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Ecumenism and Philosophy : Philosophical Questions for a Renewal of Dialogue (Charles Morerod OP, Sapientia Press 2006)

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Fr Charles Morerod is a francophone Swiss ecumenist who teaches at the Angelicum, the Dominican university in Rome. This present book, translated from the French, advocates the thesis that in the search for the essential difference between Catholic and Protestant, regard must be given to the differing philosophical presuppositions of the two sides at the Reformation. Morerod argues that the Protestants regarded any concept of human agency in the transmission of grace as unacceptable and an affront to the divine majesty and dignity. He regards this view as still very much alive in the work of modern Protestant theologians such as Barth and as evidenced in continental Reformed and Lutheran responses in ecumenical dialogue. He discusses, for example, some of the German Lutheran responses to the Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry process of the Faith and Order division of the World Council of Churches. He also analyses the dissent of certain prominent German Lutheran theologians to the recent Joint Declaration of Justification as promulgated by the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation. These theologians feel that the LWF has sold the pass to the Catholic Church.

The late Eric Mascall also pointed many years ago to the philosophical heritage of the later Middle Ages as central to understanding the emergence of Protestantism. Your reviewer, while accepting that Morerod's case is well and cogently argued, believes that more is at stake than the philosophical differences. There is also the question of the interpretation of the totality of the biblical witness and the relationship between Christ and his Church even within the economy of the Incarnation. While Morerod is right to assert that, in the new Covenant, God does use human ministerial instrumentality in conveying sacramental grace, it is also true that God is not confined to his sacraments and that grace is also given in the

context of the *immediate* relationship of the faithful believer to Christ. Much of the problem of the Reformation arose from the exclusivity of the claims of both sides, a tendency, which, as Morerod has well illustrated from the Reformed side, still prevails within continental classical Protestantism, though an exception should be made for those Lutherans, particularly in the Porvoo churches that have higher sacramental and ecclesiological views. The tendency to exclusivism is also sometimes displayed from the Catholic side when there is a tendency to see the means of grace as exclusively sacramental in basis.

The New Testament points to a much more complex relationship, based ultimately on the paradoxical relationship of the risen Christ to His Church, a relationship that is both one of identity yet also of separation, since it is one and the same Risen Christ who can ask Saul why he is persecuting him (in his members, Acts 9), yet can also confront churches as he does in the Book of Revelation. I suggest that both traditional Catholic and traditional Lutheran/Reformed positions are witnesses to key strands within the biblical witness, but strands that can never be made to prevail monopolistically over each other. Perhaps it will be the Catholic-Methodist dialogue, already profoundly into questions of sacramentality and embracing a church that combines the reformation emphasis upon justification with a very real belief in the responsible nature of grace, that will make the progress in this matter that Fr. Morerod would like to see.

Nevertheless, his contribution is a significant one and points us to an aspect of the problem.