richard J. Sklba

For the dozen years during which I was privileged to serve as the Catholic Co-Chair of the U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue, Professor Margaret O’Gara was an ardent and remarkable member of every conversation. Whether intensely focused on the theological issue of the moment in the formal sessions of the Dialogue or casually engaged in darning socks during more relaxed hours of after-dinner social discussion, Margaret was always respectfully involved and eventually willing to share her wisdom. She invariably participated in the group’s patient theological search for ecclesial reconciliation without ever dominating the exchange. If anything, she seemed to prefer a touch of quiet reflection in her thoughtful consideration of other members’ comments. It was a joy and an inspiration to witness her at work.

From my own vantage point during the tenth round, dedicated to “The Church as Koinonia of Salvation” (1998–2004), and the eleventh, summarizing round on “The Hope of Eternal Life” (2005–2010), I witnessed the manner in which the officially appointed group of scholars sought fresh starting points for addressing longstanding disagreements and then carefully brought them to new levels of theological resolution. There was always a certain thrill to watching how Margaret quietly wove her research and knowledge into the conversation.

I confess that I learned a great deal from the way Margaret often tested an idea or a tentative suggestion privately during the coffee break before bringing the thought to the full body of delegates. It seemed as if her probing mind was constantly seeking the right phrase and the most understandable approach to the question. I always found her to be dialogic to the core, perhaps the modern epitome of how theological dialogue should be conducted responsibly and fruitfully. The task is truly an enterprise of teamwork at every level and at every stage.
The papers selected for this collection exhibit the wide range of topics Margaret treated during the final decade and a half of her mature productive work. But in one way or another all the papers address serious theological and ecumenical questions of ecclesiology, as she sought ever to serve a church broken and yet yearning for the level of healing that only God’s grace can effect. In each case her thinking had been crystallized for presentation in some professional venue. In bringing together the various results, this volume well illustrates the inner logic and intellectual dynamism of that thinking. Perhaps only in retrospect, then, can a current reader understand the way in which the formal dialogues truly benefited from the cross-pollination of ecumenical conversation. The faith of every participant was deepened and developed in the process.

Margaret knew only too well that ecumenical pilgrimage requires hard work. Ever careful and creative, but always thoroughly Catholic, she was convinced of the gift that Catholics bring to such exchanges from our tradition. She understood that these theological “meals,” whether elaborate banquets or less formal picnics, must inevitably be “pot luck” by nature, with a menu in which each tradition serves its best and awaits the complementary offerings of the other invited guests.

Margaret’s soul mate and intellectual companion through several (although alas, from our limited human perspective, too few) decades, Michael Vertin, has done us all a great service in bringing this collection of talks and essays to formal publication. The topics are interrelated, and the whole is surely greater than the sum of its parts.

I am honored to have been invited to contribute this modest foreword from my own perspective and experience. My confident hope and persistent prayer remains that the work of Margaret’s lifetime may continue to nourish the thought of future ecumenical efforts. Indeed, there can be “No Turning Back!”

Richard J. Sklba
Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus of Milwaukee
January 1, 2014
The published work of an active ecumenist is almost inevitably dictated by circumstances. Much time is spent writing position papers for meetings or presenting lectures, shorter addresses, and summary talks; there is little time to write substantial books. Those working in universities depend very much on sympathetic department heads. The way this pattern has affected those who have been involved regularly in international and national theological dialogues for the last thirty years is only just becoming apparent as the first generation passes the torch to the next. Margaret O’Gara was taken from us prematurely with much still to give, despite the substantial amount she had already given. I welcome Michael Vertin’s invitation to write a foreword for this posthumous collection of her writings for ecumenical occasions over the last sixteen years.

The title, *No Turning Back*, reflects Margaret’s absolute commitment to the goal of visible unity and the process of ecumenical dialogue as a means to that end. In several papers she notes the value of long-term commitment to dialogue, and the fruit that the work of even a few committed souls can bring. Typically for one who had the gift of friendship to a remarkable degree, she affirmed the theological significance of friendship in the ecumenical movement—a theme already noticed by other historians of ecumenism. Constant prayer is the spiritual dimension of such friendship and transformation; “pray without ceasing” is a necessary text for the ecumenist, who is often more aware of sorrows than joys. Her abiding theme is teaching authority in the church. The First Vatican Council was the subject of Margaret’s first book: the discussion of papal primacy (the neglected paragraph in *Pastor Aeternus*), a paper on the teaching of the magisterium, and another on the convergences between Catholics, Disciples of Christ, and Lutherans on teaching authority show that the teaching of Vatican I, crucially modulated by Vatican II, remained a key concern for her. Finally, her commitment to the next generation of ecumenists
was not just on paper: it was the driving motive of her teaching, which she both loved and enjoyed, and was her own contribution to continuing ecumenical engagement.

Reading these papers, I recalled her quiet insistence on a historical approach to the understanding of doctrine—and the way in which she always carefully distinguished that from the relativism condemned by recent popes. I find it no coincidence that, as we have become more accustomed to understand doctrine as inseparable from its historical context, we have found more opportunities for convergence and agreement. For the church today lives in very different times from key eras of the past, whether patristic, scholastic, Reformation, or Enlightenment. Our world has both expanded and contracted so that, for example, the Western church cannot now ignore the Oriental Orthodox churches with which it parted company 1,500 years ago; indeed, with current political turbulence farther east we may even find them living next door to us.

I also detected (and share) her controlled impatience in these papers with the churches’ unwillingness to recognize that things have changed, that convergences and agreements have been reached, but that readiness to act on those agreements is still hard to find. All ecumenists know that they may well not live to see the fruit of their labors, and in any case the unity of the church is not primarily a matter of human achievement. Still, sometimes the latter point becomes an excuse for inaction. Might this not be to take the name of the Holy Spirit in vain? Margaret’s patience sometimes seemed infinite, and these papers are an appropriate way to remember (in the full sense of anamnesis) her commitment to the ecumenical quest. “Making Peace for Peacemaking” is deeply parabolic, and No Turning Back is both a summary and a motto.

David M. Thompson
Emeritus Professor of Modern Church History, Cambridge University
January 1, 2014
Editor’s Introduction

The title chosen by Margaret O’Gara for this book is inspired by a Christian hymn that originated in mid-nineteenth-century India. The first stanza is the following, with the final line repeated at the end of every subsequent stanza:

I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

Ecumenism is the collaborative effort of Christians to foster the visible unity of Jesus’ church. During Margaret’s more than three decades as a Roman Catholic ecumenical theologian she became convinced that there is no turning back from ecumenism for those who would follow Jesus today. Her conviction came from conclusions about Jesus’ desire for his church, the fidelity of Christians to that desire thus far, and what fidelity requires of them going forward.

In the first part of this introduction I will give some historical background and then explain Margaret’s three conclusions. In later parts I will summarize her contributions to the ecumenical enterprise and indicate the aim and structure of this book.

1. No Turning Back

To be a Christian is to judge that Jesus of Nazareth is the concrete historical self-manifestation of the triune God, and to strive to live as Jesus did—a life of totally self-transcending love.

Like other human persons, Christians are actively oriented toward the ultimate, toward whatever would totally satisfy their wondering minds and restless hearts. Like other spiritual persons, Christians experientially, though not always knowingly, encounter something of the ultimate, something of what is sometimes labeled “the divine.”
Like other religious persons, Christians make the judgment that this or that event or person is a revelation of the divine in human history, and decide to live in accord with what that revelation entails. But what distinguishes Christians is their judgment that Jesus of Nazareth is the revelation of the divine—and, indeed, not the mere revelation but the divine self-gift, the gift in which God both models concretely what fully human living is and invites everyone concretely to live in that way.⁷

Of course, anyone who has even a passing familiarity with Christian history knows that Christians have not been entirely successful at living as Jesus did. Disagreements resulting in divisions and sometimes violence have often marked the relations not only between Christians and others but even between Christians themselves. Four examples confirm the point. Already in the biblical period, the controversy about whether Gentiles who became Christians were required to adopt Jewish ritual practices sharply divided the Christian community. The patristic disputes about the exact relationship of Jesus to God the Father raged not just for decades but for centuries. The medieval argument between Eastern and Western Christians about the procession of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity became so serious that the two groups condemned each other and broke off further relations. Within the Western church, the early modern clash between Reformers and Rome about the nature of justification by grace was a key theological factor in centuries of European wars.

On the other hand, divisions within the Christian community are not necessarily permanent. As recounted in Acts 15, the controversy about the requirements faced by Gentile Christians was successfully resolved. The Councils of Nicea I, Ephesus, and Chalcedon settled the christological disputes. Eastern and Western Christians remain somewhat at odds, but the 1964 meeting between Pope Paul VI and Athenagoras, Patriarch of Constantinople, led to retraction of the

earlier mutual condemnations and in 1965 to the irenic Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration. And in 1999 the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, in their Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, affirmed that the differences, at least today, between Catholic and Lutheran teachings about justification are not church dividing.

The two joint declarations just mentioned illustrate a sea change that has taken place within the community of Christians during the past century or so, a development that has given rise to the modern ecumenical movement. This development involves elements of communal recognition and communal response, and although those elements are multiple and diverse, a few instances will indicate the emerging trend.

In 1910, at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, Christian missionaries began taking serious account of the obstacle presented to credible proclamation of the Gospel in places such as Africa by the scandalous spectacle of diverse Christian churches fiercely competing with each other for converts. During the 1930s and 1940s some German Protestants and Catholics began recognizing that their longstanding differences paled in comparison to the deeper commonalities on which they drew in opposing Hitler. In the 1950s and 1960s increasing numbers of Christians from diverse denominations discovered themselves working together in opposing apartheid in South Africa, protesting civil rights abuses in the southern United States, and marching against the Vietnam War.

Increasing acknowledgment of such shared commitments engendered the beginnings of a striking shift of institutional emphasis within the Christian community as a whole—away from defending even divisive differences and toward first exploring and then encouraging their elimination in the forthright pursuit of full communion. Small and inconsequential at first, this shift has gained magnitude and authority with the passage of time. The Life and Work movement and the complementary Faith and Order movement, with their respective social and doctrinal emphases, were initiated during the years preceding the Second World War. They contributed in turn to the establishment in 1948 of the World Council of Churches. Initially a mainly Protestant organization, the WCC eventually was augmented by reciprocal relationships with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, and its world assemblies approximately every
seven years attract representatives from virtually all the Christian churches. On the Roman Catholic side all the bishops worldwide, together with official Protestant and Orthodox observers, gathered for the Second Vatican Council from 1962 through 1965; and significant ecumenical endorsements and commitments appear in the sixteen documents the council produced.

The fifty years since Vatican II have seen continued progress by the Christian churches toward increased solidarity, greater mutuality, and fuller communion with one another. It has become increasingly common for Christians to pray together and even to welcome one another to participate in some parts of their respective worship services. The collaboration of Christian churches in such societal initiatives as promoting racial justice, opposing the use of military force to resolve international conflicts, and providing disaster relief has become more and more familiar. Moreover, numerous bilateral agreements, along with some multilateral ones, have been reached by the many official ecumenical dialogues established after the council—agreements on various aspects of what Christians believe about the church itself and about such central ecclesial matters as baptism, eucharist, ministry, and authority to teach and govern.

Of course, it must be admitted that not all the churches, let alone all the members of any church, are equally enthusiastic about these developments. For a variety of reasons, in this or that quarter of the Christian community there is unease about or even rejection of steps that have been taken, and reluctance about or even outright resistance to taking further steps in the direction of total solidarity, complete mutuality, full communion. But in any case the remarkable growth in the magnitude and authority of the ecumenical movement from one hundred years ago to today is difficult to deny.

Against the background of this historical sketch I can readily explain Margaret’s conviction, like that of virtually every other ecumenical theologian, that there is no turning back from ecumenism for those who would follow Jesus today. The conviction rests on three conclusions that, in and through the developments I have recounted, the community of Christians has learned to recognize with greater clarity and affirm with greater certainty.

The first conclusion is a general one. It is a reflection of Jesus’ prayer on behalf of his followers “that all may be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us” (John
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17:21). The prayer manifests the divine will that Christians be one in order that collectively they both share in and express the loving communion of Father, Son, and Spirit. And therefore, since the church is divided, God wills that it become one. Of course, church unity, like any other good, is fundamentally a divine gift. But insofar as Christians themselves can cooperate with God in the realization of that gift, God bids them do so. God wills that they unreservedly undertake the ecumenical enterprise—that there be no turning back from the pursuit of full communion.

The second conclusion is implied by the first, and it regards the past. It is that, insofar as Christians have been faithful to the divine will thus far, their actions are uniquely good in the sense that God endorses and blesses them. To the extent that Christians throughout history and more deliberatively during the past century have striven for unity—that there has been no turning back—God endorses and blesses their undertaking.

The third conclusion, also implied by the first one, regards the future. It is that, insofar as Christians now renew and subsequently keep their commitment of fidelity to the divine will, their actions are uniquely good in the sense just noted. To the extent that Christians vigorously dedicate themselves to maintaining and extending their ecumenical pilgrimage toward full communion—that henceforth there be no turning back—God will endorse and bless their endeavor.

An addendum to this explanation is that just as Jesus’ proclamation of, and invitation of all into, the community of divine love stands at the very heart of his mission, so too a commitment to ecumenism is not a peripheral matter for those who would be his followers. On the contrary, it is central to Christian living. For the visible unity of the church both strengthens its witness to the world and foreshadows the communion of saints around the banquet table of the Lamb.

A further addendum is that from the Christian standpoint the pursuit of ecumenism is not at odds with cultivating interreligious relations. Exploring and promoting communion among people insofar as they are Christian and doing so insofar as they are religious—or spiritual, or human—are complementary rather than opposed

2 John Paul II, encyclical Ut Unum Sint, n. 9.
3 Ibid.
undertakings. In Christian eyes, the human, the spiritual, the religious, and the Christian features of concrete living are successively more determinate signs of the divine ground and goal of all that is. Consequently, to explore and promote communion among people on the basis of any of those features is always thoroughly valuable. Nonetheless, Christians understand their beliefs and practices not as mere signs of the divine but as directly informed by the utterly gratuitous self-gift of the divine, the self-gift that is simultaneously an invitation to participate in the inner life of God—Father, Son, and Spirit. Hence, to explore and promote communion among people on the basis of Christian beliefs and practices—to pursue ecumenism—is supremely valuable.

At the same time, some (though not all) Christians also maintain that Christians cannot exclude the possibility that, for God’s own reasons, the current diversity of world religions is part of God’s providential design of universal history. On this view, to explore and promote communion with the adherents of other religions may give Christians a fuller knowledge and deeper appreciation of God, what God has wrought, and what God wills. And precisely for that reason, interreligious engagement by Christians no longer remains just an optional complement to ecumenism but becomes an essential one.4

2. Margaret O’Gara as Ecumenical Theologian

Margaret O’Gara was born in Chicago in 1947. The vigorous Christian commitment she eventually developed owed much to her parents. Joan Smith and James O’Gara first met in a discussion group organized by the Catholic Worker movement. Not long after they married, and Margaret and Monica, her younger sister, were born, the family moved to New York. James had accepted a position with Commonweal magazine, a lay Catholic journal of opinion. He ultimately served the journal for more than three decades, first as managing editor and then as editor.

Her familial milieu oriented Margaret quite early not just to devout Christian living but also to thoughtful reflection on that living, namely, doing theology. That early orientation became enriched with theological learning during her undergraduate studies at Trinity College in Washington, DC, master’s studies at the Yale Divinity School, and doctoral studies at the University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto. She would eventually publish her doctoral dissertation under the title *Triumph in Defeat: Infallibility, Vatican I, and the French Minority Bishops*. In 1976, near the end of her doctoral program, she was appointed to the Faculty of Theology at St. Michael’s, and she served there as a creative, committed, and energetic faculty member for the next thirty-six years. She entered the realm of eternal life in 2012, after suffering from cancer for two years.

Margaret’s teaching assignments were those of a professor in systematic theology. She happily handled the introductory course, Foundations of Theology, virtually every year she taught. Among her other frequent offerings were Theological Anthropology, Trinitarian Theology, Christology, and various courses on Karl Rahner’s theology. However, starting very early in her teaching career she regularly sought and received assignments in what quickly became the central focus of her professional interest and commitment: ecumenical theology, the personally engaged study of the divisions between the Christian churches for the sake of overcoming them. Courses explicitly devoted wholly or at least partly to ecumenical themes are more numerous than any other group on her cumulative course list, appearing under such headings as Christian Theologies in Dialogue, Anglican and Roman Catholic Theologies in Convergence, Ecumenical Dialogue on Authority, Four Movements Reforming Theology, Breakthroughs and Barriers in Ecumenical Dialogue, and New Directions in Magisterial Teaching. Not surprisingly, ecumenical issues and insights indirectly influenced her other courses as well.

Like most theology professors, Margaret accepted invitations to service in the wider community beyond her own institution. Besides extensive public lecturing, she played an active role in several academic and ecclesiastical organizations and enterprises, especially those with an ecumenical dimension. She served as president of the

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3. This Book: Its Aim and Structure

In 1998 Margaret published *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange*, a collection of ten of her papers on ecumenical themes. She envisioned *No Turning Back: The Future of Ecumenism* as a sequel. She intended it, like the earlier book, for all Christians who take seriously Jesus’ prayer “that all may be one” (John 17). More precisely, the purpose of this work, like that of the previous one, would be threefold. It would illustrate the broad lines of ecumenism for general readers; it would share certain concrete details of recent ecumenical developments with specialist readers; and it would encourage both groups of readers in their commitment to the pursuit of full communion among the Christian churches. Margaret had selected most of the papers she wished

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6 Obviously Margaret often served on more than one dialogue at the same time, and her work in one would commonly both facilitate and enrich her contributions to the others. Nonetheless, her cumulative service of eighty-nine dialogue years is unusual, even within the ranks of dedicated ecumenical theologians.

to include and had begun editing them for a unified collection, but her illness forced her to set the project aside. The present volume completes that project in line with her intentions.

The volume contains seventeen papers that collectively span the years from 1996 to 2012, plus a complete list of Margaret’s publications. Ten of the papers have already appeared in print, while seven are published here for the first time. Sixteen papers are divided into two groups of eight each, with their order in each group being roughly chronological; one stands as the collection’s epilogue.

The first group of papers is presented here as introducing the ecumenical perspective to general readers, such as students of religious studies or theology and reflective members of the broader Christian community. The papers of this group are relatively short and accessible, deal with familiar topics, and typically originated as popular talks. They indicate something of the basic rationale and motivating spirit of the ecumenical enterprise, the wide variety of occasions and topics on which ecumenists may be invited to offer observations and recommendations, and the personal traits required for ecumenical work and the personal changes nurtured by it.

The second group is presented as potentially deepening the perspective of ecumenical specialists, whether academic or ecclesiastical. The papers of this group are longer and more demanding, deal with somewhat technical subjects, and often originated as scholarly lectures. They manifest the painstaking research and careful argumentation that characterize ecumenical scholarship, and they communicate recent results of just such scholarship on certain of Margaret’s favorite themes, including the exercise of teaching authority in Christ’s church, the ecclesial character of infallibility, the theology and practice of ordained ministry, and concrete strategies for fostering ecumenical progress.

Of course, both groups of papers will be of interest to some generalist readers and some specialist ones. Taken collectively, they illuminate various facets of Margaret’s work as a Roman Catholic ecumenical theologian. They show the diverse ecclesial communities with which she was in dialogue, especially Anglicans, Disciples of Christ, Evangelicals, Lutherans, and Mennonites. They suggest the

8 For Margaret’s curriculum vitae and additional information about her, visit http://stmikes.utoronto.ca/theology/margaret-ogara/default.asp.
broad range of tasks she performed, including historical and theoretical research, writing, dialoguing, teaching, advising, public lecturing, and preaching. They highlight the intrinsically collaborative character of ecumenical endeavor. And they illustrate how Margaret’s lifetime of ecumenical labor was in effect a contribution to the broader project of “harvesting the fruits” that is outlined by Cardinal Walter Kasper, former head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity: interpreting the ecumenical work that has already been done, showing why it must be carried forward, and cultivating that forward movement.9

Finally, two features of the book’s text deserve explanation. First, in any group of papers that a given writer composed for different audiences, certain key ideas are apt to appear more than once. Moreover, the words, images, and anecdotes employed to express those ideas in different papers may be similar or occasionally even identical. Such is the case with the papers gathered for this collection. Since eliminating such repetitions editorially would usually damage the integrity of individual papers, most of the repetitions have been allowed to remain.

Second, given the special importance of the word “church” in a book about ecumenism, a remark is in order about capitalization practices for that word here. Except for direct quotations (which exactly reproduce the original), the word is capitalized when it refers to a specific denomination as a whole (e.g., “the Roman Catholic Church,” “the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America”) or when it is part of an official name or title (e.g., “the wedding took place at St. Mark’s Church”). In most other cases the word is not capitalized. In particular, it is lowercase in reference to the whole body of Christians, worldwide or throughout time (e.g., “We pray for the church throughout the world”), the Christian faith (e.g., “She returned to the church when she had children”), or the body of Christians constituting one congregation or living in any particular place (e.g., “She always belonged to this church,” “Paul was eager to visit the church at Ephesus”).10

10 This paragraph, including its examples, draws heavily on the Liturgical Press Style Guide, 7th ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008).
4. Expressions of Gratitude

It is my happy task to conclude this introduction with several expressions of gratitude.

First, I thank the following journals and other copyright holders for permission to use material that previously appeared in the form indicated by the introductory notes to the respective chapters: Benedictine Bridge, for chapter 3; Bondings, for chapter 5; Canon Law Society of America Proceedings, for chapter 10; Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings, for chapters 11 and 16; Commonweal, for chapter 7; Ecumenism, for chapter 2; The Jurist, for chapter 9; Origins, for chapter 16; the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, for chapter 14; and University Press of America, for chapter 6.

Second, I warmly thank Hans Christoffersen and his colleagues at Liturgical Press for their enthusiasm about this project from the very beginning, and for their discerning guidance and friendly support at every step along the way.

Third, I convey my heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Daniel Monsour, erstwhile member of the editorial staff at the Lonergan Research Institute at Regis College, Toronto. By his meticulous reading of the manuscript and his indefatigable checking, updating, and supplementing its many references, Danny has made a capital contribution to the resulting volume’s technical quality.

Fourth, I offer my profound gratitude to Bishop Richard Sklba and Professor David Thompson for their insightful, generous, and beautifully wrought forewords, and for the long collegial friendships with Margaret that their words reflect.

Fifth, I gratefully and fondly remember Brother Jeffrey Gros, who among his many ecumenical contributions served for fourteen years as an ecumenical officer for the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. In May 2013 I sought Jeff’s candid opinion on the potential value of Margaret’s project and whether I should try to bring it to completion. He responded immediately with strong encouragement and astute advice. He also volunteered further assistance on particular issues—an especially (but typically) generous offer, since he was suffering from terminal cancer. We had additional exchanges during the following weeks, and his last message to me, a ten-point reply to a short question, was written less than three weeks before his death in August 2013. The publication of this volume owes a great deal to him.
Finally and most centrally, in my dual role as her academic colleague and—for thirty-six years, three months, and twenty-three days—her providentially graced husband, with unique gratitude and affection I remember Margaret O’Gara, the light of my life.

Michael Vertin
Professor Emeritus, Philosophy, Study of Religion, Theology
St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto
February 1, 2014
Abbreviations


Part One

Introducing the Ecumenical Perspective
I am delighted to be at this conference and to learn about the Mennonite tradition and grasp more deeply what gifts Catholics and Mennonites can offer and receive from one another. I was asked to say something about the strengths and weaknesses of my church in the world today. So let me sketch what I see as one important strength of the Roman Catholic Church and one of its important weaknesses.

1. One Important Strength

Last fall I had a new experience: I served as a theological advisor to the five Canadian bishops who attended the 2001 World Synod of Bishops. The Canadian bishops pride themselves on being consultative. So they invited two theologians to assist their five delegates with advice as they gathered for a month in Rome with some 250 other bishops from around the world to address the topic of this

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Introducing the Ecumenical Perspective

synod, the ministry of bishops. I was privileged to be one of those two advisors.2

The synod was a rich and dramatic example of Roman Catholic solidarity at the international level. And I think it also showed how ecclesial solidarity can encourage and confirm ecclesial commitment to global justice and peace.

For starters, the timing of our stay in Rome turned out to be pretty unusual. The synod began on September 29, 2001, less than three weeks after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York. It got under way with a beautiful celebration of the eucharist in St. Peter’s Basilica. A week later, in response to 9/11, the United States and its allies attacked the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. So the remaining weeks of the synod coincided with the onset of the Afghanistan war.

While the first half of the synod was devoted to individual presentations by the delegates, the second half was spent in workshops and discussions. Especially striking to me were the small-group discussions, where ten or twelve bishops from all over the world sat together and talked about what it means to be a bishop. For the bishops, these discussions were remarkable experiences of solidarity. They not only shared ideas for addressing their common challenges, but they also supported one another in facing the differing challenges the international hostilities presented to different bishops.3

You may remember how at the start of the war in Afghanistan it seemed that many nations might become involved, and all were being asked to choose: you’re either with the United States or against it. Here were these bishops, all in one church, celebrating the eucharist together each day but simultaneously realizing that their countries could soon

2 The other adviser was Father Gilles Routhier, Professor of Theology at Laval University, Quebec City. For the five delegates’ report on the synod to the church in Canada, see http://www.cccb.ca/site/Files/CdnSynod.html.

3 In an e-mail message to me on November 26, 2013, Father Routhier sketched just how the two theological advisors followed the synod’s events. Although they were not present at the bishops’ individual presentations, workshops, or discussions, each day they received a summary of the interventions that had been made. They analyzed each summary and entered the results into an electronic database; thus they were readily able to see which topics were receiving the most attention. This information was filled out at their daily midday meal with the five Canadian bishops, who would share their sense of the meaning and direction of the events. Finally, the two advisors often would join the bishops at an evening reception, to assist them as they formed their judgments on the topics under discussion. (Ed.)
be at war with each other. The countries of some bishops were threatening to attack the cities where other bishops might be preaching to their congregations, to bomb the people that others might be baptizing. In the middle of the synod, Cardinal Edward Egan of New York went home for a time to take part in a service honoring the victims of the World Trade Center attack. Shortly afterward, Bishop Anthony Lobo of Islamabad, Pakistan, left permanently to be with the people of his diocese, people whom he feared might be killed by random bombs or as the result of military mistakes in nearby Afghanistan.

The situation in which the bishops found themselves was absurd, but they confronted it in sacramentally based solidarity with one another. They felt themselves strongly compelled to denounce the terrorist acts of 9/11, and they did so. After expressing sympathy for the victims and their families, they continued: “We absolutely condemn terrorism, which nothing can justify.” But they also recognized that terrorism often stems from gross injustice and the hopelessness it fosters. So they spoke out as well against extreme poverty and the social structures of poverty in which the rich nations are complicit. “Some endemic evils, when they are too long ignored, can produce despair in entire populations.” In short, the bishops asserted what has become a classic Catholic teaching in our time: “To achieve peace, work for justice.”

I think these developments during the synod illustrate a Roman Catholic strength: the tendency of sacramentally based solidarity to encourage and confirm an ecclesial commitment to justice and peace for the entire world.

2. One Important Weakness

My example of a weakness in the Roman Catholic tradition shows itself in something we’ve heard a lot about during the past few years: the sexual abuse crisis. Perhaps it’s not so surprising that some clergy have sinned, although victimization of children is especially lamentable. What’s more surprising is how those sins have been handled by

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5 Ibid., n. 11; cf. n. 10.
church authorities. I think this crisis illustrates a serious problem in the Roman Catholic tradition: the lack of episcopal accountability.

First of all, the bishops are not properly accountable to their own local church. Christopher Ruddy speaks about the lack of synodality, i.e., the lack of relationship within and among the local churches, which contributes to the sense that the bishop cannot really be called to account by members of the laity in his own diocese. Of course, laypeople certainly ought to be involved in accountability today, but the structures of accountability that should already have been in place were lacking. Also lacking is accountability of the bishops to one another. The Vatican sometimes makes such mutual accountability—which Catholics have discussed under the term “collegiality”—more difficult. In fact, the Vatican often isolates the bishops from one another so that they are left to operate as lone rangers. And this in turn has sometimes led the bishops, as they’ve responded to the sexual abuse situation, to go from one extreme to the other, from laxity to harshness.

People often say the Roman Catholic Church has too many structures, but in some respects just the opposite is true. We need more or at least better structures of episcopal accountability, and I think that has been shown somewhat dramatically in this sad crisis. Although we Roman Catholics commit ourselves to global justice, this structural deficiency can prevent us from serving justice within our own church, thus putting us in a position of self-contradiction.

Here is one place where Roman Catholics have something to learn from the Mennonite tradition. Mennonites have long envisioned ecclesial responsibility, including mutual accountability, as a duty that is shared by everyone in the church. We could profit greatly from their example.

I have sketched an important strength of the Roman Catholic Church in the world and also an important weakness. And I have indicated a Mennonite strength that I suggest could serve to correct that Catholic weakness. This brief account illustrates my conviction that we Roman Catholics have gifts to offer and gifts to receive in our encounter with the Mennonite tradition.

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