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CHURCH, Category, and Speciation

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Abstract: The Roman Catholic definition of “church”, especially as applied to groups of Protestant Christians, creates a number of well-known difficulties. The similarly complex category, “species,” provides a model for applying this term so as to neither lose the centrality of certain examples nor draw a hard boundary to rule out border cases. In this way, it can help us to more adequately apply the complex ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. This article draws parallels between the understanding of speciation and categorization and the definition of Church since the council. In doing so, it applies the work of cognitive linguists, including George Lakoff, Zoltán Kövecses, Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner on categorization. We tend to think of categories as containers into which we sort objects according to essential criteria. However, categories are actually built inductively by making associations between objects. This means that natural categories, including species, are more porous than we assume, but nevertheless bear real meaning about the natural world. Taxonomists dispute the border between “zebras” and “wild asses,” but this distinction arises out of genetic and evolutionary reality; it is not merely arbitrary. Genetic descriptions of species has also led recently to the conviction that there are four species of giraffe, not one. This engagement will ground a vantage point from which the Council’s complex ecclesiology can be more easily described so as to authentically integrate its noncompetitive vision vis-à-vis other Christians with its sense of the unique place held by Catholic Church.

Keywords: Ecclesiology; Second Vatican Council; Ecumenism; Categories; Speciation; cognitive linguistics; Roman Catholic Theology

1 Introduction

Contemporary Roman Catholic discourse becomes fraught whenever the word *church* is used. While pre-conciliar ecclesiology was thoroughly integrated into theology, canon law, and practice, the Second Vatican Council’s significant developments in the theology of the church are still being received and their consequences worked out. There have therefore been recurring arguments over what these implications are. In particular, these disputes have focused on how and to whom the word *church* may be applied and what the implications of the council’s new openness to the “separated brethren” means for the Catholic Church’s self-understanding.¹

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, at least in official use, the Catholic definition of *church* was quite clear. It referred to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church that was simply those churches in communion with the Bishop of Rome. Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, one of the great figures of the Catholic Reformation, summed up this understanding in an oft-cited passage:

¹ The term “separated brethren” is itself a signal of the change, and begins to be used widely in the Council’s Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*. See §§ 1, 3, 4, 7–11, 20, 24.

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The church is . . . the community of persons brought together by the profession of the same Christian faith and conjoined in the communion of the same sacraments, under the government of their legitimate pastors and especially the one vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman pontiff.²

Bellarmino defined these three bonds (*vincula*) of faith, the sacraments, and submission to the hierarchy as what constituted a person as a member of the church. While this membership may be destroyed by heresy, schism, or excommunication, losing membership was not understood to destroy the church's jurisdiction over a person, for that authority has its roots in the indelible character of baptism. Therefore, any baptized person—whether a Catholic or not—was understood to be subject to the authority which the church wields on Christ's behalf. Non-Catholic Christians are understood in this model to be persons who have lost the rights of membership in the church but are still bound by its obligations.³

Non-Catholic Christian *churches*, then, were an impossibility. The church was conceived of as a society, perfect insofar as it has everything it needs to achieve its God-given ends. It is visible, public, and can be known by the presence of the successors of the apostles.⁴ There can only be one such society not only because belief in the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” is professed in the Nicene Creed, but because it is a logical necessity of the perfect society model.⁵ This ecclesiology was thoroughly integrated into the church's self-understanding, especially in its canon law, as Miriam Wijlens argues:

In its language, the 1917 Code testifies to this understanding. It speaks of *sectae* when referring to groups of baptized non-Catholics. Such a reference is more sociological than theological; as a group, baptized non-Catholics were not considered in a theological sense. Instead, they were predominantly seen in their individual relationship to the Catholic Church. Therefore, they were called heretics or schismatics erring in good faith. The ecumenical model of church unity displayed in the norms could be described as ‘a return to the Catholic Church by the individual.’⁶

Over the course of the twentieth century, however, Catholic engagement with other Christians began to grow, albeit quite slowly. Although Pope Benedict XV hosted an American Episcopal Bishop in 1919 and later praised the growing movement for Christian unity, he felt that the Catholic Church was precluded by its ecclesiology from participating in any official engagement with that movement. The sense that ecumenism was a Protestant concern continued up through mid-century, when the Holy Office (predecessor to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, hereafter CDF) issued a document under the title *Ecclesia Catholica*, that recognized this movement as a work of the Holy Spirit, and allowed a very limited Catholic participation in it.⁷ Growing experience of engagement with other Christians, including the participation of ecumenical observers at every session of the Second Vatican Council, led to a much more nuanced understanding of the ecumenical situation, and therefore a more differentiated description of non-Catholic Christians in the conciliar documents. This includes the use of the word *church* to describe some groupings of non-Catholics.⁸

This use and its implications continue to be disputed. Two particular questions about how to interpret the council's ecumenical engagement have come to dominate the conversation: the interpretation of “*subsistit in*” in Lumen Gentium §8 and the use of the terms “churches and ecclesial communities” to describe communities descending from the sixteenth-century Reformation. This article will not argue about what exactly the council meant by its teaching that the one Church of Christ “*subsistit in*” the Catholic

² Bellarmine. *De controversiis*, 195. “Ecclesia esse . . . coetum hominum eiusdem Christianae fidei professione, et eorundem Sacramentorum communione colligatum, sub regimine legitimorum pastorum, ac praecipue unius Christi in terris Vicarii Romani Pontificis.”

³ CIC 1917, can. 87; Wijlens, *Sharing the Eucharist*, 38–50.

⁴ See Granfield, “The Church as *Societas Perfecta* in the Schemata of Vatican I.”

⁵ Bellarmine among others makes this point. See “De definitione Ecclesiae.”

⁶ Wijlens, *Sharing the Eucharist*, 73.

⁷ Suprema Saepe Congregatio S. Officii, Instruction, “Ecclesia Catholica.” See also Gros, McManus, and Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism*, 28–30. Gros et al. refer to the document as *Ecclesia sua*, although what they reference matches the document listed in this footnote in content.

⁸ Particularly the churches of the East, although the word is applied, as will be seen below, to some communities in the West. “Unitatis Redintegratio,” ch. 3.

Church,⁹ nor will it wade directly into the argument about how the CDF has determined that theologians should interpret the council's application of the categories of "churches" and "ecclesial communities."¹⁰ Instead, it will answer a much more basic question: How does a complex category like "church" work? How should we expect it to function? And might understanding that function help us to re-approach these over-tilled fields in a new way?

In order to do this, it will first provide a general introduction to the understanding of categorization that is described by contemporary cognitive linguists like George Lakoff, Zoltán Kövecses, Giles Fauconnier, and Mark Turner. It will then demonstrate, using examples of speciation in the animal kingdom, how such categories are meaningful and also describe differing levels of connection in complex systems. Finally, it will return to the descriptions of the church in the documents of the Second Vatican Council to show how their description of the mystery of Christ's Church in the situation of a divided Christianity functions mirrors the complexities of this kind of category. The council fathers were able to both recognize that the communities of separated Christians functioned as churches, even if analogously, without losing their insistence that the Catholic Church is church in a unique way. Understanding *church* to function as a radial category of the kind that species is, allows these two commitments to be harmonized without either being lost. Attending to research into the ways that human persons create and use categories more generally further supports the idea that categories function like species, and not like containers.

2 Beyond CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS

Most commonly, categories are conceived via the metaphoric construction CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS.¹¹ We usually reason about categories in terms of this basic metaphor. Items "fit" within the category. They are "inside" or "outside" of its borders. We argue about where exactly the borders of a category lie, and produce lists of necessary and sufficient conditions that define these edges. In other words, the classical model pictures categories as things that contain items sharing particular properties in common. These properties then define the category.¹² This metaphor most adequately describes logical constructs like geometric objects. Any object with 4 sides and 4 right angles is a square. If it lacks the 4 right angles, it is a parallelogram if the sides are parallel, and a quadrilateral in any event. Because these "objects" are purely logical and the parameters are few, a Venn diagram can be produced that accounts for all the possibilities, and does not allow of any border cases, thus.

Working in the 1970s and 1980s, Eleanor Rosch tested whether this theory adequately describes broader human use of categories by testing two of its implications.

First, if categories are defined only by properties that all members share, then no members should be better examples of the category than any other members.

Second, if categories are defined only by properties inherent in the members, then categories should be independent of the peculiarities of any beings doing the categorizing; that is, they should not involve such matters as human neurophysiology, human body movement, and specific human capacities to perceive, to form mental images, to learn and to remember, to organize the things learned, and to communicate efficiently.¹³

⁹ See Becker, "On the Meaning of *Subsistit In*"; Schelkens, "Lumen Gentium's '*Subsistit in*' Revisited: The Catholic Church and Christian Unity after Vatican II"; Sullivan, "A Response to Karl Becker, S.J. on the Meaning of *Subsistit In*"; Idem., "The Meaning of *Subsistit In* as Explained by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith"; Idem., "Further Thoughts on the Meaning of *Subsistit In*"; Kasper, "The Meaning and Impact of Vatican II's Ecumenism Decree."

¹⁰ See, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), "Mysterium Ecclesiae," §1. Idem, Declaration "Dominus Iesus," §17; Idem. "Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church," Q 4–5; Granfield, "Churches and Ecclesial Communities;" Hotchin, "Canon Law and Ecumenism;" Feiner, "Decree on Ecumenism;" Sullivan, "'Ecclesial Communities' and their '*Defectus Sacramenti Ordinis*.'"

¹¹ Small caps are conventionally used to designate a schema, a frame, or a blend. I will also use them to designate categories, to differentiate between birds and the category BIRD.

¹² Lakoff, *Women Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 6. Kövecses rightly points out that dissatisfaction with this theory of categorization is not unique to scientists of language or mind, Ludwig Wittgenstein's engagements with the category game led him to reject a version of the classical view, and his idea of "family resemblances" has been well expanded among philosophers and related disciplines. *Language, Mind and Culture*, 21–24.

¹³ Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 7.

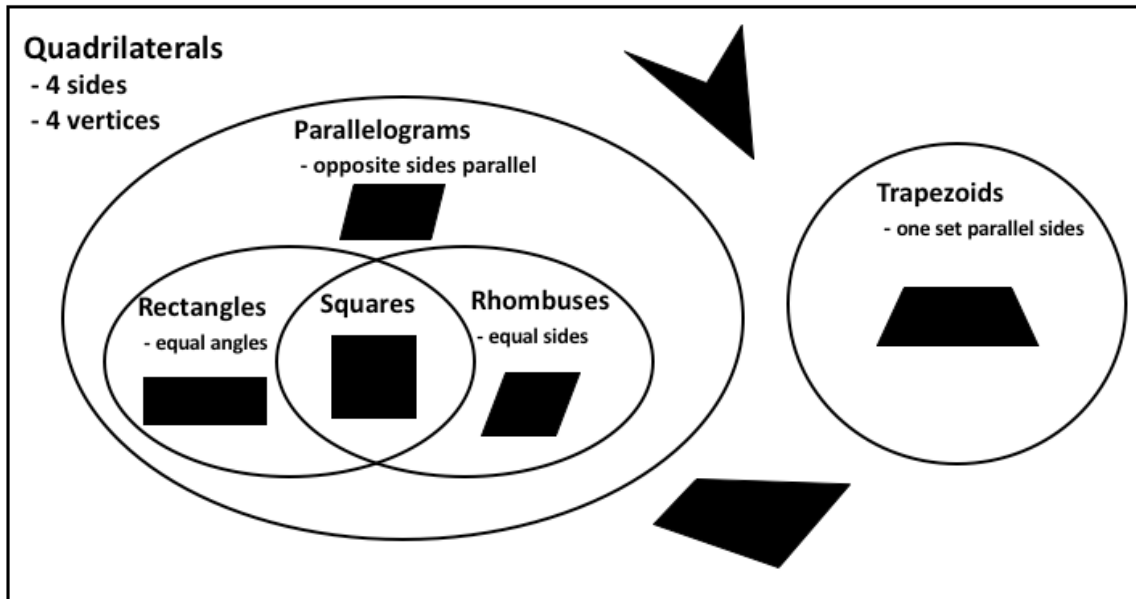


Fig 1: Classical Categorization

However, repeated testing demonstrates that there are indeed, better and worse examples within categories (she called the better examples “prototypes”) and that human capacities do play important roles in categorization. Few things are as neatly dividable as geometric figures, and even these exist only notionally. Any real-world instantiation of a “square” will not actually be a square, and would not “fit” within the category described by its rules. Moreover, the classical theory of categorization does not adequately describe how humans form the categories by which they think, communicate, and reason. In light of the findings of a growing body of research in the 1970s and 80s, including Rosch’s, a new theory arose, called “prototype theory,” which understands categorization to be a human activity that is accomplished by growing familiarity and building flexible cognitive models of the world humans experience.

In brief, we build categories by constructing a model of the world around us. We continually compare things we experience to things we have engaged before, as they are presented to us by experience, language, culture, and other framings. We even build categories in much the same way to meet the particular exigencies of daily life. Lawrence Barsalou showed that these “ad hoc” categories—one of his examples was THINGS TO SELL IN A GARAGE SALE—operated in the same way as more stable categories like BIRD, including the correlational structure and having more- and less-central members.¹⁴

Natural-kind terms, such as species, are often some of the first categories we construct, and demonstrate clearly how this process happens. We tend to form these categories outward from what George Lakoff calls “basic-level terms”¹⁵ or Brent Berlin calls the “folk-generic level.”¹⁶ In living things, this usually corresponds to what Linneus defined as *genus*.¹⁷ These are the terms that children learn first, and the ones that most people identify most accurately. From here, we develop both more general and more specific categories. A simplified version of this would look as follows:

¹⁴ Barsalou, “Ad Hoc Categories.”

¹⁵ Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 34, 46.

¹⁶ Berlin, *Ethnobiological Classification*, 18–19.

¹⁷ I.e. terms like “oak,” “maple,” “giraffe,” “rabbit.”



Fig 2: Categorical Development

There seem to be a number of reasons for why we focus on these “basic-level terms,” having to do with both the distribution of species in the world and our own psychological development. But what constitutes a “basic term” can itself be flexible over time: growing familiarity and specialization can bring the basic-level term more specific, less familiarity can move it to a broader category.

We can chart which examples are more and less prototypical in a particular language and culture through a series of replicable paradigmatic tests, including direct rating, reaction time, production of examples, asymmetry in similarity ratings, asymmetry in generalization, and perceived family resemblances.¹⁸ These various tests can provide a sense of how the categories at stake are constructed, and allow this construction to be described in terms of “more central” and “less central” members. Jean Aitchison uses her research on how North American speakers of English understand the category BIRD to produce the following figure.¹⁹

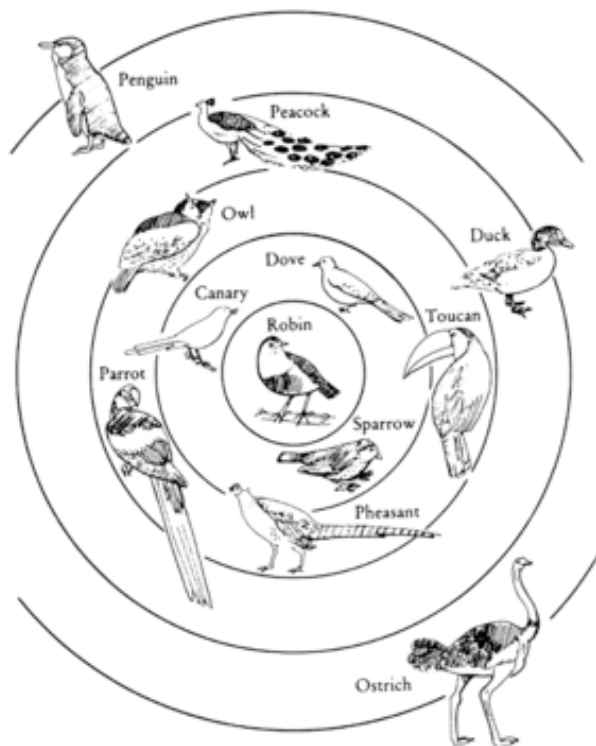


Fig. 3: Bird as a Category for North American Speakers of English

¹⁸ Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 41–42.

¹⁹ Aitchison, *Words in the Mind*, 69. Fig 6.1: “Birdiness Rankings”

For theologians and philosophers, such a claim will likely bring to mind the long-running debates about the reality of universals and what this might mean for how philosophy and theology are practiced well. But, to say that categories are constructed and do not function like containers is not necessarily to espouse an anti-realist position.²⁰ Instead, it affirms both that human categorization is capable of naming real things about the world around us, and that the way it does so is conditioned by the kind of creatures that human beings are, along with the particular historical, cultural, and linguistic aspects that shape our experience.

Considering how natural groups of interrelated living things are categorized will clarify how these cultural, anthropological, and exterior elements relate to each other. If in the category BIRD, Americans tend to operate with robins as more central examples of the category than ducks, flamingoes, or ostriches, what does this tell us about our engagements with natural categories like genera and species? And most importantly for the present argument, how does this relate to the question of how we define *church*?

Specifically, it leads to three implications. First, the most obvious categories with which we interact in the natural world are not always the most important. Nor do they always adequately describe reality. They are revised as we build greater familiarity with the world, often in ways we do not directly realize. A shift to theory, even when it challenges assumed positions, can better illuminate how the world is actually structured. Second, the borders of natural categories are permeable. The density of the genetic spectrum means that there will be border cases between closely-related categories. Finally, our metaphoric assumption that CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS hides much of what we can know about the interrelations of the natural world. If we approach complex categories such as *church* instead with a metaphoric orientation that CATEGORIES ARE GENERA OR SPECIES, we will be able to describe the world in a less inadequate way.²¹

2.1 Speciation: What exactly is a GIRAFFE?

Genetics, or at least biological descent, has long been a source of reasoning in the theological realm about things that share a common nature. Consider the Nicene debate about whether the Only Begotten Son was a creature by nature of being begotten. The council determined against Arius that calling the Logos by this biblical title means that he is *not* a creature for he is “begotten, not made.” Zebras beget zebras, giraffes beget giraffes, and therefore begetting is not the work of a creator, but of an act by which a nature is shared. By virtue of the process of sexual reproduction, a new creature begins its life in both unavoidable connection to the lives of its parents and in recognizable distinction from them. It partakes in their “giraffe nature” but does so as a unique individual. The theological application of the metaphor abstracts from this sexual reproduction to posit an “eternal begetting” by which the Father gives everything of himself (save paternity) to the Son, who receives it all and shares all of his being (save filiation) with the Father.²²

What exactly defines such a nature, or what we usually call a *species*, is itself somewhat of a question.²³ Many high school biology classes teach that any two animals who can produce viable, fertile offspring belong to the same species. This definition is easily understandable, but not entirely adequate to the complexities

²⁰ See Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 81–114. See also Masson, *Without Metaphor*, 27–55. Lakoff and Johnson write that cognitive science argues for an “embodied realism,” that is “closer to the direct realism of the Greeks than it is to the disembodied representational realism of Cartesian and analytic philosophy, which is fundamentally separated from the world. Embodied realism, rejecting the Cartesian separation, is, rather, a realism grounded in our capacity to function successfully in our physical environments.” *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 95.

²¹ This kind of reasoning, the “less-inadequate” is, I believe, a greatly underutilized category in theology. I borrow it from Duffy, who describes Thomas’s description of created grace as a quality of the soul as “perhaps the least inadequate term available” to him. The category provides a negative mirror to Thomas’ own reliance on the category of apt [*aptus*], especially in a field where that which is most apt [*aptissime*] may seek to describe a relationship that is not based on causal necessity. See *The Dynamics of Grace*: 157–58.

²² See Williams, *Arius*.

²³ Bradley and Baker, “Speciation in Mammals and the Genetic Species Concept.” Notice that we tend to form categories from mid-level terms outward. There is little confusion or debate about whether a pig is the same kind of thing as a horse. However, as we push towards specificity, the distinctions get muddier and the means by which we judge becomes more determinative.

of genetically differentiated animals.²⁴ Historically, taxonomists used a “morphological species concept” in which visible differentiations of skin, skeleton, etc. are judged to form taxonomic groups. In recent years, however, taxonomists have been arguing for differentiation of species based on genetic diversity.²⁵ In one way, this is a step closer to the interbreeding definition of species, for genetic, not morphological, factors determine the possibility of viable, fertile offspring.

The move to judge by means of genetic, rather than morphological factors, however, introduces an increased distance between those judgments and our common-sense perceptions, and thus may lead to surprising results. In helping to interpret such data, Bernard Lonergan’s distinction between *theory* and *common sense* can be quite helpful. For Lonergan, theory is the description of the relations between realities as we observe them relating to each other, whereas common sense is the description of things as they relate to us.²⁶ We need both kinds of reasoning and have to learn when to apply which kind: if you try to cross a busy street according to theory, you will die. But, if you try and make other kinds of judgment—like whether global climate change is happening—by common sense, you will fail.²⁷

The move towards a genetic description of speciation is a move towards theory. Morphological taxonomies, while rooted in the ways of things, are more related to us and our ways of engaging the world (we are very visual creatures), genetic difference is less related to us and more related to the thing itself. This means that GENETIC SPECIES is a particular kind of category. It operates according to a kind of prototype theory, but does so according to a different logic than, for example, grammatical gender. When cognitive linguists describe the radially constructed categories illuminating the hidden logic of the Dyirbal language, what emerges is a cohesive system that is culturally intelligible.²⁸ A speaker of Dyirbal, having internalized the logic that orders its radial categories, correctly classifies new nouns according to perceived connections relating to the culture, that is as an outgrowth of a shared common sense. Genetic classification of species still produces radial categories, but categories that are structured according to a theoretical logic. How different animals relate to me, to my culture, or even my worldview is not the primary consideration. Instead, the question is how we can map the web of interrelationships between *them* using their genetic variance.²⁹

The move towards theory can upend our expectations. As one example, consider the dog (*canis lupus*) and the giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*). Dogs’ genome allows an extensive variation that has been pushed to extremes by human breeding. Despite this variation, dogs make up one species that includes not only the wide variety of domestic dogs (which make up but one sub-species) but 37 additional subspecies of wolves and dingoes. On the other hand, morphologically, giraffes seem to be a monolithic species, and were generally considered to be such until 2016.³⁰ Genetic testing of wild populations across Africa led

²⁴ For a good overview of the history of the definitions of what makes a species, albeit one that predates the current debates on Genetic Species Concept, see McKelvey, *Organizational Systematics: Taxonomy, Evolution, Classification*, 143–68.

²⁵ See for example Bradley and Baker, “A Test of the Genetic Species Concept;” Ibid., “Speciation in Mammals and The Genetic Species Concept.” Notice that this shift is both more theoretical and yet not more clear-cut. Authors argue over how much difference makes a species. Since we’re talking about a continuum, this difference could be from absolute (making us like angels – each our own species) to absolute (all earth-living life is genetically connected). Among the questions requiring consideration is how “useful” definitions of speciation are: for conservation or for other practical necessities, and how well our definitions describe the data of the natural world. See, also Zachos, et al., “Species Inflation and Taxonomic Artefacts;” and Groves, “The Nature of Species.”

²⁶ See Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 163–227; Idem, *Method in Theology*, 81–85. It is important to note that the distinction is not between knowledge that is received as embodied knowers and knowledge received in ways that are unrelated to ourselves – the knower can only know things through embodied interaction. Nevertheless, as embodied engaged knowers, we can describe things according to their relationship to us (*common sense*), or in terms of systems to which we are only observers (*theory*).

²⁷ I am indebted to Robert Doran, SJ for the very illuminative example.

²⁸ Cf. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, ch. 6.

²⁹ Of course, this is not disconnected from our cultural engagement with animals. Our understanding of DNA, the ways in which we value which differences matter, and many other aspects are themselves products of cultural and human ways of being in the world. Even the form of mathematics, long perceived to be absolutely abstract and non-embodied, can be understood to be a product of the kind of embodied beings that human beings are. See Lakoff and Núñez, *Where Mathematics Comes From: How the Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics Into Being*,

³⁰ Fennessy et al., “Multi-locus Analyses Reveal Four Giraffe Species Instead of One.”

to a proposed reclassification of *Giraffa camelopardalis* into four species and those then further into subspecies.³¹

Similar proposals have been made for other taxonomies in recent years as genetic testing has become more available and less expensive, including an intriguing discussion about whether morphology or genetics matter more to where we set the dividing line between “zebras,” and “wild asses.” At issue is how to best describe the contemporary products of the complex evolution within the genus *Equus*. The methodology chosen to differentiate among them leads to different divisions being made.³²

So, what does this tell us about categories? One important lesson is that we must be attentive to the world as we find it, continue to try and understand its complexities, and be attentive to when our understanding of the world as it is requires a move to theory.³³ Otherwise, we will find that we are describing a world other than the one in which we live, confusing common sense for theory or theory for common sense. Adequately understanding the world, requires us to know when common sense judgements and theoretical judgements are appropriately made, even when they are describing the same object or phenomenon.

2.2 Permeability

A second implication to which we should attend is the question of permeability. As categories do not actually function as containers, the borders between them are permeable. This is true both on the cultural-linguistic side (tomatoes are biologically fruits, but function as vegetables culturally and legally)³⁴ and in the data we gather about world outside of ourselves (genetic diversity forms a cloud of relations, meaning that some individuals are more closely related than others).³⁵ The mechanics of genetic drift dictate that as a population becomes divided over time into distinct species, there will be a period of time over which a “parting of the ways” takes place. During this time, the differentiation that exists between populations becomes more and more distinct, but does not clearly constitute a division.³⁶ Precisely when a separation has occurred is a matter of judgment. Moreover, the divergent populations share common ancestors, and thus are genetically linked to each other and to those ancestors. Depending on the degree of separation, this ancestral population may itself eventually be classified as a third species, separate from either descendent group.³⁷

31 (1) (*G. giraffa*), comprising two distinct subspecies, Angolan giraffe (*G. g. angolensis*) and South African giraffe (*G. g. giraffa*); (2) Masai giraffe (*G. tippelskirchi*), which includes the formerly recognized Thornicroft’s giraffe; (3) reticulated giraffe (*G. reticulata*); and (4) northern giraffe (*G. camelopardalis*), which includes Nubian giraffe (*G. c. camelopardalis*) and its new synonym, Rothschild’s giraffe (*G. c. rothschildi*), with Kordofan giraffe (*G. c. antiquorum*) and West African giraffe (*G. c. peralta*) as distinct subspecies. *Ibid.*, 3

32 See, for example, Steiner, *et al.*, “Molecular Phylogeny of Extant Equids and Effects of Ancestral Polymorphism in Resolving Species-Level Phylogenies;” Kefena, *et al.*; “Discordances Between Morphological Systematics and Molecular Taxonomy in the Stem Line of Equids.”

33 A common example of the phenomenon would be the argument that sometimes is made against global climate change based on the severe winter events of the last several years. This is a confusion of theory and common sense, for it mistakes the weather and its impact on me (common sense) for the climate, which is a global system that can only be understood through theoretical modelling. Theory is not always the most helpful engagement, however. Theory tells me that the chair on which I am sitting is mostly empty space. Generally, however, my common-sense perception of it as solid produces more helpful inferences.

34 *Nix v. Heddon*, 149 U.S. 304 (1893).

35 Because these relationships form a continuum that finally unites all living things, the model used to differentiate between species will affect where the lines are drawn. See the discussion of giraffes, zebras, and dogs above.

36 The image is chosen specifically with the theory that the division between Jewish and Christian communities arose over time in mind as very similar dynamics are at play.

37 The question about how to classify Neanderthals, as *Homo neanderthalensis*, or *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*, points to the difficulty. We have good evidence of viable, fertile offspring being produced by interbreeding – most modern humans of non-African origin show evidence of partial Neanderthal ancestry. Clearly these distinct populations were close enough to leave genetic evidence of their compatibility behind, and yet, seem to have also been distinct, although whether Neanderthals constitute a separate species or a subspecies of *Homo sapiens* could therefore become a question of debate depending on the definition of species used. See Sankararaman, *et al.*, “The Genomic Landscape of Neanderthal Ancestry in Present-day Humans” for the studies of Neanderthal ancestry, and Havarti, Frost, and McNulty, “Neanderthal taxonomy reconsidered” for a discussion of how to classify Neanderthals given the complexities of their relationship with *Homo sapiens*.

2.3 Categories are genera or species

Natural categories comport more closely to our actual ways of constructing categories (central members and other members with differentiated internal relationships), than they do to our perception of how we construct categories. There is a direct, though diffuse, causal connection that ties together all life on earth. We can chart how closely or how distantly life is related, and we were pretty good at doing this even before we were even aware that DNA existed. We are adapted to dealing with natural categories, and accounting for their vagaries.

So, if CATEGORIES ARE SPECIES, however we define them, must allow for a variety of individuals with differentiated relationships existing between and among them. That we form categories to match this reality makes more sense than that they would act as containers. Our engagement with the world is primarily shaped by interaction with natural categories, even if much of our epistemological tradition is built on engagement with logical constructs (like geometric figures) that are adequately described by CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS. Because the Second Vatican Council reasons about the church in terms of their experience of non-Catholic Christians, their description functions like a natural-kind category, and it cannot be adequately reduced to the simplicity of a logical category. The council's use of CHURCH is therefore much more adequately understood within the conceptual metaphor CATEGORIES ARE GENERA OR SPECIES.

3 The Second Vatican Council's use of the category CHURCH

Before moving on to consider the Second Vatican Council's use of church directly, it may be useful to sum up some important implications of the metaphoric construct CATEGORIES ARE GENERA OR SPECIES:

1. Species relate large numbers of instantiations to each other, naming related cases that may vary from each other in a number of ways.
2. Some examples are more central than others and define the meaning of the category.
3. Less-central examples, even marginal ones, are not excluded. This means that the borders of categories may be permeable.
4. Honest engagement with potential members of such categories requires building familiarity with their actual interrelationships, including potentially a move from common sense to theory.

In light of these implications, I will proceed as follows to apply this engagement to understanding the church in Roman Catholic discourse. First, I will describe recent engagements with the Second Vatican Council's use of the category CHURCH, especially as the application of that category has remained controversial since the council. Then, I will demonstrate how engaging it through the construct of categories as species can ground a vantage point from which the Council's complex ecclesiology can be more easily described. Any such description must integrate both its noncompetitive vision vis-à-vis other Christians and its sense of the unique place held by the Catholic Church.³⁸ Finally, if the council does indeed have such a nuanced understanding of non-Catholic Christians, the importance of the category CHURCH must be explained.

As already stated, the Second Vatican Council's use of the word *church*, specifically to which groups that term should be applied and for what reasons, has been an area of some controversy in the last half-century. As mentioned above, the two points around which this controversy usually coalesces are the council's use of the terminology of "churches and ecclesial communities" in *Unitatis redintegratio* (UR) and it's use of "*subsistit in*" to describe of the relationship between the Church of Christ and the Catholic Church (LG 8). Outlining these discussions will help to clarify the present argument.

In the years after the council, a particular interpretation of these passages has been fostered by the CDF. This draws a near equation between the Catholic Church and the Church of Christ, and sharply

³⁸ The description of the council ecclesiology as noncompetitive is drawn from Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 91–115. Cardinal Kasper's recent ecclesiology text makes a strong case that the council's ecclesiology must also be interpreted as naming the Catholic Church "church" in a unique way without thereby excluding others. Kasper, *The Catholic Church*, especially 151–94.

differentiates between *churches* and *ecclesial communities* on the basis of whether the groups involved have a valid sacrament of Order, and a valid Eucharist. This position is mostly clearly spelled out in a 2007 document of the Congregation entitled “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church.”³⁹ The CDF argues that the Council “neither changed nor intended to change this doctrine [on the Church], rather it developed, deepened, and more fully expanded it” (First Question). While the congregation recognizes and cites the council’s more nuanced use of the word church, it does so by applying a checklist, that is, it conceives of the category church via CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS.

Specifically, the checklist in this document includes the presence of an apostolic succession and therefore a valid sacramental priesthood, and “the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery” (Fifth Question). While this language allows for the recognition of the workings of divine grace in the ministries and the liturgical actions of the groups descending from the European Protestant Reformations, it denies the title of church to any group missing one of its conditions.⁴⁰ In practice, since a valid Eucharist requires a validly ordained minister, the question quickly becomes about the ordination of the ministers alone.⁴¹

But, if CHURCH is the kind of category that we have been describing, we needn’t only approach the question of whether particular communities stemming from the Reformation are churches in this juridical, black-and-white manner. Indeed, there are two good reasons for Catholics to rethink how to approach the category of CHURCH: first, because of what we have already said about how categories function, and second, that such a differentiated approach more authentically describes the complex picture of the church which the council describes.

Precisely because the council did not “change or intend to change” the doctrine of the church, its means of proceeding vis-à-vis other Christians constitutes a development. The development, deepening, and expansion which the council makes are made possible by what Richard Gaillardetz has described as its ability to view difference in terms of a series of “non-competitive” relationships: between Pope and Bishops, between the Magisterium and the whole Christian faithful, between baptismal charisms and Church Office, and between the spheres of Christian activity.⁴² Neither does the council set up a competition between the Church of Christ that subsists in the visible society of the Catholic Church and other Christians. In doing so, it, without making this explicit, understands the category CHURCH to operate according to a species-prototype model. Moreover, its means of argumentation, relying not on abstract principles for inclusion, but on naming the relationships of other Christians to God, and recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in their communities and their liturgical actions, demonstrates a move from a common-sense model in which churches were churches if they were connected to the See of Peter, to a theoretical model in which the relationship between communities and between communities and God is considered apart from a mediation through the See of Rome. Nevertheless, Rome and the churches in communion with it are understood to be the central examples of CHURCH. Less-central examples have differing relationships to that center, but are not caught up in the zero-sum game of ecclesiality that was generally assumed in the period following the 16c. schisms.

In order to understand how such a non-competitive understanding of the church sets up this species-prototypical use of CHURCH, we might borrow an image from John XXIII, as related by Br. Roger of Taizé:

Our last meeting took place on February 25, 1963. There were three of us. Suffering from an advanced stage of cancer, at the age of 82, the Holy Father knew his death was approaching and we had been warned of this. ... John XXIII was concerned that we not be worried about the future of our community. Making circular gestures again and again with his hands, he emphasized: “The Catholic Church is made up of concentric circles that are larger and larger, always larger.” In Christ’s Church there is room for everybody, the Pope seems to say. This of course does not imply relativism or syncretism, but a constant deepening of our communion with Christ and with one another.⁴³

³⁹ CDF, “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church.”

⁴⁰ The document points to §22 of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, in which makes a similar point, noting the lack of a valid priesthood, but noting the possibility of God’s work in their celebrations. UR however sees this as an impetus to further dialogue.

⁴¹ See: Pesch, *The Ecumenical Potential of the Second Vatican Council*, 44–47; For the second, see CDF, “Dominus Iesus,” §§16–17; and Idem., “Communio notio.”

⁴² Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 91–113.

⁴³ Br. John of Taizé, quoting Br. Roger of Taizé, “Remarks for the *Dignitas Humana* Award.”

This vision sees the church as both centered and extending outward to eventually include much more than what the pre-conciliar texts assumed.⁴⁴ It should not be surprising that it closely resembles the depiction of the category BIRD in figure three above.⁴⁵

Unitatis redintegratio is clear that the ecclesiality of the Orthodox Churches does not compete with that of the churches in communion with Rome. It also assumes that there are *both* “separated churches and ecclesial communities in the west.”⁴⁶ But the council determines that the task of “describing them adequately is extremely difficult.”⁴⁷ Throughout these relationships, there are both important differences and reason to hope for a future healing of the divisions. Throughout, UR speaks not of the salvation of individual baptized persons outside the church, but rather of communities, and the work of God in them. It describes the growth in unity between these communities towards the “fullness to which our Lord wills his body to grow in the course of time.”⁴⁸

This vision leads UR to insist that the “sacred actions of the Christian religion [as celebrated by the separated communities] must be regarded as capable of giving access to that communion in which is salvation,” and therefore these communities “*as such*, though we believe them to be deficient in some respects, have *by no means* been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation.”⁴⁹

The language of the council describes both real connection and real difference. We might call the separated brethren non-central examples of churches: for the council acknowledges that they “believe [non-Catholic churches] to be deficient in some way” and yet, recognize these communities to themselves be means by which God is present.⁵⁰ Separated Christians are truly Christians. Their communities participate in the reality of the church *as communities*, and their liturgical actions give access to “that communion which is salvation.” Nevertheless, the council insists that the Roman church is unique, and that lacking communion with it, damages the ability of communities to be fully Christ’s church.

An approximation of the conception of the category church among Western Catholics might look something like this:

⁴⁴ The Council insists that the Church of Christ, “constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity” (LG 8). But it also speaks of the communions of non-Catholic Christians in differentiated relationships to the Church of Christ, in ways that clearly can only be adequately defined in terms of connection to, being part of, the Body of Christ.

⁴⁵ A liturgical version of this pattern is enacted during the solemn intercessions of Good Friday, which begins by praying for the church in general, then its leaders, then moves to catechumens, all who believe in Christ, the Jewish people, all who do not believe in Christ, atheists, and finally for those in public office. With the exception of the last petition, this forms a broader and broader inclusion until all people are gathered together rhetorically in the church’s prayer.

⁴⁶ UR Chapter III, part II, title: *De ecclesiis et communitatibus ecclesialibus in Occidente seiunctis*. Repeated in §19: “*Ecclesiae et communitates ecclesiales, quae vel in gravissimo illo rerum discrimine, quod in occidente iam ab exeunte medio aevo initium sumpsit, vel posterioribus temporibus ab apostolica sede Romana separatae sunt, cum ecclesia catholica puciliare affinitate ac necessitudine iunguntur ob diuturnam populi christiani vitam praeteritis saeculis in ecclesiastica communion peractum.*” “The churches and ecclesial communities which came to be separated from the apostolic see of Rome in the great upheaval which began in the west at the end of the Middle Ages and in later times too, have retained a special affinity and close relationship with the catholic church as a result of the long centuries in which all Christendom lived together in ecclesiastical communion.”

⁴⁷ UR §19.

⁴⁸ UR §24

⁴⁹ UR §3, emphasis added.

⁵⁰ This parallels the language Ratzinger has used to speak of Lutheran eucharistic celebrations and UR uses of non-Catholics in general. Even if we do rule them “invalid” we should, to quote Cardinal Ratzinger, “in no way deny the saving presence of the Lord in the Evangelical Lord’s Supper.” Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, letter to Dr. Johannes Hanselmann, March 9, 1993. In saying this, Ratzinger is holding to the conciliar teaching – for these actions “give access to that communion in which is salvation.” (UR §3) And pointing towards the kind of differentiated use of language that we need when naming our “separated brothers and sisters.”

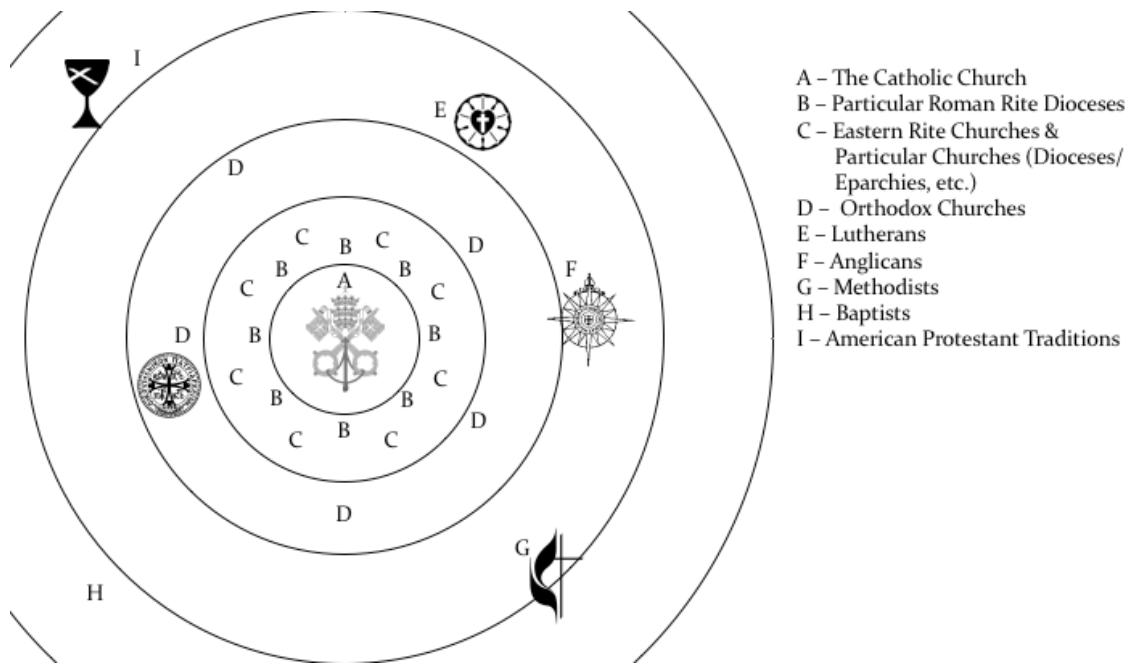


Fig.4: An Approximation of the Structure of the Category CHURCH Among Western Catholics⁵¹

The placement of particular Christian groups within this chart could be — and should be — a matter of debate, and it is important to note that it is specifically from a Western Catholic point of view, and represents my own closer familiarity with certain kinds of Christians than others. But if CHURCH is a category like species, then there is both an ordered set of relationships that can be better understood through further familiarity, and our ability to perceive, order, and understand those relationships is inherently an inescapably embodied. We can know more about the messy relationships between zebras and our categorization can more and less adequately name those relationships. But the categorization that we provide will always be a cultural product that makes particular assumptions. In dialogue with Lutherans, for example, Catholics will find that their map of CHURCH is quite different, perhaps in ways that will eventually further re-shape the Catholic map just as happened in the mid-twentieth century.

4 Conclusion

So, if this is all true, and clearly demonstrable from the teaching of the council, why does it matter how we use the word *church*, or how we conceive of it functioning as a category? Words matter, and the places that we choose to fight about their use also matter. When Roman Catholics make a major point of excluding communities issuing from the Reformation from being called “churches,” they may intend to merely offer a careful application of the Roman Catholic judgment that these communities are “in some way deficient;” Roman Catholics cannot lose this judgment without distorting their theology. Certainly, it is often mutual. However, we cannot properly understand the ecclesiology of the council if this choice forces us to discount the salvific action of these communities that participate in the Body of Christ *as communities*. They are not merely pious associations of individually validly baptized schismatic Christians. Nevertheless, we do not apply the language of “church” to them, including to the Orthodox, in exactly the same theological matter

⁵¹ It would be interesting to do the research to determine if this is how the category is deployed by Western Catholics, and how the structure shifts according to location, expertise, and other variables. The figure above, however, approximates the use of the council, even when it is not their stated intention — western diocese and practices are more central to the council’s engagement, even though theologically Eastern Catholic churches are no less churches than western ones. This figure is an approximation based on one author’s observation of Western Catholic usage and close reading of the council.

than we do to describe those churches in communion with Rome.⁵²

But, the regular denial of the term “church” to western Christian communities that are not in communion with the See of Rome, often works against the theological teaching of the Second Vatican Council itself. Instead of upholding the nuanced theological position of the Second Vatican Council that also recognizes the work of God in these communities, this denial becomes a wedge to be driven between Catholics and other Christians and a weapon in the zero-sum game of religious domination.

By understanding the church as a species-prototype category, constructed in the same way that other categories are, we can properly locate Christian assemblies within the differentiated reality that the council already bent its inherited language to describe. We can name groups falling within those concentric circles “church” without worrying that this must mean that the center is lost or difference ignored. When we name some of them “ecclesial communities” this itself relates those communities to the category CHURCH, and we can openly acknowledge this. Allowing for this kind of differentiation can allow for ecumenical dialogue which is both honest about the deficiencies that we see in each other without thereby losing sight of the grace of God in communities that are separated from ourselves. And the work of reconciliation, which is first and foremost God’s work, might continue.

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⁵² Notice that the CDF’s own engagement with *subsistit in* makes this clear: See Resp., CDF “Responses” (June 29, 2007). (Second Question)

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