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EDITORIAL

October 2024 will see the second session of the Catholic Church's Synod on Synodality take place in Rome. Quite fittingly, then, a number of the articles of this issue of ONE IN CHRIST reflect on synodality and its connection to ecumenism.

Clifford presents the relationship of synodality and ecumenism in the teaching of Pope Francis and demonstrates how the ecumenical movement has influenced the current practice of synodality in the Catholic Church. D'Aloisio, writing from an Orthodox point of view, emphasises how synodality is one concrete way of incarnating the fundamental equality, rooted in baptism, of all Christians, while Destivelle, in his presentation of the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Churches, mentions the importance of the participation of representatives from different churches in the synodal processes of the Catholic Church. Mirilli's personal testimony illustrates how ecumenism and synodality can be effectively intertwined in everyday pastoral ministry.

Even in the reports section, synodality emerges as a theme. This topic was explicitly discussed at the Anglican Primates' meeting in Rome reported on by McDowell. Moreover, we are reminded of how concrete journeys together can lead to important ecumenical breakthroughs, both by Coll and Wilkinson in their account of January's IARCCUM Summit, and by Pecklers, who in his report on the latest meeting of the Malines Conversations Group recalls the walks of Halifax and Portal (also highlighted in Falconer's review article of the book *Malines: Continuing the Conversations*).

As Christians all over the world journey towards the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, may we engage each other in conversation on the road and, as Clifford puts it, 'find a pace at which to move forward together into a future of the Spirit's making.'

POPE FRANCIS, SYNODALITY, AND CHRISTIAN UNITY: LEANING INTO THE DISTANT GOAL OF VATICAN II

Catherine E. Clifford*

The Instrumentum Laboris of the first session of the General Assembly XVI of the International Synod in October 2023, a step in the multiyear synodal process (2021–2024), considers the rediscovery of synodality as ‘a constitutive dimension of the Church’ a ‘fruit of ecumenical dialogue’ and refers to the ecumenical movement as a ‘laboratory of synodality.’ This paper presents Pope Francis’s initiative for a renewed practice of synodality in the Catholic Church against the horizon of inter-church dialogue, and draws attention to his understanding of the synodal nature of the path toward full Christian unity.¹

To fully appreciate the significance of the ecclesial reforms being encouraged and introduced by Pope Francis, it is essential to place them within the broader context of the search for Christian unity and the evolution of world Christianity in the last century. This becomes apparent when we examine the present synodal process of the global Catholic Church (2021–2024), the aim of which is to move us toward being a more synodal church. I contend that Catholics would not be embarking on a global synodal process, or rediscovering the experience of synodality as a ‘constitutive element of the church’ today were it not for the experience of sixty years of sustained dialogue with other

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¹ Originally a paper presented at the ‘Pope Francis and the Future of the Church: Prospects and Challenges for Renewal’ conference, St. Mark’s College, Vancouver, B.C., March 6, 2023, this article first appeared in *Critical Theology* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2023): 2–9.

Christian communions.² Further, the extent to which Catholics embrace this process of ‘pastoral conversion’ that has its roots in the Second Vatican Council, will have profound consequences for the future visible unity of the church. Francis and many others consider synodality as an apt description of the necessary path to full ecclesial unity.

Few authors have paid attention to this dimension of Pope Francis’s initiative for ecclesial reform. In his ‘programmatic’ apostolic exhortation on The Joy of the Gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), where in 2013 he laid out his vision for the new evangelization, Francis made a single reference to ‘synodality,’ suggesting that this practice or characteristic of ecclesial relations is something that, in a spirit of receptive ecumenism, Catholics might learn and receive from other Christian communions:

How many important things unite us! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another. It is not just about being informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us (EG 246).³

He gives the example of dialogue with the Orthodox from which Catholics might learn ‘about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality’ (EG 246). In this paper I will explore some of the more important developments in the trajectory of the wider ecumenical movement to better contextualize Pope Francis’s initiative for a synodal reform of Catholicism and his unique perception of synodality as a requirement for the future of Christian unity. Against

² Francis characterizes synodality in this way in his 2015 speech on the fiftieth anniversary of the International Synod of Bishops, instituted by Pope Paul VI in October of 1965. ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis. Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops’ (17 October 2015), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html. The term ‘elements of the church,’ introduced into official Catholic teaching at the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium* 8; *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3), has an important ecclesiological significance.

³ Francis, ‘Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium*’ (24 November 2013), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost-exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#Star_of_the_new_evangelization. Hereafter abbreviated as EG.

this background, I will then consider some of his reflections on how this might determine the future shape of Catholicism as well as the future of full ecclesial communion as the churches come together in the full unity of diverse, yet fully reconciled, communions.

The Renewal of Conciliarity and Synodality: The Broader Ecumenical Context

Synodality, or conciliarity, has been the focus of ecumenical reflection and study for over half a century. The establishment of new ecumenical bodies, councils of churches, to foster the unity of the divided churches and provide spaces for joint reflection and action—including the World Council of Churches (WCC, founded in 1948), and other national, regional, and local bodies—raised a host of new ecclesiological questions.⁴ These new ‘councils of churches’ carefully distinguished themselves from the authoritative and deliberative bodies that took important decisions on matters of church doctrine and practice in the past—ecumenical and regional councils and synods. They have remained by and large consultative bodies and places of meeting for the separated churches. They are ‘conseils,’ not ‘conciles,’ in French; ‘Räte,’ not ‘Konzilien,’ in German—nuances that are lost in English translation. Still, a new ecclesial reality was being born, one that was not adequately covered by traditional categories, and that nonetheless evoked the memory of the ‘conciliarity’ that characterized the communion of the diverse churches of early Christianity.⁵

Catholic authorities were initially very cool to the growing interest in Christian unity among Protestant communities. Yet, in 1949, following the first Assembly of the WCC, things began to thaw. The Holy Office

⁴ Thomas F. Best, ‘Councils of Churches: Local, National, Regional,’ in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd edition, N. Lossky, et al., eds (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 255–263.

⁵ The Basis of the WCC might be seen as a response to critiques emerging in some sectors of Catholicism, and an effort to clarify its ecclesiological status: ‘The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches’ [Toronto Declaration, 1950], *Ecumenical Review* 3 (October 1950): 47–53; also in *Minutes and Reports of the Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Toronto, 1950*, Appendix VII. In a pointed effort to clarify the goals of the WCC and to respond to critics, the founding General Secretary of the WCC, W.A. Visser t’Hooft penned ‘The Super-Church and the Ecumenical Movement,’ *Ecumenical Review* 10, no. 4 (1958): 365–385.

under Pope Pius XII recognized the working of the Holy Spirit in the modern ecumenical movement and authorized Catholics to participate in ecumenical gatherings.⁶ It was against the horizon of these developments and during the liturgical celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, on January 25, 1959, that Pope John XXIII announced his intention to convoke a diocesan synod for the local church of Rome and a 'general council' for the universal church.⁷ The dual aim of the council was the 'edification' and renewal 'of the Christian people,' and a 'renewed invitation to the faithful of the separated churches to share with us in this banquet of grace and fraternity.'⁸ The updating and reform of the Catholic Church was to create the conditions for reconciliation and growth in unity with the separated churches. Other Christian churches had been invited to the general councils of the Western Church following the great schism of 1054, including the councils of Trent and Vatican I, though on condition of accepting papal claims to authority. In a remarkable move, Pope John now invited them to send delegates with no pre-conditions, essentially hitting the 'reset' button on interchurch relations.

The upshot of this was that more than a hundred officially delegated observers from virtually every Christian communion would take part in each of the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council. While the ecumenical observers did not have a right to speak or vote *in aula*, they

⁶ Holy Office, 'Instruction *De Motione oecumenica*,' (20 December 1949), *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 42 (1950): 142–147.

⁷ Alberto Melloni, 'Concili, ecumenicità e storia: Note di discussioni,' *Cristianesimo nella storia* 28 (2007): 509–542. Melloni draws here from the Manuscript of Pope John XXIII's oral remarks in Italian—which would be revised to say 'ecumenical council' before they appeared in published form, six weeks later, in the *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 51 (1959): 65–69. Cf. *Tablet* 213 (1959): 308; *ICI* 93 (April 1, 1959): 27–28. Pope John was acutely aware that the separation of the churches following the great schism of 1054 prevented them from gathering in a truly 'ecumenical' council; the councils of the second millennium are more properly considered 'general councils of the Western Church.'

⁸ Joseph A. Komonchak notes the difference between Pope John's original text and the published version which has 'separated *communities*' in the place of 'separated *churches*' and to 'follow us in this search for unity and grace' in the place of 'share with us in this banquet of grace and fraternity.' See 'Initial Reactions to Pope John XXIII's Announcement of an Ecumenical Council' (2011), at: <https://isidore.co/misc/Res%20pro%20Deo/Councils/Vatican%20II%20documents/Komonchak/initial-reactions-to-announcement.pdf>.

were not to remain passive spectators. Through weekly meetings with the staff and advisors of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and other informal encounters, they conveyed their views and concerns on the matters under debate to the bishops and theologians.⁹ Alberto Melloni sees in these moves by John XXIII an effort to consciously redefine the ‘ecumenicity’ of the council. It was perhaps the most ecumenical of councils since the schism of 1054, or the fifteenth-century Council of Florence that had sought to heal the rift between East and West.

The appearance of new ecumenical councils of churches and the event of the Second Vatican Council gave rise to new studies on the importance of conciliarity, beginning in the 1960s.¹⁰ The 1968 Assembly of the WCC at Uppsala urged members to ‘work for the time when a genuinely universal council may once more speak for all Christians and lead the way into the future.’ Beginning in 1971, the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, established to explore church-dividing theological issues, and which now included Catholic participation, undertook a study on the meaning of conciliarity, defining it as ‘the coming together of Christians—locally, regionally, or globally—for common prayer, counsel and decision, in the belief that the Holy Spirit can use such meetings for his own purpose by reconciling, renewing and reforming the church by guiding it towards the fullness of truth and love.’ These and other reflections led to a vision of unity as a ‘conciliar fellowship’ understood essentially as a communion of local churches where each one possesses ‘the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith and therefore, recognizes the others as belonging to the same church of Christ and guided by the

⁹ Mauro Velati, *Separati ma fratelli. Gli osservatori non cattolici al Vaticano II (1962–1965)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014); Peter de Mey, ‘Non-Catholic Observers at Vatican II,’ in *The Oxford Handbook on Vatican II*, Catherine E. Clifford and Massimo Faggioli, eds (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2023), 475–492; Thomas Stransky, ‘The Observers at Vatican Two: An Experience of Dialogue,’ *Bulletin Centro Pro Unione* 63 (Spring 2002): 8–14; Idem, ‘Paul VI and the Delegated Observers to Vatican II,’ in *Paolo VI e l’Ecumenismo. Colloquio Internazionale di Studio. Brescia, 25–27 settembre 1998* (Brescia/Roma: Istituto Paolo VI, 2001), 118–158.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Lanne, ‘Conciliarity,’ in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd edition, 235–236. Discussion in this paragraph draws from Lanne’s overview. See also: Hervé Legrand, ‘Synodes et conseils de l’après-concile. Quelques enjeux ecclésiologiques,’ *Nouvelle revue théologique* 86 (1976): 193–216.

same Spirit' (WCC Nairobi, 1975).¹¹ By the 1990s, when the Faith and Order Commission turned its attention to a sustained study of ecclesiology, significant new works began to emerge on the notion of synodality.¹²

As far back as 1982, as we see in the Faith and Order agreed statement on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), there was a growing recognition of the need for a substantial reform of the structures and practices of ministry in every church, especially as they relate to the exercise of authority and decision-making. The BEM text on Ministry distilled an important principle or pattern for the exercise of authority from the scriptures and the practice of the early church:

The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial, and communal way. It should be personal because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and call the community to the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should be collegial, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit.¹³

This principle for ecclesial reform would lead to a greater awareness of the need for a renewal in the practice of synodality in church governance. It shows that the exercise of ministry cannot be divorced from the synergy of the whole church, and points to how all the

¹¹ Aram Keshishian, *Conciliar Fellowship: A Common Goal* (Geneva: WCC, 1992).

¹² See, for example: *La synodalité. La participation au gouvernement de l'église. Actes du VIIème congrès international de droit canonique. L'année canonique*. Paris, UNESCO, 21–28 septembre 1990; Alberto Melloni and Sylvia Scatena, eds, *Synod and Synodality: Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contact*. International Colloquium, Bruges, 2003. Christianity and History, Vol. 1 (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2005).

¹³ Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), Ministry, no. 26, at: https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/FO1982_111_en.pdf. To my knowledge, the earliest identification of this principle can be traced to the Groupe des Dombes, 'The Episcopal Ministry (1976),' in *For the Communion of the Churches*, Catherine E. Clifford, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 37–58.

baptized faithful must work together to discern the will of God, to understand the Gospel message more fully and proclaim it with greater effect. In the very next paragraph, BEM notes, 'The collegial and communal dimensions will find expression in regular representative synodal gatherings.' The commentary that accompanied the BEM document observes that while these three dimensions—the personal, collegial, and communal—'need to be kept together,' in point of fact, 'in various churches one or another has been overemphasized at the expense of the others.'¹⁴

The Renewal of Catholicism in light of Vatican II

It is fair to say that in Catholic theology and practice there has been an excessive focus on the personal dimension of ministry symbolized in the monarchical form of the papal and episcopal offices or in notions of an omnicompetent clergy, at the expense of the collegial and the communal. At the Second Vatican Council, Catholic theology began to recover an understanding of the collegial character of ordained ministry. This is expressed in its renewed understanding of the office of bishops who belong to a collegial body, and who share with the Bishop of Rome in solicitude for the universal church (*Lumen Gentium* (LG) 27). It was further signified in the establishment of the International Synod (*Christus Dominus* (CD) 5)¹⁵ and national conferences of bishops (CD 37–39). At the local level as well, presbyters are understood as 'cooperators' of the bishop in service of the local church (LG 28), a reality signified by their belonging to a council of presbyters or college of consultors (*Presbyterium Ordinis* 7; *Codex Iuris Canonici* (CIC) 495–502). These bodies all flow from the synodal character of church governance.

Vatican II's recovery of an understanding of the equal dignity of all the baptized faithful and its recognition of the co-responsibility of the laity for the life and mission of the church has placed us on the path to restoring a better balance where the communal dimension of authority

¹⁴ Faith and Order, *BEM*, Ministry, no. 27.

¹⁵ Pope Paul VI officially established the international synod of bishops on the eve of the final session of the council: 'Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio*, *Apostolica Sollicitudo* Establishing the Synod of Bishops for the Universal Church' (15 September 1965), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19650915_apostolica-sollicitudo.html.

and decision-making is taken seriously. While this principle might be taken for granted today, we ought not to underestimate what a significant change it represents. For almost a millennium the Latin Church of the West labored under an understanding of the church as an ‘unequal society’ inhabited by two classes or categories of persons—the omniscient pastors and the docile and obedient flock of the laity.¹⁶ Given the weight of this history, it should not surprise us to discover considerable resistance to the implementation of structures intended to foster a more meaningful participation of the laity. Vatican II had encouraged the revival of provincial and plenary councils and diocesan synods, which include provisions for lay participation (CD 36).¹⁷ In addition, it encouraged the establishment of diocesan and parish pastoral councils to foster lay participation in the discernment of pastoral and missional needs and priorities within the local church (CD 27; *Ad Gentes* 30). These various means of fostering lay participation in the discernment of the pastoral and missional priorities are to reflect the synodal nature of the church at every level.

Following the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, diocesan synods were to be convened annually, though they were often reduced to *pro forma* meetings of the local clergy. With the publication of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the frequency of diocesan synods was reduced

¹⁶ Pius X describes them as: ‘The pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in different degrees of the hierarchy, and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude,’ he said, ‘is to allow themselves to be led, and like a docile flock, to follow the pastors.’ Encyclical on the French Law of Separation (*Vehementer Nos*) (11 February 1906), no. 8, at: https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html.

¹⁷ Francis Sullivan, ‘Why does the Earnest Desire of Vatican II that Provincial Councils Flourish with Renewed Strength, Remain Unsatisfied?’ *Lonergan Workshop* 27 (2017): 271–281; idem. ‘Provincial Councils and the Choosing of Priests for Appointment of Bishops,’ *Theological Studies* 74, no. 4 (2013): 872–883. Sullivan argues that provincial councils might provide a means for lay persons to contribute to the nomination of suitable candidates for the episcopal office, a function held by provincial councils until recent revisions of canon law, and a role played by the laity in early church practice. At present, the Apostolic nuncio may consult members of the laity ‘who are outstanding for their wisdom’ concerning the suitability of candidates for episcopal ministry (CIC 377.3).

to every ten years, though this law was not often followed. For all intents and purposes, they had fallen into disuse.¹⁸ The revised Code of Canon Law, published in 1983, and intended to reflect Vatican II's teaching on the church as people of God, retained provisions for diocesan synods and pastoral councils but left their implementation to the discretion of local bishops. While there have been some successful initiatives in this regard, recent studies show that in the sixty years since Vatican II, two thirds of Catholic dioceses have yet to hold a synod.¹⁹ In addition, there remain many dioceses and entire episcopal conferences today where no diocesan or parish pastoral councils exist.

Pope John Paul II was cognizant of both the ecumenical import of these reforms, and of the slow and halting pace of receiving the vision of Vatican II. In his 1995 encyclical letter on Catholic Commitment to Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*, he famously opened a new chapter in the ecumenical dialogue concerning the exercise of papal primacy within the communion of churches, a topic that had been the subject of several important studies. There he asked that church leaders and theologians help him in 'heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation.'²⁰ A more collegial and synodal form for the exercise of primacy is indispensable to the future recognition of this ministry and to the restoration of full communion between the separated churches. Similarly, on the eve of the new millennium, Pope John Paul II could not help but observe that the many structures for the participation of the people of God at the local level

¹⁸ Pope John XXIII was surely aware of this. At the same time that he announced his intention to convene the Second Vatican Council, he issued a pastoral letter to convene a synod of the local diocese of Rome. John XXIII, 'La Lettera di Sua Santità al Popolo Romano,' *L'Osservatore Romano* (21 February, 1959), 1.

¹⁹ Arnaud Joint-Lambert has compiled a comprehensive list of diocesan synods and para-synodal assemblies at: <https://www.pastoralis.org/document-n-3-les-synodes-diocesains-parasynodes-et-conciles-particuliers-dans-leglise-catholique-depuis-le-concile-vatican-ii-liste-bibliographie-ressources-ed-join-lambert>.

²⁰ John Paul II, 'Encyclical Letter on Commitment to Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*' (1995), no. 95. Citing, 'Homily in the Vatican Basilica in the Presence of Dimitrios I, Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch' (6 December 1987), 3; *AAS* 80 (1988), 714; at: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html#%224A.

envisioned by the council's teaching and the revised Code of Canon Law had yet to be implemented in a consequential way.²¹

Emerging Ecumenical Consensus on Synodality

The question of synodality has been explored in some depth in recent bilateral dialogues. One of the first to do so was the 1999 agreed statement of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II), *The Gift of Authority*, which defines synodality as the ‘common way,’ ‘the manner in which believers and churches are held together in communion,’ in their following of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6; Mk 10:52).²² It points to the indispensable

²¹ John Paul II, ‘Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio adveniente*, On Preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000’ (10 November 1994), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19941110_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html.

²² Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II), *The Gift of Authority [Authority in the Church III]* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre/London: Catholic Truth Society, 1999), 26, no. 34. Also at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/comunione-anglicana/dialogo/arcic-ii/fr.html>. This basic understanding of synodality is echoed in the more recent statement of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, ‘Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service of the Unity of the Church (Chieti, 2016),’ at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese1.html>. ‘Since the bishop is the head of his local church, he represents his church to other local churches and in the communion of all the churches. Likewise, he makes that communion present to his own church. This is the fundamental principle of synodality (no. 10).’ More recently: ‘Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority (Ravenna, 2007),’ where synodality is taken as synonymous with conciliarity (no. 5), at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese.html>; and ‘Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today’ (Alexandria, 2023), at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/document-d-alexandrie---synodalite-et-primaute-au-deuxieme-mille.html>.

role of the *sensus fidelium*, or sense of the faithful, that Spirit-guided capacity for discerning the Gospel that belongs to all the baptized. In its discussion of synodality, which is practiced in the exercise of *episcopé*, ARCIC II is clear that ‘consulting the faithful’ is integral to this ministry: ‘When bishops take counsel together, they seek to both discern and to articulate the *sensus fidelium* as it is present in their local church and in the wider communion of churches.’²³

Considering this theoretical agreement on the synodal nature of church governance, ARCIC II identified important questions to be faced by the Catholic Communion concerning the lived experience of synodality (as it does for the Anglican Communion). It asks whether there is ‘at all levels, effective participation of clergy as well as laity in emerging synodal bodies;’ whether Vatican II’s teaching ‘regarding the collegiality of bishops [has] been implemented sufficiently;’ whether there are adequate provisions for the ‘consultation between the Bishop of Rome and the local churches prior to making important decisions;’ whether ‘the procedures of the Roman Curia adequately respect the exercise of *episcopé* at other levels;’ and what answer, if any, might be given to the question of the universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome in response to the ‘patient and fraternal dialogue’ initiated by Pope John Paul II.²⁴

In 2013, the year of Pope Francis’s election as Bishop of Rome, the Faith and Order Commission published a substantial consensus document, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the fruit of twenty years of study and dialogue. It describes the quality of synodality or conciliarity as signifying that ‘each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in the communion of the church.’ It maintains, further, ‘the whole church is synodal, at all levels of ecclesial life: local, regional, and universal’ as

²³ ARCIC II, *The Gift of Authority*, 28, no. 38.

²⁴ ARCIC II, *The Gift of Authority*, 40–41, no. 57. More recently, ARCIC III, applying the method of receptive ecumenism, has explored the actual functioning of Anglican and Catholic instruments of communion, acknowledging that there is lively debate today within each communion as to how these might better serve the mission of the church. *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to be Church - Local, Regional, Universal* (2018), at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/comunione-anglicana/dialogo/arcic-iii/arcic-iii---documents/2018-walking-together-on-the-way.html>.

church structures are intended ‘to express this quality and actualize the community’s life as a communion.’²⁵ All this and more was said and done before the election of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as Bishop of Rome. This all-too-brief survey illustrates Catholicism’s debt to the wider ecumenical movement for reawakening an awareness of this essential dimension of ecclesial life and helps us to understand what is at stake ecumenically in the synodal reform of Catholic Church.

Pope Francis on the Renewal of Synodality in Catholic Ecclesial Practice

Against this broader ecumenical context, we now turn to Pope Francis’s effort to revive the practice of synodality. By exhorting the bishops of the Catholic Church to embark upon a synodal process with the whole community of the baptized and to listen to the voices of the marginalized, he is inviting the whole church to relearn some very ancient yet forgotten habits. His aim is not, as he has clearly stated, to create a new church,²⁶ but to help us learn new ways of being church, ways that better reflect the nature of who we are as a community of disciples on a shared journey of faith.

In ‘The Joy of the Gospel’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*), published in 2013, Francis called the whole church to begin a process of self-examination and reform, to undergo a ‘pastoral and missionary conversion’ (EG 25) by re-examining structures and practices at every level and asking whether they continue to serve the mission of the church with effect. That mission, put simply, is to create spaces where those who seek the face of God might encounter God’s loving mercy, where they might encounter Christ. This renewal begins by deepening our own personal encounter with Christ through the Word. It bears fruit in the creation of a ‘culture of dialogue and encounter’ (EG 220) both within the church, and in the way we go out to meet and serve others, especially

²⁵ Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 30, no. 53.

²⁶ Francis, ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod, 9 October, 2021’ at: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html>; ‘There is no need to create *another* church, but to create a *different* church.’ A citation of Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert. (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 2010). [Original Edition: *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l’église* (Paris: Cerf, 1952); revised 1968].

those on the peripheries of society. The practice of synodality would become a key to this reform of ecclesial life and help to achieve two objectives: first, to better express the nature of the church as the baptized people of God; and second, to better equip it for discerning the call to participate in God's mission to the world.

Reflecting on his own ministry as Bishop of Rome, and on the need for the 'conversion of the papacy', Francis notes that 'little progress' has been made regarding Pope John Paul II's acknowledgement of the need to exercise the primacy in a way that better serves the unity of the churches. Seeking to reverse the centralizing dynamic that has characterized the recent history of the papacy, he remarks:

Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of the local bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory (EG 16).

In this regard, he pointed to the need for a more robust role of the episcopal conferences and to overcome an 'excessive centralization' in church governance, which stifles the responsiveness of the local churches in their missionary outreach (EG 32).

Francis took note of the failure to create spaces for the meaningful participation of the laity in the practice of discernment of the church's missional needs and priorities.

Lay people are, put simply, the majority of the people of God. The minority—ordained ministers—are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the church. (...) At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their local churches room has not been given for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism that keeps them away from decision-making (EG 102).

He pointed to the importance of Vatican II's teaching on the *sensus fidelium* (LG 12), thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of baptized believers as they encounter Christ and discern 'what is truly of God.' 'The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them expression' (EG 119). He would later urge, in a letter to Cardinal Marc

Ouellet, 'Let us trust in our people, in their memory and in their "sense of smell;" let us trust that the Holy Spirit acts in and with our people and that this Spirit is not merely the "property" of the ecclesial hierarchy.'²⁷ In short, they have a 'nose' for the truth of the Gospel.

From the beginning of his pontificate Francis has sought to make the international synod of bishops a more vital instrument of encounter and dialogue, of teaching and learning. Since its establishment in 1965, it has remained a consultative body and largely an instrument of the papacy. Pope Francis is working to make it a forum for listening to the voices of the local churches. In his opening speech to the 2014 synod on the family and marriage, he reminded the bishops that synodality brought 'a great responsibility,' namely, to give voice to 'the realities and problems of the churches.' The basic condition for that to happen was that they speak honestly, candidly, frankly, with *parrhesia*.²⁸

Pope Francis's most important reflection on the meaning of a synodal church is found in a speech that he gave on the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the international synod by Pope Paul VI, given on October 17, 2015.²⁹ Here he describes a synodal church as

a church which listens, which realizes that the listening 'is more than simply hearing.' It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening together, all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he is saying to the churches (Rev 2:7).

The international synod, he said, is to be the culmination of a listening process that begins in the local churches.

The synod of bishops is the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of church life. The synod process begins by

²⁷ Francis, 'Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to Cardinal Ouellet, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America' (19 March 2016), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html.

²⁸ Francis, 'Greeting of Pope Francis to the Synod Fathers during the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops' (October 6, 2014), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141006_padri-sinodali.html.

²⁹ Francis, 'Address of His Holiness Pope Francis. Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops' (17 October 2015), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

listening to the people of God, which also shares in Christ's prophetic office, according to a principle dear to the church of the first millennium: *Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractaro debet* [Whatever concerns all should be considered by all]. The synod process then continues by listening to the pastors.

Here he characterizes the practice of synodality as 'a constitutive element of the church.'

In a 2018 Constitution on the Bishops' Synod, *Episcopalis Communio*, this process of extensive consultation became a mandatory procedure. This legislative document acknowledges that the synod 'is essentially structured as an episcopal body,' a gathering of bishops. Nonetheless, it insists, 'this does not mean that the synod exists separately from the rest of the faithful. On the contrary,' it exists 'to give voice to the entire people of God.'³⁰

The recent synthesis document prepared as part of the global synodal process, entitled, 'Enlarge the Space of Your Tent,'³¹ seems to confirm Pope Francis's perception of the essential role of the baptized faithful in a synodal church. Participants describe a renewal of hope born from the simple experience of being invited to share their wisdom, to be heard, listened to. Some describe it as an experience of long awaited 'liberation,' or of the 'return from exile of the people of God.'

Synodality and the Path to Christian Unity

In the first extensive interview granted in September of 2013, Francis linked synodality to ecumenism, with no little awareness of the significance of the internal reform of the Catholic Church for the future of Christian unity. His remarks anticipate the text of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

We must walk together: the people, the bishops, and the pope. Synodality should be lived at various levels. Maybe it is time to change the methods of the Synod of Bishops because it seems to me that the current method is not dynamic. This will also have ecumenical value, especially with our Orthodox brethren. From them we can learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and the tradition of

³⁰ Francis, 'Apostolic Constitution On the Synod of Bishops, *Episcopalis Communio*' (15 September 2018), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html.

³¹ 'Enlarge the Space of Your Tent (Is 54:2): Working Document of the Continental Stage' (2023), at: <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/comm/on/phases/continental-stage/dcs/20221025-ENG-DTC-FINAL-OK.pdf>.

synodality. The joint effort of reflection, looking at how the church was governed in the early centuries, before the breakup between East and West, will bear fruit in due time. In ecumenical relations it is important not only to know each other better, but also to recognize what the Spirit has sown in the other as a gift for us.³²

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, he alludes to ecumenism as a shared journey of faith, playing on the word ‘synod’ (which means literally, together on the way): ‘We must walk united with our differences: there is no other way to become one. This is the way of Jesus.’ In *The Joy of the Gospel*, he identifies ecumenical partners as fellow travellers on the path of salvation, saying:

We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. That means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicions or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God’s face (EG 244).

In a homily during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2015, he warned against the danger of reducing ecumenical relations to ‘subtle theoretical discussions.’³³ True dialogue and encounter, he argued, must lead us to interior conversion, and to ‘grasp[ing] more fully what unites us.’ He is not naive about the need for careful theological work to overcome doctrinal divisions. But he insists that it must be accompanied by an ecumenism of the heart and an ecumenism of life. He drew a parallel between the encounter of the Samaritan woman at the well and the ecumenical gift exchange.

[Jesus’] example encourages us to seek a serene encounter with others. To understand one another and to grow in charity and truth, we need to pause, to accept and listen to one another. In this way we already begin to experience unity. Unity grows along the way; it never stands still. Unity happens when we walk together.

The suggestion here is that we must learn to lean in, or to live into unity, deepening an understanding of the character of our differences—not

³² Antonio Spadaro, ‘A Big Heart Open to God,’ *America* (30 September 2013): 1–15, at 10. Francis refers explicitly to the importance of the Ravenna document of the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue (see note 22, above) and his desire to reform the exercise of the Roman primacy.

³³ Francis, ‘Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, Celebration of Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle’ (25 January 2015), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150125-vespri-conversione-san-paolo.html.

all of which are necessarily church-dividing, when seen in the light of all that we hold in common.

In 2018, Pope Francis travelled to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, as it marked the seventieth anniversary of its founding. The theme of that anniversary celebration was 'Walking, Praying, and Working Together.' 'The journey of ecumenism,' he said, must take 'the path of forgiveness,' humbly acknowledging both historic and more recent failures that have contributed to 'mutual distrust and estrangement.'³⁴ It also involves committing ourselves to be sent out together on mission: 'I am convinced that an increasing missionary impulse will lead us to greater unity. Just as in the early days, preaching marked the springtime of the church, so evangelization will mark the flowering of a new ecumenical spring.' Francis describes our 'walking together' as having 'a twofold movement: the first, moving inward toward Christ, who is the center; and the second, outward movement 'towards the many existential peripheries of today's world.' Speaking elsewhere of the priority of common witness, he remarked:

I don't believe in a definitive ecumenism, much less do I believe in the ecumenism that as its first step gets us to agree on the theological level. I think that we must progress in unity, participating together in prayer and in the works of charity.³⁵

These remarks provide an interpretive lens for Pope Francis's prophetic ecumenism of encounter and common witness. As Cardinal-Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he developed bonds of friendship with local Pentecostals through a movement known as the 'Renewed Communion of Evangelicals and Catholics in the Spirit.' This, in a period where the Catholic Church in Latin America was witnessing an exodus of 8–10,000 members each day, as they joined charismatic Protestant communities. The Episcopal Conference of Latin America had identified, in the Report of its 1992 assembly in Santo Domingo, the

³⁴ Francis, 'Address of His Holiness, Ecumenical Meeting, WCC Ecumenical Centre' (21 June 2018), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/june/documents/papa-francesco_20180621_pellegrinaggio-ginevra.html.

³⁵ Alessandra Nucci, 'Francis, Ecumenism and Common Witness to Christ,' *Catholic World Report* (5 September 2014). The remarks are drawn from a monograph entitled; *Il Cardinale Bergoglio al Rinnovamento* published by the Italian Renewal in the Spirit.

activities of ‘fundamentalist sects’³⁶ as a major challenge. But at that meeting, which included frank exchanges with Evangelical leaders, the bishops of Latin America were forced to acknowledge that many of those leaving the Catholic Church were doing so not only because of unwelcome proselytism, but due to the lack of vitality in their own communities. When his friend, the Italian Evangelical pastor Giovanni Traettino organized a meeting with Pentecostal representatives in the city of Caserta in July 2014, Francis paid them a ‘private’ visit. In his unscripted remarks, he made an historic apology, in his capacity as ‘Pastor of Catholics.’ ‘I ask your forgiveness,’ he said, ‘for the times when the Christian community has been tempted to say, “I am a church, you are a sect”,’ and committed himself to an approach that would emphasize instead all that is held in common.³⁷

Pope Francis has sought to model the practice of common witness on many occasions. He travelled to Jerusalem in 2014 to meet with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I on the fiftieth anniversary of Paul VI’s historic meeting with his predecessor Athenagoras to begin the thaw in Orthodox–Catholic relations. In their joint declaration, they committed themselves to work together for the safeguarding of creation.³⁸ Francis did not hesitate to quote from Bartholomew’s encyclical letter on the care of creation in his own teaching, *Laudato Si*,³⁹ and in 2015 he travelled together with Patriarch Bartholomew to the Island of Lesbos to draw the world’s attention to the plight of migrants on the Mediterranean Sea. In 2017 he accepted an invitation to participate, together with the leaders of the Lutheran World

³⁶ CELAM, ‘Documento de Santo Domingo: Nueva Evangelización, Promoción Human, Cultura Cristiana Jesucristo Ayer, Hoy y Siempre,’ especially Section 1.4-5.

³⁷ Francis, ‘Private Visit of the Holy Father to Caserta for a Meeting with the Evangelical Pastor Giovanni Traettino,’ ‘Address of Pope Francis’ (28 July 2014), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco_20140728_caserta-pastore-traettino.html.

³⁸ ‘Common Declaration of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I’ (25 May 2014), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/may/documents/papa-francesco_20140525_terra-santa-dichiarazione-congiunta.html.

³⁹ Francis, ‘Encyclical Letter on Care for our Common Home, *Laudato Si*’ (24 May 2015), nos 8–9, at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Federation, Bishop Munib Younan and Rev. Dr Martin Junge, for the ceremonies of the Joint Commemoration of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. In a Joint statement signed during the liturgy, they committed themselves to a renewed common witness and service.⁴⁰ More recently, he travelled on an ecumenical pilgrimage of peace to South Sudan, together with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields.

In all these prophetic initiatives Pope Francis can be seen to put in practice the ‘Lund principle,’ which asks the churches to do all that they can in conscience do *together*, even if full visible unity has yet to be achieved. In doing so, he is leaning into fuller unity, and challenges us to do the same.

Conclusion

I began by suggesting that the experience of the Second Vatican Council, which had as its distant goal the restoration of unity with other Christian communions and was marked by the presence and influence of official ecumenical observers, redefined the ‘ecumenicity’ of a council of the global church—albeit in a provisional way, and one that reflects the present state of ecclesial separation. Surely, we have grown together in communion since then. The practice continues in our day of inviting ecumenical representatives to attend and at times address the international synod of bishops, conferences of bishops, and other synodal gatherings. In return, Catholics are regularly invited as ecumenical guests and delegates at synods and assemblies of other Christian communions. In the synodal process on synodality, we have made efforts to listen to the voices of ecumenical partners, convinced that they are essential to discerning the *sense of faith*, or the consensus of the whole church, a sign and confirmation of the Spirit’s guidance. Do we continue to see these encounters as a mere form of diplomacy or ‘politesse’? Have we taken the full measure of these encounters? Pope Francis invites us to consider the gifts of the Spirit in the life of other communities as something we are meant to receive, as a source of

⁴⁰ ‘Joint Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on the Conclusion of the Year of the Common Commemoration of the Reformation’ (31 October 2017), at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/10/31/171031a.html>.

wisdom, healing, and conversion as we grow into the community of disciples we are called to be.

The way of synodality is like a marathon, not a sprint. We cannot see the finish line. But we can find a pace at which to move forward together into a future of the Spirit's making. Christians together on the synodal path are rediscovering themselves as people of the Way, pilgrims on a journey, God's people sent forth as one.

GEOFFREY WAINWRIGHT: A THEOLOGICAL LEGACY IN TEN PROPOSITIONS

Richard Clutterbuck*

Geoffrey Wainwright (1939–2020) was a British Methodist minister who, from 1983 to 2012, held the Robert Earl Cushman Chair of Theology at Duke Divinity School. Wainwright was a significant liturgical scholar, an eminent systematic theologian and a leading figure in the ecumenical movement. He co-chaired the Methodist–Roman Catholic conversations and was one of the editors of the highly influential World Council of Churches document, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Given at a symposium jointly sponsored by Pro Unione and the Methodist Ecumenical Office, Rome, in October 2022, this paper aims to identify key elements in Wainwright's theological legacy.¹

In a short presentation I cannot do more than to point to the main characteristics of Wainwright's theological vision and legacy, and to offer one or two samples of his distinctive approach. I think it best to do this through a series of theses that sum up the approach to theology bequeathed to us by Wainwright.

1. Leaving a legacy is a prime task for Christian theology

'Legacy' seems the appropriate word to describe Geoffrey Wainwright's distinctive contribution to Christian theology. He did not, like so many in twentieth and twenty-first century theology, claim great originality. He offered no new doctrines; he constructed no revisionist account of Christian belief; he developed no philosophical foundation for Christianity; he commended no general account of religion. In this he

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¹ The paper has also been published in the *Bulletin Centro Pro Unione* n. 103/Spring 2023.

was very different from his Anglican brother-in-law, Maurice Wiles. Wiles, as Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford and one of the authors of the 1970s volume, *The Myth of God Incarnate*,² challenged the traditional doctrine of the incarnation and argued for a radical re-reading of scripture and tradition. Instead, to quote a phrase he used repeatedly in his writing, Wainwright ‘speaks faith to faith’. He saw the task of theology as a handing on of Christian faith. St Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 11.23 might serve as a summary of Wainwright’s sense of theological vocation: ‘For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you...’ Christian theology is one aspect of the process of sharing across generations, cultures and traditions, the Christian faith. The faith he was called to hand on was the Christian faith in all its historical richness and its ecumenical catholicity, rooted in a worshipping Christian community and expressed in Christian action.

He often remarked that the reason he had such a good relationship with Pope Benedict was that, while Benedict learned his Catholic faith from his Bavarian mother, he was nurtured in the faith by his mother in their Yorkshire Methodist home. As one who was handed on the gift of Christian faith, he ought to hand it on through his vocation as a Christian theologian.

2. Christian theology is necessarily conservative, but need not be defensive and reactionary; it can and should be constructively conservative

Wainwright’s instincts were—as we might expect from what I have just said—essentially conservative. He was not comfortable with many of the developments in contemporary social behaviour, or with the way they were mirrored (as he saw it) in aspects of recent theology. What we might call identity-group theology, whether feminist, black, gay or cultural, was alien to his theological instincts.³ This was partly because he saw in it examples of the rejection of historic Christian belief, partly because he worried about its threat to the catholicity of the Church, separating rather than uniting Christians. But his conservatism was not the defensive pose of the person who resists all change, or who fights

² John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM, 1977).

³ See, for example, the critique of the 1993 feminist ‘Re-imagining’ conference in Geoffrey Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialogue* (Nashville, Tn: Abingdon, 1995), 279f.

for this or that narrow confessional interpretation. It was, I want to suggest, a constructive conservatism, it involved a close reading of and engagement with a wide range of contemporary writing. An illustration of this is that, from the mid-70s until 2001, Wainwright, making use of his formidable linguistic skills, provided regular articles for *The Expository Times* which reported on recently-published continental theology, mostly in French and German, but with some from other languages. So, for example, 1977 found him discussing, among others, Schillebeeckx's *Christ*, Jüngel's *God as the Mystery of the World* and Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith*,⁴ while in 2000 he reported on recent French postmodern discussion of religion.⁵

This wide reading meant that Wainwright was sensitive to the need for careful inculturation of theology, providing it did not result in a drift away from orthodoxy. Above all, he wanted theology to be at the service of the worship and mission of the Church, activities that were inevitably shaped by their context, but were in essence unchanging. Like the *ressourcement* theologians who paved the way for Vatican II, Wainwright saw the resources of the past facilitating the life of the Church in the present. This can be seen clearly in his early project, Eucharist and Eschatology, and in all his subsequent works.

3. Christian theology is necessarily, but generously, dogmatic; it is focussed on the core beliefs of the Christian community

As Stanley Hauerwas once remarked, Wainwright was impatient with those who spent their time working out what they might do if ever they got round to some proper theology.⁶ Instead, he much preferred to get straight to the point rather than dwell on methodology and philosophy. He was, after all, an ecclesial theologian, exercising his ministry (and for him it was a ministry) through an engagement with the key doctrines of the faith. Throughout his career, he frequently wrote pieces

⁴ 'Recent Foreign Theology: Historical and Systematic,' *The Expository Times* 89, no. 2 (1977).

⁵ 'Recent Continental Theology, Historical and Systematic,' *The Expository Times* 112, no. 1 (2000).

⁶ Based on a remark by Stanley Hauerwas in David Cunningham, Ralph Del Colle, and Lucas Lamadrid, eds, *Ecumenical Theology in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: Essays Presented to Geoffrey Wainwright on His Sixtieth Birthday* (New York/Oxford: OUP, 1999), xii.

on eschatology⁷ and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit⁸. The doctrine of the Trinity was also key and Wainwright was a champion of this element of Christian belief, even before it became fashionable. So, in *Methodists in Dialogue* there is a chapter on John Wesley's trinitarianism, while some years later he provided an essay on the Trinity in relation to liturgy and preaching for *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*.⁹

Few things made him more impatient than the old adage, 'doctrine divides, but service unites'. He argued passionately that the only effective Christian service was based on a proper foundation of faith in Jesus Christ and on the work of the triune God. In his editor's preface to *Keeping the Faith*,¹⁰ a collection of essays commemorating the centenary of the publication of *Lux Mundi*, he asserts both that 'historic Christianity stands or falls with a trinitarian faith'¹¹ and that 'the Christian story or vision offers a comprehensive context or perspective in which particular knowledge can be illuminatingly and effectively pursued and applied.'¹² I do not think Wainwright coined the term 'generous orthodoxy' but it certainly expressed his theological stance.

4. Christian theology needs to be systematic for its own coherence, but should not be shaped—or distorted—through conformity to extra-theological criteria

Before settling in Duke, Wainwright spent a short time as professor of systematic theology at Union Seminary, New York, following such illustrious predecessors as Paul Tillich¹³ and John Macquarrie¹⁴. He even wrote letters that began, 'as I sit here at Paul Tillich's old desk...' Like

⁷ For example, the chapter on 'The Last Things,' in Geoffrey Wainwright, ed., *Keeping the Faith: Essays to Mark the Centenary of Lux Mundi* (London: SPCK, 1989), 341–370.

⁸ For example, the chapter on the Holy Spirit in Colin Gunton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 273–296.

⁹ Geoffrey Wainwright, 'The Trinity in Liturgy and Preaching,' in Gilles Emery, Matthew Levering, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), chapter 33, 457–471.

¹⁰ Wainwright, *Keeping the Faith: Essays to Mark the Centenary of Lux Mundi*.

¹¹ *Keeping the Faith*, xxiii.

¹² *Keeping the Faith*, xx.

¹³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology (Combined Volume)* (Welwyn, Herts: Nisbet, 1968).

¹⁴ John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1966).

Tillich and Macquarrie, he has left us a systematic theology.¹⁵ Unlike them, however, his approach to systematics is not to construct a philosophical (for which—in their case—read ‘existentialist’) foundation, on to which an interpretation of Christian belief can then be grafted. Instead, he sees the central task of systematic theology as the integration of different aspects of Christian doctrine, woven together with the Church’s practice of worship and mission. *Doxology* remains a bold achievement by one who was still, at the time of its writing, a young scholar in his thirties. It displays Wainwright’s preference for theological substance over endless debate over methodology and foundations as well as his relentless linking of theology with the believing and worshipping community. It is in *Doxology* that Wainwright offers his key phrase, ‘Worship, doctrine and life’.¹⁶ ‘Life’ becomes strikingly prominent in the later chapters, where there is a strong emphasis on contextual issues such as ethics, justice and inter-faith relations, while the introduction highlights his concern with issues of diachronic and synchronic Christian identity; his advocacy of ‘Christ, the transformer of culture’ as the middle and best of Niebuhr’s options in *Christ and Culture*.¹⁷ Wainwright was alert to, but not unduly troubled by, the challenges of modernity.

It is also worth drawing attention to Wainwright’s early work, based on his doctoral dissertation, *Eucharist and Eschatology*.¹⁸ This book, which develops a theology of the eucharist as a ‘feast of the kingdom’, sets the pattern for his life’s work. It is an exercise in systematic theology conducted as an inter-disciplinary, inter-confessional, inter-generational activity rooted and expressed in ecclesial practice. Inter-disciplinary in that it brings together biblical and liturgical studies, patristics, historical and contemporary theology. Inter-confessional in its curating a conversation between Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions. Inter-generational in its commitment to what Jürgen Moltmann has called ‘the ecumenism of time’. Practical in the way it relates eucharistic theology to the practice of Christian worship and the pastoral life of the Church.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (New York: Oxford, 1980).

¹⁶ *Doxology*, 8.

¹⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

¹⁸ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (London: Epworth Press, 1971).

5. Christian theology needs to be rooted in a living Christian tradition, but need not be confessional

Wainwright was proud of his Methodist heritage, and in the introduction to *Doxology* he situates himself (as we would now say) in that tradition. Much of his theological work was in the service of Methodist ecumenical conversations of various kinds, a good deal of it drawn together in his collection of essays: *Methodists in Dialogue*.¹⁹ But there is nothing sectarian about Wainwright's Methodism. He does not seek to develop a 'Methodist theology', nor does he pretend that the writings of the Wesleys hold the clue to all the dilemmas currently facing humanity. This means that he is far from being a confessional theologian, constructing his theology as a development of his own tradition. His legacy is that he brings Methodism to the ecumenical theological table as a genuine contributor to the mix that is Christian doctrine, worship and life in all its synchronic and diachronic diversity. He wants his ecumenical partners—especially those drawn from the Catholic and Orthodox traditions—to see Methodism as theologically orthodox, part of the Christian mainstream, yet having distinctive emphases and expressions that can enrich the wider Church. He misses no opportunity to express his theology in words from a Charles Wesley hymn. He might have echoed Evelyn Underhill's defence of her allegiance to Anglicanism when challenged by her Roman Catholic friends: 'just because I live in Wimbledon, doesn't mean I not a Londoner!'

At the same time, he opens up his own Methodist tradition to an immense theological enrichment from the two thousand years of Christian reflection and the great spectrum of other Christian traditions. Aware of Methodism's tendency to elevate experience and action at the expense of tradition and doctrine, he would urge it to root itself in the historic creeds and to open itself to other ways of expressing faith. He often, in his teaching, used an ironic ('tongue in cheek', we would say in English) two-minute summary of Church history that concluded with the assertion that Methodism alone was the one true

¹⁹ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialogue* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995). The essays are arranged in terms of Methodist dialogue with different Christian confessions, followed by Methodist participation in multilateral conversations. A final section gives a Methodist perspective on aspects of ecumenical theology.

Church.²⁰ When laughter died down, he would point out that almost everyone has some kind of Church history summary like that, one that makes their own tradition normative. The vocation of the ecumenical theologian, for Wainwright, is of someone rooted in a tradition, but living and working in the space between that tradition and the world of the Church catholic.

6. Christian theology is at its best when it is creatively catholic as well as eirenically ecumenical

It should be clear by now that Wainwright's is a theology that makes connections, that weaves together different confessional emphases.

Wainwright had, as others make clear, a passionate commitment to the ecumenical project. That project is essentially theological. Doing theology ecumenically and doing ecumenism theologically are two sides of the same coin. I have been in correspondence with Dame Mary Tanner who, along with Wainwright, was one of the drafters of the ground-breaking *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.²¹ She pays tribute to his pivotal role in securing an agreed text, and in developing the further ecumenical and theological work that flowed from it. World Council of Churches' Faith and Order, and the international Methodist–Roman Catholic conversations were perhaps the obvious examples of Wainwright's ecumenical approach to theology, but there were plenty of others. One example would be the chapters on the three-fold office of Christ in *For Our Salvation*,²² which look at issues that have often divided Reformed Christians from others, an approach echoed in lectures given in Melbourne on the theme of Wesley and Calvin.²³ What I want to highlight here is that Wainwright's ecumenical theology never aimed at discovering a lowest common denominator—a bare minimum that all parties can agree to, while ignoring the adiaphora dividing them. Instead, the resources of the catholicity of the Church, its scriptures, its diverse voices and practices, its many confessional

²⁰ See, *The Ecumenical Moment: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 189.

²¹ WCC Faith and Order, 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,' in *Faith and Order Papers* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

²² Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (London: SPCK, 1997).

²³ *Geoffrey Wainwright on Wesley and Calvin*, Sources for Theology, Liturgy and Spirituality (Melbourne: Uniting church press, 1987).

manifestations, are brought to bear so that something emerges that is creative in terms of the doctrine, worship and life of all Christians.

7. Christian theology is doxological all the way down

Worship, doctrine and life are inseparable. Others have highlighted Wainwright's prowess as a liturgical scholar. He knew his way round an immense amount of material on different aspects of Christian worship. He was the co-editor of the *Oxford History of Christian Worship*,²⁴ writing its introduction on the nature of Christian worship and its chapter on ecumenical convergence in worship. As a theologian, he reminded us of two things, both perhaps influenced by his early encounter with the Orthodox tradition. The first is that theology is always dependent on the Christian worshipping community; however intellectually rigorous, it is never merely an intellectual exercise. For him, the principle, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, was no empty slogan. Not just ancient liturgical texts, but the whole story of Christian encounter with God in worship provided the language and framework of theological reflection. On a personal level, I can remember being introduced by Wainwright to the eucharistic hymns of Charles Wesley. It was a significant moment both in my spiritual development, and in my understanding of what it means to do Christian theology. This doxological shaping of Christian theology also finds expression in Wainwright's sense of 'sacramental time',²⁵ so that the very structures of time and space, of history and hope, are, for the Christian, prefigured and performed through eucharistic worship.

But if it is true that all good theology has its origins in the language and practice of worship, it is even more true that all good Christian theology has its end in worship. Going back to the introduction of *Eucharist and Eschatology*, Wainwright says:

My own primary concern here will be to show how our understanding of the eucharist may benefit from the rediscovery of eschatology experienced in biblical and systematic theology; secondarily, I shall try to indicate how the eucharist itself may, in turn contribute towards a

²⁴ *Eucharist and Eschatology*, in Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen Westerfield-Tucker, eds, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (New York: OUP, 2006).

²⁵ Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church*, chapter VII, 'Sacramental Time'.

sound eschatology in theology as a whole and in the total understanding of and life of the church.²⁶

On the very next page, though, he refers to his ultimate aim to draw out the ecclesiological consequences of his research, in the Church's liturgical practice, in its mission and in its unity.

8. Christian theology is eschatological; it finds its meaning and end in God's future

Perhaps this is the clue to the constructive nature of Wainwright's conservatism. Faithfulness to the historical doctrines of the faith is important, not because of the need to hold onto the past, but because they point us towards God's promised future. This is already evident in *Eucharist and Eschatology*, where he takes the eschatological work of biblical scholars like Schweitzer and contemporary systematic theologians such as Moltmann to help rediscover the eucharist as a forward-looking event. It returns in the closing pages of *Doxology*,²⁷ with its meditation on the coming kingdom of God, drawing in doctrinal affirmation, liturgical insight and Wesleyan hymnody.

Those looking for a succinct discussion of recent eschatology need look no further than the essay on eschatology in *Keeping the Faith*.²⁸ This is a *tour de force*, beginning with a survey of the discussion of Christian eschatology within and since *Lux Mundi*, going on to discuss key theological dilemmas (such as providence and predestination, body and spirit, salvation and damnation, eschatology and apocalyptic), and ending with dogmatic confession of faith, drawing on biblical and patristic foundations, and shaped by reflection on liturgy.

9. Christian theology serves the Church's mission as messenger of the Kingdom of God

I have to admit that, prior to preparing this presentation, I had not read Wainwright's theological biography of Lesslie Newbigin.²⁹ I knew of his admiration for him, indeed, I have a vivid memory of the two of them sharing in an Ascension Day eucharist in the chapel of Queen's College, Birmingham, while I was a student. But it seemed puzzling that he

²⁶ *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 5.

²⁷ Wainwright, *ibid.*, 456–462.

²⁸ *Keeping the Faith*, 341–370.

²⁹ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

should give so much of his precious research time to working through Newbigin's papers and preparing what was, after *Doxology*, the most substantial volume he published. Newbigin was the veteran Church of Scotland missionary to India, ordained as one of the first bishops of the Church of South India, a pioneering General Secretary for the International Missionary Council, a popular author on mission and ecumenism and, in later life, an active pastor and theological critic in Birmingham. For all his theological intelligence and prolific authorship, Newbigin was not an academic theologian, nor did he have the leisure for the detailed scholarship that was second-nature to Wainwright. However, he shared his attachment to historic Christian faith, his sense of ecumenical vocation and his delight in worship. And he exemplified something that was clearly vital for Wainwright: a theological life. This says something about his understanding of theology. For all his delight in the academic environment and the kudos of international conferences, he knew that in the final analysis theology was something to be lived out rather than taught and written. It was subservient to the mission in which God is engaged and to the kingdom in which Christ is Lord. The point of ecumenical convergence and its attendant theology is missiological. Theology is to be lived and—for the Christian Church—life is to be theological. That this was a lifelong concern is shown by Wainwright's very early work on Christian initiation.³⁰ Published as part of the Lutterworth 'Ecumenical History' series, it begins with a patient analysis of New Testament and historical evidence, giving a balanced opportunity for Eastern, Western and Protestant views. The final chapters, though, are on Christian initiation in relation to Unity and Mission. Theology is always missiologically-directed.

It is no coincidence that the *Festschrift* for Wainwright, published in 1999, was titled *Ecumenical Theology in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*, with its final section headed 'Church, World, Mission'. The book pays tribute to the immense range of his theological interest, with chapters employing many different approaches to the theological task, including detailed historical analysis and intense doctrinal reflection. But the endpoint is never in doubt. Unity and mission are always the destination.

³⁰ *Christian Initiation*, Ecumenical Studies in History (London: Lutterworth, 1969).

10. No one theologian gives a complete picture of Christian faith and its implications

This is my own gloss on reading Wainwright—I am not totally sure he would agree, as he was notoriously devoid of any false modesty! Yes, Wainwright leaves us with a wealth of theological insight, an important model of theology put at the service of the wider Christian Church and its mission. It is a vital legacy, not least because so many of the things that were central to Wainwright have become marginalised and neglected in recent years. The ecumenical vision, centred on worship and doctrine, expressed in visible unity, has become deeply unfashionable in many quarters. Yet, I believe, his approach to theology needs to be further enriched in a number of ways:

a) Orthodoxy may turn out to be even more generous than Wainwright would allow

Theology needs to be more open to voices from different cultural contexts and from minorities within our own.

b) Christian theology needs to be more global and less Eurocentric

While Wainwright was influenced by his years in Cameroon, his intellectual development was solidly European. Recent theology has been much more global in scope and much less willing to accept European norms.

c) Theology needs to be earthed in the reality of existing Churches, rather than in an idealised *ecclesia*

Sometimes Wainwright's ecumenical writing seems focussed on an idealistic Church that is remote from the reality of the divided and disparate communions that make up the world Church.

d) Christian theology needs to reach out beyond the boundaries of the community of faith

While Wainwright was right not to let questions of philosophical foundation or the demands of apologetics distort his theology, there is nonetheless a need to engage with both.

Finally, in the spirit of Wainwright, we can only pray that theology, like its practitioners will—in the words of Charles Wesley's hymn—be:

Changed from glory into glory
Till in heaven we take our place.

Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT—DOCTRINE OR CULTURE?

Joseph Swann^{*}

The article sheds light on some of the underlying cultural reasons for the Protestant–Catholic divide. It sees the Western Schism as a product of historical and philosophical movements of the Middle Ages, especially the opposition between the Thomist and Scotist schools of thought, and outlines ways in which these have continued to characterize Catholic and Protestant interpretations of Christianity.

Protestants and Catholics behave today like good—or at least mutually respectful—neighbors. For decades now in most parts of the world they have viewed each other with interest, discussed attitudes, met and celebrated together in various ways. And they have held prolonged and serious theological discussions. Differences in belief are no longer the obstacle they were for our grandparents, and the only reason still keeping the western churches from intercommunion seems to be that they are so used to the status quo that they lack the motivation for any further step. I speak here above all of the laity, and I speak as a layperson, but as one who has an interest not only in the role of religion in the world—undoubtedly the more important issue—but also, as an aspect of this, in relations between the two principal branches of western Christianity.

Key concepts of church, ministry, and Eucharist, and corresponding practices, have been a matter of joint discussion among the churches for some decades—in Germany since the end of the Second World War and in the USA since the mid-1960s—and considerable progress has been made on those issues in both countries, as well as in Scandinavia,

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at the level of theological working groups supported by the national hierarchies. In 2015 the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, together with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, published a *Declaration on the Way. Church, Ministry, and Eucharist*;¹ in 2017 the Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue Commission for Finland published the closely parallel *Communion in Growth. Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry*;² and in 2020 the German Ecumenical Study Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians published a joint statement on Eucharistic teaching and practice *Gemeinsam am Tisch des Herrn / Together at the Lord's Table*.³ These documents do much to explain and reconcile some key doctrinal, theological, and pastoral differences—e.g. regarding Christ's presence in the Eucharist (to which I shall return later)—but progress made in individual areas has not yet generated official agreement on those issues, let alone resolved the overarching *skandalon* of Christian disunity.

Against this background it is worth asking questions at another level: not so much about the doctrines and practices of Christianity as about the underlying historical and philosophical reasons for the different, sometimes opposing forms they have taken. To understand where a view or formulation comes from can be a considerable help in negotiating it, opening a wider perspective for flexibility and compromise than is generally available from a focus restricted—as so often in the past—to positions and statements directly arising from that view. Today, such a perspective can enrich the substantial progress already achieved at the theological level with dimensions of awareness that make its insights more accessible to Christians and non-Christians alike.

In this sense I shall in the following pages look first at the intellectual and spiritual origins of the sixteenth century Reformation that sealed

¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Minneapolis, 2015), hereafter referred to as '*Declaration on the Way*.'

² Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Catholic Church in Finland (Helsinki, 2017), hereafter referred to as '*Communion in Growth*.'

³ Dorothea Sattler and Volker Leppin, eds (Freiburg & Göttingen, 2020); for a commentary on this document see Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Intercommunion Should be Delayed No Longer: the Significance of a New Statement from Germany,' *One in Christ* 55 (2021) no. 2: 162–176.

the divisions of western Christianity. These can be pursued back into the scholasticism of the High Middle Ages (and even further), when two disparate cultural traditions, two ways of seeking transcendence, emerged that are still active today. The impact of these traditions on the Reformation will be shown in an exemplary fashion with reference to the Council of Trent, which directly addressed the disputed questions and in doing so launched the Catholic Counter-Reformation; this virtually excluded dialogue between Catholics and other western Christians until as recently as the mid-twentieth century. The concluding paragraphs of the essay review the argument as a whole and set it in a wider ecumenical and interreligious context.

The broader historical background

Let us begin, then, with the events, in their broader historical background, that caused the split between the two traditions of western Christianity. The key figure here is the Augustinian friar Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther's society in early sixteenth century Germany was one in which an educated and entrepreneurial class was slowly emerging in the towns and cities of the still feudal Middle Ages. It was an incipient bourgeois world of emancipation from imposed authority, and by the same token a world of burgeoning individual spirituality and intellectual endeavor struggling to reach beyond the confines of the established hierarchical order. From our perspective, five hundred years later, this sounds like a natural process, and Martin Luther certainly saw himself as a reformer rather than a heretic. But he chose to challenge papal authority on the controversial issue of indulgences, whose propagation in contemporary northern Europe was bringing in a great deal of money for a project dear to the heart of Pope Leo X: the construction of St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

In fact, the 95 theses in which Luther formulated his arguments against indulgences show an underlying deference towards papal authority, and before making the theses public he submitted them, along with a letter of protest, to his ecclesiastical superior, the Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg. However, instead of replying, the archbishop sent the matter on to the Roman curia, with the intention that 'this impertinent friar,' who dared to criticize the 'sacred *negotium*,'

should be silenced.⁴ But Luther—not one to be easily suppressed—determined to open an academic debate on the subject and took what at the time was the customary step of having his theses posted on the door of the University Church in Wittenberg. The debate never took place, but the effect of making the issue public was immediate: the theses were copied and printed and ‘before 14 days had passed these propositions had spread throughout Germany, and in four weeks across the whole of Christendom [...]’.⁵ What we know as the Reformation had begun.

The split in the western church which these events initiated was due as much to the overt corruption of the institution itself, and to the drive of secular forces to assume wider spiritual, and with it political, control, as it was to purely theological considerations. Nevertheless, these latter became central to the intellectual encounter between the church and Luther and his followers. This clash, however, must also be seen against the backdrop of Renaissance Europe, where new worlds were opening and new thinking was abroad. By 1515, the maritime powers’ expansion into the Americas and the Orient was under way, the Copernican revolution had set the sun at the center of the known universe, and printing had revolutionized the spread of ideas in the west. Resounding through Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, Luther’s iconic (however mythical) hammer blows echoed into a world that was ripe for change.

The young theologian’s reinterpretation of Christianity was by no means confined to the doctrine and practice of indulgences, but it was Luther’s revulsion at the idea of a quasi-automatic release from sin and its purgatorial punishment that inspired him to call for an academic debate on the subject. His 95 theses contrast ‘sincere repentance and remorse’ with the ‘letters of indulgence’⁶ purveyed in Saxony at the behest of the Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg by the Dominican friar Johann Tetzel; but the real issue was far wider. It was the question, central to all religion, of the relation between inner disposition and

⁴ Hans Volz, *Martin Luthers Thesenanschlag und dessen Vorgeschichte* (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1959), 63. Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are by the author of this article.

⁵ Volz, *Martin Luthers Thesenanschlag*, 140.

⁶ Bernhard Gruhl, ‘Martin Luther’s 95 Theses,’ *Wittenberg Castle Church* (Regensburg, 2016), 15 (Thesis 36).

outer action. This was the stumbling block over which the sixteenth century western church broke eventually into many different pieces.⁷

In his *Preface to the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans* (1522), written soon after his arraignment before the Imperial Diet (or Assembly) at Worms in 1521, Luther formulated that issue in terms of the distinction between faith and works. 'Faith,' he states, 'is not the human notion and dream that some people call faith'—not mere credulity, then, or factual belief. It is a gift of God's grace, 'a divine work in us that changes us,' touching what he repeatedly calls our 'inmost heart.'⁸ Newman's later distinction between *real* and *notional* assent⁹ aptly expresses Luther's conviction: his concept of faith was of a *real* assent of the whole person, intellect, will and emotions, to the divine. This was (and is) quite different from a *notional* assent, for example, to an argument for God's existence.

In the same context we find a central statement of the *sola fides* doctrine that is often seen as the hallmark of Protestantism: '*faith alone* makes a person righteous [...]' (my italics). Personal faith, nourished by a private reading of God's word in the scriptures, can alone effect salvation, the healing of the wound in the relationship of self and world that underlies much of religion. One feels the depth of Luther's conviction in the lyrical exultation of his language: 'O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith [...],' and a few lines later 'Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace [...].' Nor is faith set in any real contrast with works: 'It is impossible for it [faith] not to be doing good works incessantly'; indeed 'it is impossible to separate works from faith [...].'¹⁰ The works against which Luther and his followers fulminated were not those that derived from the commitment of faith, but actions performed externally, for whatever reason, without participation of the

⁷ The later secession from Lutheranism of the Calvinist Reformed Church, from Anglicanism of the nonconformist churches, and from Catholicism of the Old Catholic Church and some other smaller entities, does not bear directly on the argument here, whose main theses apply *mutatis mutandis* to all these groups.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Vorrede zum Römerbrief* (1522), English version 'Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans,' *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, ed./trans. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 3.

⁹ John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, orig. 1870), 34–94.

¹⁰ Luther, 'Preface,' 3.

‘inmost heart,’ the most prominent contemporary example being the purchase of indulgences.

Luther’s passionate emphasis on inner, personal faith as the foundation of religion was in tune with the spirit of his age and in particular with his background as an Augustinian friar. The previous 150 years had seen the rise, initially in the Low Countries but quickly spreading throughout central Europe, of a pietistic movement known historically as the *devotio moderna*. With its emphasis on a personal, individual relationship with God, and especially with a profoundly spiritualized figure of Christ, the movement lived somewhat uneasily with the ritual observances of the official church, which regarded itself as the sole vehicle of salvation, yet it managed to avoid condemnation. Its physical presence took the form on the one hand of lay religious houses of the Brethren of the Common Life, and on the other of the Windesheim Congregation of Augustinian Canons. From that Congregation came a work of popular piety, Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*, that remained influential among North European Catholics at least until the mid-twentieth century. A direct academic influence of the new piety on Luther can be seen in the teachings of the fifteenth century German theologian Gabriel Biel, a member of the Windesheim Congregation (and co-founder of Tübingen University), whose writings propagated the ideas of two key earlier figures, the philosopher-theologians Duns Scotus and William of Ockham.

Scotus, Ockham and Aquinas

The Scottish Franciscan friar John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308) studied and taught in Oxford, Paris and Cologne. His work marks a parting of the ways that runs through the entire intellectual life of the west from the Middle Ages to our own day. A generation earlier, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) had appealed to the newly rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle—and to a lesser extent also to Plato—to mediate a consistently rational analysis of the Christian faith. Where Aquinas propagated a system ordered by the *logos*—the word or mind of God—Scotus emphasized God’s creative power and will; hence his designation as a voluntarist to mark him off from Aquinas’s rationalist stance. The distinction has far-reaching implications; for if, as Aristotle taught, the realities of our world inherently contain their God-given meaning (their *morphē* or ‘form’), our knowledge of the world is simply a matter of extracting that meaning from the particular reality. If, however, as

Scotus taught, what we encounter in the world is the force of God's loving, creative will, the knowing, naming—and hence also determination—of the myriad forms this takes becomes a human task, specifically the never-ending task of empirical science, whose first stirrings in the west this mindset heralded. Such a perspective amounts to a radical revaluation of language as the medium in whose terms we experience the world, no longer simply reading the story of God's workings in the Book of Nature, but writing and rewriting that story and that book ourselves. The shift from rational analysis to voluntarism, or from an ontology of form and essence to one of energy and will, reflects at the intellectual level the late medieval blossoming of individual piety in the *devotio moderna*.

Illustrative of these developments is a story—probably apocryphal—told of the young Scotus lying in an Oxford meadow, observing the refraction of light in a dewdrop on a blade of grass. What does the name 'light' mean, he asked, if what it refers to is constantly changing? For the post-Socratic tradition of western philosophy, to name an object was synonymous with grasping its nature in an act of understanding. Indeed, the concept of knowledge was generally confined to the moment of understanding: regarded as the completion of the knowing process, this stood for—and erased from further consideration—all other aspects of that process. The short-sightedness of this conception has long bedeviled western philosophy. The Franciscan tradition, however, appealed to a prior moment in the knowing process (and perhaps also to an older, pre-Socratic awareness): that of the initial encounter between knower and known, where the self faces a nameless other. To name that other is not to grasp its inherent nature but to assimilate it into our functional world; it cannot in any case be known in its particularity—in what Scotus called its *haecceitas* and his contemporary, the German Dominican Meister Eckhart, its *istigkeit* (both words mean 'thisness' and refer to the irreducible individuality of all phenomena).

For Scotus—and more especially for his younger contemporary and fellow-Franciscan William of Ockham (c. 1288–1347)—things did not possess an immanent, nameable nature at all: that concept was in principle redundant. We knew and named what we needed to know and name; and this naming could never be wholly adequate. This can be put in a modern way by saying that Duns Scotus was the ur-father of constructivism. Modern or not, however, his perspective has never been

popular in the west. For one thing, it is more finely nuanced, more difficult to grasp than Aristotelian realism, although it embraces and critically vindicates the strictest concepts of reality. Moreover, so far as the Catholic tradition is concerned, Scotist voluntarism—especially in the shape of its fully fledged derivative, Ockhamist nominalism—was widely thought to undermine the realities of our world by making them purely internal and logocentric. For all of these reasons the Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy has long been preferred and sanctioned by the church.

There is, for all that, an undeniable tendency to intellectualism in the Scotist-Ockhamist position (not for nothing was Scotus dubbed *doctor subtilis*), inasmuch as it makes the realities of everyday life ontologically (if that word still has any meaning) subject to interpretation—whether by the individual or the community scarcely matters any longer. At least in emphasis, this is quite different from the binary division of matter and form and correspondingly positivist concept of being that mark the Aristotelian tradition and that have left their stamp on mainstream Catholic thought since the High Middle Ages. Here physical enactment, communal celebration and temporal continuity prevail. Where Protestant attitudes in all their breadth and variety share an individual drive to transcend the human condition, Catholicism shows a counter-movement that seeks its resolution in an all-embracing immanence. Two sorts of energy are at work here, one replete with dynamism, the other with latency; both are equally self-transcending—not in the sense of an achieved transcendence, but in that of the German Jewish philosopher Ernst Bloch's dictum: 'What is decisive [is] to transcend without transcendence'¹¹—and neither movement excludes the other. The very fact that one can speak of them in such similar terms suggests that their difference is one of cultural weighting rather than incompatible conviction.

An apt metaphor for that difference is the contrasting architectural impact of the Gothic cathedrals of northern Europe and their Romanesque (or in Britain 'Norman') counterparts: on the one hand finely fluted pillars arching upward like forest trees, on the other massive stone arches bending back to their origins in earth—an image memorably evoked in Seamus Heaney's poem *In Gallarus Oratory*:

¹¹ Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 9.

You can still feel the community pack
 This place: it's like going into a turfstack,
 A core of old dark walled up with stone
 A yard thick. When you're in it alone,
 You might have dropped, a reduced creature,
 To the heart of the globe. No worshipper
 Would leap up to his God off this floor. [...]¹²

Heaney's images evoke the womb-like village churches of southern Europe. His lines radiate a *re-ligio* in the sense of bonding back to physical and cultural origins. All is *stasis* here; the transcendence sought is downward and within, an exploration of primordial experience enacted in the physical texture of the poem's language, notably in its synesthetic echoing of sense in sound. In this dark central space—'the heart of the globe'—meaning is found, but that meaning is no longer fathomable.

Heaney's lines contrast significantly with the articulate intellectual probing and individual moral urgency of Derek Mahon's *The Spring Vacation* from the other (Protestant) side of the Northern Irish divide:

Walking among my own this windy morning
 In a tide of sunlight between shower and shower,
 I resume my old conspiracy with the wet
 Stone and the unwieldy images of the squinting heart.
 Once more, as before, I remember not to forget.[...]

The focus here is explicitly on the inner workings of a particular mind and emotions. It is in the individual quest, not in the finding, not in the communal walled space of Heaney's oratory, but in the momentary dynamic of 'walking among my own,' that the world becomes meaningful. For the poem concludes:

One part of my mind must learn to know its place.
 The things that happen in the kitchen houses
 And echoing back-streets of this desperate city
 Should engage more than my casual interest,
 Exact more interest than my casual pity.¹³

There can be no question of mutual exclusion in the worldviews of these poems: they are different as the cultures behind them are different, but they complement each other as equals in sense and impact. For three centuries before Luther the approaches underlying them coexisted

¹² Seamus Heaney, *Door into the Dark* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 22.

¹³ Derek Mahon, *Poems 1962–1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 4.

under the same roof, and in many dimensions other than the institutionally religious they have continued to do so.

The Understanding of Sacrament

The outreach of the two contrasting traditions can be seen in the doctrinal divisions of the Reformation, for instance in the concept of sacrament. Assembled in 1547 at the Council of Trent (1545–1563) to confront what they clearly saw as the Lutheran heresy, the Catholic bishops uttered their anathema against ‘anyone [who] says that the sacraments of the new Law do not contain the grace that they signify [...]’¹⁴—as if sacraments were vessels filled with a spiritual substance, or as if words, by pointing, did not at the same time perform. The same mindset and the same concept of containment informed the decree on the Eucharist which, with regard to what the Council explicitly called the ‘real presence,’ declared that ‘by the consecration of bread and wine the conversion takes place of the whole substance of bread into the substance of the body of Christ [...],’ and that ‘this conversion is truly and appropriately called transubstantiation [...]’.¹⁵ *Declaration on the Way* comments: ‘In thirteenth-century scholastic theology, Aristotelian metaphysics of substance and accidents entered explanatory treatments of the Real Presence.’¹⁶ Neither the bishops at Trent nor their theologians evidently grasped the underlying notion that a sign *qua sign* could be an enactment and that the sacraments were (as the contemporary *Thirty-Nine Articles* of the Church of England put it) in that sense ‘effectual signs’; some 450 years later the Vatican’s own *Catechism* would speak similarly of the sacraments as ‘efficacious signs of grace.’¹⁷ On this point at least, then, the Council banned Luther not so much for heresy as for failing to subscribe to the Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy.

The ban lasted for some 450 years; the past half century, however, has witnessed a sea change in relations between the churches at the theological level. The Finnish ecumenical document *Communion*, for example, speaks far more incisively than was ever possible in the past

¹⁴ Denzinger-Schönmetzer: *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), no. 1606.

¹⁵ Denzinger-Schönmetzer: *Enchiridion*, no. 1642.

¹⁶ *Declaration on the Way*, 65.

¹⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City, 1993), 1131.

of the ‘sacramental understanding of the word’¹⁸ as a tenet common to both Catholic and Lutheran theology. In the same sense all three ecumenical documents—American, Finnish, and German—quoted at the head of this essay are explicit in their agreement on the spiritual reality of Christ’s presence in the Eucharistic celebration. Thus *Declaration on the Way* cites approvingly the International Lutheran–Catholic Joint Commission’s 1978 statement on the Eucharist confirming agreement between Lutherans and Catholics in their belief ‘that the consecrated elements do not simply remain bread and wine, but rather, by the power of the creative word, are given as the body and blood of Christ,’ and that conversely ‘[t]he concept of transubstantiation, for its part, is intended as a confession and preservation of the Mystery-character of the Eucharistic presence; it is not intended as an explanation of *how* this change occurs.’¹⁹

One might doubt whether the concept of transubstantiation was really intended by the Council of Trent (or by Aquinas three centuries earlier) as ‘a confession and preservation of the Mystery-character of the Eucharistic presence’; it might be more accurate to say that it can be intended in that sense today. One might wonder, too, if the Council of Trent would have accepted that the ‘consecrated elements’ are ‘given as’ rather than actually *are* ‘the body and blood of Christ.’ The distinction can be read as indicating a tectonic shift in ontology that has taken place in the interim. For within the time span of the ecumenical documents cited here, the received post-Socratic understanding of being as a condition obtaining existentially outside of and independently of the knower has given way to the realization that this term, too, is a construct indispensably necessary for human life in all its dimensions—one of which is religion.

This awareness, both modern and in its roots very ancient, has been comprehensively argued in our own day by the German philosopher Günter Abel, for whom language is a performative process: ‘To speak of “signs of reality” implies that [...] reality is only ever reality as interpreted *in* signs [...].’²⁰ This does not mean that we cannot *conceive*

¹⁸ *Communion*, 34.

¹⁹ Lutheran/Roman Catholic Joint Commission, *Das Herrenmahl / The Eucharist* (Frankfurt, 1978), 5, original emphasis; *Declaration on the Way*, 67.

²⁰ Günter Abel, *Zeichen der Wirklichkeit* [‘Signs of Reality’] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), 15, original emphasis.

of a reality prior to or independent of the act of knowing, but that such a conception is itself the product of an act of knowing: reality is always *our* reality, is *what we mean* by reality, and this is only ever accessible to us in and through the sign systems of language (in the broadest sense of that word). In these terms, Aristotelian-Thomist rationalism has finally combined with and fructified the voluntarist-nominalist tradition of the Late Middle Ages, from which it was in any case never fully divorced. Underlying the 1978 Lutheran–Catholic statement on the *Eucharist*,²¹ the convergence of these lines of thought gives rise to a far subtler and suppler negotiation of the inherited differences between Catholic and Protestant positions than could ever have been achieved by rigid adherence to scholastic categories.

The *Ekklesia*

Another longstanding bone of contention between the Catholic and Protestant traditions is the concept of ‘church’—in Greek *ekklesia*: an assembly of the people—and the correlative concept of apostolic succession, which from the Catholic point of view underpins the historical continuity of the ministry, and with it the apostolic identity of the church. The Council of Trent touched on this in terms of the consecration of bishops, who ‘have succeeded into the place of the apostles,’²² that succession being traditionally regarded as conditional on unimpaired historical continuity in the sense of a physically unbroken line dating back to the apostolic origins of the bishopric—again an aspect of Catholic insistence on the *fundamentum in re*.

Here too, however, *Declaration on the Way* takes a broader view, stating first in general terms that ‘Catholics and Lutherans affirm the ecclesial character of one another’s communities,’²³ and then going on to quote with tacit approval a Lutheran–Roman Catholic study document of 2006, *The Apostolicity of the Church*, to the effect that ‘[f]or apostolic succession, succession in faith is the essential aspect.’²⁴ This echoes in rather stronger terms Article XIX of the Church of

²¹ Lutheran/Roman Catholic Joint Commission, *Das Herrenmahl / The Eucharist* (Frankfurt, 1978).

²² Denzinger-Schönmetzer: *Enchiridion*, no. 1768.

²³ *Declaration on the Way*, 11.

²⁴ Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *The Apostolicity of the Church*, hereafter referred to as *Apostolicity* (Minneapolis, 2006), 288, cited in *Declaration on the Way*, 40.

England's *Thirty-Nine Articles* of 1571, which sees the church as 'a congregation of faithful men [...].'²⁵ Conversely, on the key question (for Catholics) of the apostolic succession of bishops, *Declaration on the Way* affirms the desire of the Lutheran reformers in the Augsburg Confession to 'preserve [...] the episcopal polity that they had inherited from the past'²⁶—though what 'preserving an episcopal polity' means is not explained in further detail. Language sometimes loses in clarity what it gains in diplomacy.

The issue comes to a head in the question of the validity of Lutheran (or in general Protestant) ordination to the ministry, about which *Declaration on the Way* observes that: 'According to Catholic teaching, in Lutheran churches the sacramental sign of ordination is not fully present because those who ordain are not themselves in recognized apostolic succession.'²⁷ Again quoting *The Apostolicity of the Church*, it comments: 'Therefore the Second Vatican Council speaks of a *defectus sacramenti ordinis* in these churches,' and concludes: 'This perception of a *defectus*, when understood as "lack" or "absence," clearly stands in the way of recognition of Lutheran ordained ministry.' But, *Declaration on the Way* goes on to ask, 'must the term *defectus* necessarily be understood in this way? Does it not refer to a "defect" or "deficiency" rather than "lack"?'—a question to which it responds in a sentence taken from the 2004 U. S. Catholic-Lutheran dialogue *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation*: 'In acknowledging the imperfect *koinonia* between our communities and the access to grace through the ministries of these communities, we also acknowledge a real though imperfect *koinonia* between our ministries.'²⁸

Consistently with the criterion of a 'succession in faith' rather than an unbroken historical chain of ministry, *Declaration on the Way* (again quoting *Apostolicity*) sees this *koinonia* as lying in 'fidelity to the apostolic gospel.'²⁹ A shared faith nourished and sanctioned by the community has here taken the place of physical continuity. In broader

²⁵ XXXIX *Articles of Religion*, <https://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/articles/articles.html>, retrieved Feb. 14, 2024.

²⁶ *Declaration on the Way*, 50.

²⁷ *Declaration on the Way*, 93.

²⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation* (Washington, D.C., 2004), 107, cited in *Declaration on the Way*, 94.

²⁹ *Apostolicity* 288, cited in *Declaration on the Way*, 41.

terms, a culture of intellectual and emotional proximity has infused one wedded to a contiguity that is both spiritual and rooted in an irreducibly material world. In modern philosophical terms, 'belief'—now in an entirely secular sense—has reclaimed its ontological primacy in the realm of cognition, for there is no position outside the knowing subject from which one can rationally ground the validity and truth of human knowledge.

Following Wittgenstein, Abel speaks here of 'pragmatically necessary interpretative presuppositions' that constitute a 'practical trust in what one says, thinks and does [...], without which we would not even begin to speak, think or act.'³⁰ In other words, to live a human life in all its dimensions, one must assent to the basic principles of knowledge: they cannot prove themselves, they are verified only by working for us and enabling our lives. To borrow Newman's terminology, our assent to them is neither 'real' nor purely 'notional.' Given its fundamental role, it is perhaps best called 'existential.' This existential assent takes (and *must* take) what we define as reality for granted—must take it, quite literally, on faith. A key cultural development of the past fifty years has seen first western philosophy and then Christian theology—particularly in the USA, Scandinavia and Germany—at least implicitly achieve this critical insight. It remains for it to permeate the institutional cultures concerned. Then the *koinonia* between ministries, and by implication between their churches, need no longer be deemed imperfect.

Concluding Remarks

Two fundamental ideas underlie the ecumenical documents cited here and inform the argument of this essay: for Protestants the key issue is the change denoted by the term 'justification,' for Catholics it is the real substrate of that change expressed in the concept of 'grace'—not a material quantity, of course, but, as observed above in the context of the Council of Trent, often thought and spoken of as if it were. And grace, for the Catholic, while it is 'kept flowing' at the interface of individuals with their God, is mediated above all by the sacraments of the Christian community. Justification, on the other hand, whether as experience or state, is *per se* individual, approximating to a form of knowledge, an intellectual and emotional encounter with that God. We

³⁰ Günter Abel, *Sprache, Zeichen, Interpretation* ['Language, Signs, Interpretation'] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999), 38.

are back again with Aquinas and Scotus and with philosophical and theological distinctions which after 800 years of dispute seem now—at least at the academic level—to be largely reconciled.³¹

There are other ways of looking at the Protestant–Catholic divide that shed light on these two Christian paths, Protestantism in its origins and development arguably giving more weight to Pauline soteriology, Catholicism to incarnational Johannine Christology; Protestantism more strictly Hebrew, Catholicism more Greek in inspiration, more open to syncretism, more able to assimilate aspects of other religions than Christianity. The current momentum of doctrinal reconciliation between the two traditions leads one to hope that Catholics and Protestants may increasingly find their differences constitutive not of opposition but of an enriching cultural diversity.

³¹ For progress in discussion of such difficult issues as infallibility, see e.g. *Declaration on the Way* 30–32, 81–88.

A GIFT RECEIVED: EXPLORING THE USE OF IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT IN LUTHERAN PASTORAL PRACTICE

May Bente Matre^{*}

Over the past 30 years, ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Norway and Sweden have discovered that the Ignatian tradition of spiritual accompaniment constitutes a valuable resource. Many find that this is an element of the Catholic tradition they can receive with integrity and benefit from within their own ecclesial context, both personally and in their pastoral practice. Catholic spiritual directors formed in this tradition have in turn been enriched by interacting with their Lutheran colleagues. The field of spiritual accompaniment has thus become a fertile ground for collaboration across the denominational divides. This article gives a brief historical overview of this ecumenical reception process, presents Ignatian accompaniment seen from a Lutheran perspective, and explores the reasons for its success.

Ignatian accompaniment in Norway and Sweden; a brief historical review

Ignatian accompaniment has become increasingly widespread in the Nordic countries. How can we understand the fact that this tradition of spiritual direction has taken root here, in Norway in particular? Perhaps we need to go back to the man who is considered the father of the retreat movement in this country: Edin Løvås (1920–2014), who launched a form of prayer called ‘Jesus Meditation’. This was a great inspiration to many, while others were sceptical about the concept of meditation, which at the time was unfamiliar in a Protestant context.

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The 'Jesus Meditation' emphasises the use of all the senses to immerse oneself in the Biblical texts. What many people did not know was that this form of meditation was largely inspired by Ignatius' spiritual exercises written in the sixteenth century. When the first Norwegian retreat centre at Sandom (1955) was opened, Norway still had a law that prohibited Jesuits from entering the country. Løvås encountered so much resistance that he had to spend many years in 'exile' in Sweden.

In Sweden, Magnus Malm eventually emerged as a similar leader. He was also strongly influenced by Ignatian spirituality, which he encountered at St Davidsgården in Rättvik, through its founder, Per Mases, a priest of the Church of Sweden, who had close contact with Jesuits in Sweden. Magnus Malm has also had a great influence in the Nordic countries through his ABC retreats¹ in which one gets an introduction to spiritual direction. These courses became a Swedish-Norwegian collaboration for employees and volunteers in congregations. Both Edin Løvås and Magnus Malm have written many books inspired by Ignatian direction.

In parallel with the influence of these two, during the 1980s several Catholic communities had a major impact on the spread of, and interest in, Ignatian spirituality. In Sweden, the Jesuits in Uppsala began publishing Ignatian literature and the nuns at the Sacré-Cœur convent outside Gothenburg started the very first programme of education in Ignatian guidance.

In Norway, the Sisters of St Joseph of Chambéry have played a major role in Lutherans discovering what spiritual accompaniment is and in its spread. The sisters trained in Ignatian spiritual direction and, without them marketing it, a good number of Lutheran priests, many of them in leading positions, discovered what they were offering and profited greatly from it. Over the years, countless Protestants, lay and learned, have received guidance of this kind from these sisters. In 1991, they established an ecumenical retreat centre at Nesøya, outside Oslo, which in 2007 moved to Grefsen in Oslo itself. The Norwegian province

¹ ABC Retreats are a series of retreats made over several years, aimed at people working in Christian communities, either employed or volunteer workers. The purpose is to help these persons grow as Christians in their particular role through a sustained spiritual discipline, rooted above all in the Ignatian tradition, and to give them the tools they need to continue to grow in their daily lives.

of the Sisters of St Joseph of Chambéry, has as its aim 'Unity with God, with each other, with all people' (§4 Constitutions, cf. John 17).

The retreat centres in Norway also had contacts in England and a team from there came to Norway for many years and held Ignatian retreats here. This team was comprised of Patrick Purnell (a Jesuit associated with St Beunos), Lister Tounge (an Anglican priest) and Yvonne Walker (a Methodist), who were in themselves an ecumenical witness to the unity one can experience in sharing faith.

The Swedish magazine *Pilgrim—a magazine for spiritual guidance*, with its broadly ecumenical editorial team and Pentecostal Peter Halldorf as editor, has also been of great importance to those who have wanted to deepen their faith.

Programmes in Ignatian spiritual guidance in Norway

Academic education

In the early 2000s, the MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society² and the Association of Priests³ created the first programme in Ignatian accompaniment ever conducted in Norway. It was a comprehensive pilot project that was process-orientated with weekly sessions over 3+2 years and gave academic credits. The course was very well received and had to be doubled in relation to the planned intake.

This led to various questions being posed:

But what made the Church of Norway turn to a guidance tradition based on Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, to the Catholic Sisters of St Joseph at Nesøya, and the ecumenical retreat movement in Norway? Which paths had led us there, and which paths led us as participants there? Was it something we longed for?

So asks Elisabeth Fagermoen, editor of *Luthersk Kirketidende*.⁴

Some thought it was a dead end and would lead us astray. Experience showed that this was not the case, however. The course, which was only held once because it was too extensive, created environments for Ignatian accompaniment across large parts of the country.

² Earlier known as Menighets-fakultetet (Faculty for Congregations, in practice a seminary for the Church of Norway), hence the acronym MF.

³ A professional association for priests in the Church of Norway.

⁴ Elisabeth Fagermoen, 'Editorial,' *Luthersk Kirketidende* 03/2023: 66. Author's translation. *Luthersk Kirketidende* (*Lutheran Church Review*) is a Norwegian theological review published by MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society.

In 2021, there was a demand for a new program in spiritual guidance. I was asked by Bjørgvin Diocese to create a course that could provide inspiration and renewal after the pandemic. I linked up NLA University College⁵ with the idea, and together we developed an introductory course in spiritual guidance for church employees. We have now completed two courses and are ready for the third. The experience is the same as last time; there is great demand and we have full courses.

Both academic courses have had contributions from both Lutherans and Catholics. The course which I run has its first week-long gathering at the Sisters of St Joseph at Grefsen. It makes a deep impression on the Lutherans who have participated in it to hear that the retired sisters who live there ‘carry’ our course in prayer. My course co-ordinator is Peder Solberg, senior lecturer at NLA University College, who is a Catholic.

Qualifying course in Ignatian guidance outside academia

The association Kompass, an ecumenical Christian organisation, was established in 2005. Its goal is to ‘help people unite with Jesus Christ and his interests in the world. They do this primarily by promoting spiritual guidance based on the tradition of Ignatian spirituality.’⁶ The association has members from both the Church of Sweden and the Church of Norway, as well as from the Free Churches and the Catholic Church. The association organises courses in Ignatian spirituality that are held at the Lia Gård retreat centre in Norway.

In parallel with this, the Sisters of St Joseph have trained new spiritual directors by groups, and by seminars and personal guidance. Both Catholics and Lutherans who have been trained by the sisters in this way are giving spiritual guidance to the retreatants.

In 2012, the Loyola Centre was established at the St Joseph Retreat Centre at Grefsen. The Centre is ecumenical, and its mission is to: Provide spiritual guidance to individuals; Equip and strengthen people who provide spiritual guidance; Collaborate with other counselling communities in Norway, and also internationally when appropriate.

⁵ Earlier known as Norsk lærer-akademi (Norwegian Academy for Teachers, educating teachers in the fields of Christian faith and pedagogy), hence the acronym NLA. Currently, they also educate theologians and ordained ministers.

⁶ <https://www.foreningenkompas.se/>, accessed on 13 July 2024. Author's translation.

Several retreat centres have also held short courses in spiritual direction. These retreat centres, all of which have an ecumenical profile and practice hospitality and respect for all seekers, have played an important role in making Ignatian spirituality and its forms of guidance known.

What does the Ignatian spiritual accompaniment add to the Lutheran tradition?

Divided spirituality

As described above, many Lutherans have benefited from spiritual guidance in the Ignatian tradition and use this actively in their ministry and life. What have we found here that we missed in our own tradition?

Spiritual counselling is essentially about the relationship with God. Magnus Malm points out that it is no wonder that the demand for good spiritual direction has increased because 'sterile theorising has often transformed God from Saviour to lecturer.'⁷ After the Reformation, the teaching of Christian faith was placed in the emerging universities. Spirituality remained in the monasteries, but in the Lutheran tradition this meant that doctrine stood alone because there was no place for monasteries any more. I believe it to be unfortunate that this has characterised our Protestant tradition even to this day. Theology provides us with insight and knowledge, but what about the personal relationship with God? Here, I believe, we are dealing with a 'spiritual poverty' that creates a longing for something more. As a result, many people recognise Gerard Hughes' description of what he calls 'divided spirituality'.⁸ By this he means that, disastrously, our spiritual experience and our daily lives are kept apart. This division is experienced in many church communities, and perhaps this is a large part of the reason why many people seek Ignatian spirituality, which places decisive emphasis on experience. According to Ignatius,

⁷ Magnus Malm, 'Introduction,' in William Barry and William Connely, *Att ge andlig vägledning*, trans. Lena Bergström (Skellefteå: Artos Bokförlag, 2001), 7. Author's translation. English original: *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982).

⁸ Gerard Hughes, *Gud i allt*, trans. Kjersti W. Grøv (Oslo: Verbum Forlag, 2003), 16. Author's translation. English original: *God in All Things* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Religious, 2003).

experiences are as important for spiritual guidance as ingredients are for cooking.

When theology is detached from a life of prayer and contemplation, priests are deprived of a natural path to immersion in Christ.⁹ The fact that the subject of theology and one's own life of piety are kept so separate means that faith does not always provide help with life, or help people to relate to God in all circumstances. This division also makes it difficult to help other people with their particular issues. Some of the priests who participated in the course said that their main motivation for attending was that they wanted to learn how to concretely help people who were seeking a relationship with God. If the church and priests cannot help with this, who can? The Ignatian tradition provides us with tools, approaches, and help. Priests in both the Catholic and Lutheran churches have experienced this. There are also many 'lay people' who have found help with their faith somewhat outside, rather than within the church's 'usual' offerings, when they have discovered spiritual guidance. It is through courses like those mentioned above, as well as through their personal experience that many of them have become good guides for others.

God in everything

Ignatian accompaniment is essentially about helping the pilgrim to see God in everything. 'Seeking God in all things' is fundamental and everything else is built around this.¹⁰ This is one of the things that can heal the division to which Hughes had referred. Everyday life is sanctified through a deeper belief that God is never somewhere else, he is always to be found in the reality that surrounds us. Ignatius himself describes it in this beautiful way:

Keep yourselves open, you may be given a moment of this spiritual experience, which will then carry your whole life. Then in every drop of dew you will find the sun in the sky and the sun of God. In every human face, in every conversation, in the darkness and in the light, in the joys

⁹ Tore Laugerud, *Kirken i møte med den åndelige lengsel i vår tid: Betenkning til kirkemøtet 1999* [The Church Faced with the Contemporary Desire for Spirituality: Reflection for the General Synod of the Church of Norway 1999] (Oslo: Kirkerådet (National Council of the Church of Norway), 1999), 25.

¹⁰ Willy Lambert, *Kærlig opmærksomhet,—træk av den Ignatianske spiritualitet* [Loving Attention—Sketches of Ignatian Spirituality] (Copenhagen: The Sisters of Saint Joseph in Denmark/Ansgarstiftelsens Forlag, 1999), 23.

and the sorrows, in heated discussions and in agreements, in opposition and with the wind at your back, in the questions and in the answers, in God's presence and in his distance,—in everything God.¹¹

Even when reality is raw and brutal, Ignatius recommends that we embrace it and let ourselves be embraced by it. This is when it is easy to feel abandoned by God or even to flee from what we are facing but, against this, the Ignatian way implies that there is nothing in our lives that is not also part of our spiritual life.¹² I believe that finding God in one's own life is a longing within us all. It transcends doctrines and dogmas and responds to a deep human need.

Inner movements and emotions

Ignatius advises us to listen to our inner movements and our feelings. Recovering from an illness while still a young man, Ignatius had discovered when he read works of chivalry on the one hand and accounts of the lives of the saints on the other, how both gave him immediate pleasure. But soon after reading chivalric novels, he quickly became restless, while the accounts of the lives of the saints left a deeper satisfaction within him, and it lasted. Through this difference in the 'aftertaste,' he learned to distinguish between what creates good fruit and draws us closer to God and what does not.

Unlike Ignatius, listening to emotions and inner movements is not what Lutherans have normally been concerned with. On the contrary, feelings have been suspected to such an extent that believers have been encouraged to let 'the word alone' override how they are feeling. For many, this has created a chasm between what we objectively know in our heads and what we subjectively experience emotionally. This has been difficult to come to terms with.

Anthropology

At this point there is a difference in the anthropology of Lutheran and Catholic theology. It is also here that theologians who have participated in the courses I have held on spiritual guidance have been challenged. In the Lutheran tradition, there has been a belief that humans are

¹¹ Paraphrased in Lambert, *Kærlig oppmerksomhet*, 23. Author's translation.

¹² Cf. James Martin, *Å finne Gud i alle ting*, trans. Erik Steenhoff and Ingvild Røsok (Oslo: St. Olav forlag 2016), 31. Author's translation. English original: *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

depraved sinners and that there is nothing good in our inner self. The Catholic view of humanity has placed greater emphasis on the fact that we are created in the image of God. Although that image can become dirty and almost impossible to recognise, it will never completely disappear. It is possible to 'polish the soot' off the image, open ourselves to God's love and become more and more influenced by it. Encountering a more positive view of humanity has challenged and enriched many Protestants.

Prayer

Ignatian spirituality understands emotions in the same way as we understand them in psychology. In both these domains, our emotions provide information about what is going on deep inside us. By examining why we feel the way we do, we can also get in touch with what is disturbing our relationship with God. It may be old wounds, disappointments, lack of trust, etc. All this must be expressed in prayer, which requires honesty. 'Anyone who wants to find deep prayer must engage in close combat with the Holy One,' says Joseph Bergdahl,¹³ going on to say that this will always involve real self-knowledge. Those who are afraid of their own darkness will not find prayer. Prayer requires spiritual nakedness in front of God, which in turn requires great courage. In a Protestant context, prayer has often been synonymous with praying for something or someone, which often means that prayer is neither personally intimate nor life-transforming.

Many remain without words about their experiences, and this makes their relationship with God difficult. The Norwegian author and senior lecturer Torborg Aalen Leenderts writes about this, referring to the basic Ignatian guidance questions in the following way: 'What happens when you pray?' 'What do you long for?' 'What is God calling you to?' She explains how she knew a lot about what to pray for but was tongue-tied and unsure of how to talk to God about experiences that challenged her image of God. 'Could I talk to God about my painful feelings? Did God tolerate what I was saying? Did I tolerate it myself? And how could I say it?'¹⁴

¹³ Joseph Bergdahl, 'Ropet frå djupet,' [The Cry from the Depths] *Pilgrim/Hjærtats bønn* 1. 3/2023: 23. Author's translation.

¹⁴ Torborg Aalen Leenderts, *Gud og det vonde—om tillit og tillitstap* [God and the painful—of trust and loss of trust] (Oslo: Bibelselskapet/Verbum, 2011), 184. Author's translation.

Her experience with spiritual accompaniment was that she discovered what many of us do: we hold back our most pressing feelings, needs and conflicts when talking to God. Then prayer becomes a conversation where you never express anything important and do not expect to hear anything important. In the end, therefore, prayer often becomes a heavy duty that eventually dries up. Acknowledging, confessing and addressing are important in therapeutic processes, and the same must be the case in our relationship with God. Ignatius himself does not warn against rebellion, grief or anger in prayer, only against untouched self-restraint.¹⁵

Praying with one's whole life and experiences is also the challenge of one of Ignatius' most recommended forms of prayer, the 'Examen' or, as it is often described now in Ignatian literature, 'the Loving Review of the day'. Here, events of the day are reviewed, both good and bad, including what needs to be changed as well as what one is grateful for.

Silence and images of God

In accompaniment, you are encouraged to be in a basic silence before God; listening and reflecting, albeit not without some talking as well. In this way, you come into close contact with your image of God. Who can bear to sit in front of a judgemental or critical gaze? It can break us down and not even stimulate self-recognition, far less change. Many people have unconscious ideas about God that do not fit in at all with the theology we have learned, perhaps in too abstract a fashion, according to which God is love. But even when we push these ideas away, we never get in touch with anything other than our fears and our poor self-image. Challenging our perceptions of God is always scary. After all, we do not think they are ideas, we think they are God. And if they are, it feels safer to submit to them. Doing that, however, we miss the opportunity to meet the living God who surprises us, whom we can never pigeonhole, who is free from our images and ideas. This is the God who also wants us to be free, so that we can be who we are, and thus find our way with God.

Opening up to such processes of change is often an important part of spiritual direction. It is hard work and 'this kind of transformation often

¹⁵ Barry and Connely, *Att ge andlig vägledning*, 133.

takes a considerable amount of personal courage, along with conscious effort, the willingness to be challenged.”¹⁶

The emphasis on silence and retreats has also opened up a space where everything is not about efficiency and working in the ‘vineyard’. God’s goodness is best experienced in the encounter between the one who created each individual and each particular individual in him- or herself. Who we are and how we feel is something God cares about. Without an experience of this God who cares about us, in every aspect of our lives, it is easy to get burned out and believe that the only thing that counts is our own actions. This prevents curiosity about what God is inviting us to from unfolding and revealing itself, through everything that happens in our lives.

We can maintain our integrity while experiencing union in Christ

An important common denominator between Ignatian guidance and Lutherans is the relationship to Scripture. The Word has a central place in Lutheranism. Ignatian-style *Lectio Divina*, with its emphasis on immersing oneself in Scriptural stories with both imagination and emotion, has been of great importance for Lutherans; it helps them to feel confident that it is this source, which their own tradition so greatly emphasises, that is the ground on which everything, including all Ignatian meditation and discernment, rests.

Visual contemplation was discovered by Ignatius when he was in hospital. This came about through his reading of Ludolf of Saxony’s *Vita Christi*, which called all to read what happened in the Gospels as if it were happening right now. Ludolf’s readers were to imagine with all their feelings and all their power that they were witnessing in the here and now everything that was said or done by or through our Lord Jesus Christ. This would help them not only to think of Christ, but to experience him. As a modern author puts it, ‘Imaginative prayer makes the Jesus of the Gospels our Jesus. It helps us develop a unique and personal relationship with him.’¹⁷

Reading the Bible this way, we all have the opportunity to find our own ‘splinter in the eye’, our ‘*exodus*’ and our ‘*kyrie eleison*’. This way of

¹⁶ John J. Shea, *Finding God again* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 127.

¹⁷ David L. Fleming, *What is Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 19.

reading the texts requires caution. Here, Ignatius' guidance in relation to discerning the spirits is also reassuring for Lutherans. All such discernment should be tested: where does it lead us—closer to God or away from him? Here, experiences of consolation and desolation are crucial, as is knowing how to interpret them. Ignatius' focus on our 'disordered inflections' is also in line with Luther's focus on not letting other things, people, etc. become idols in our lives. Man is created to honour, serve and praise God and everything else should help us reach our destiny. If it does not, we should refrain from it.

Talking about our experiences in spiritual direction groups provides an experience of sharing faith rather than discussing faith. Spiritual counselling never focuses on ideas, dogmas or doctrines. It focuses on our human experiences with the texts that are the foundation of our common Christian faith and our attempts to find and follow God. The texts were created before the schism in the church. This is a way of rediscovering that we have a common treasure that we all are thankful for.

A concrete example will help us to illustrate this. In 2006, four of us Lutherans went to visit the Sisters of St Andrew, who together with the priest of the Swedish Church, Susanne Carlsson (who lived with them for many years), have been important ambassadors for Ignatian guidance both in England and in the Nordic countries. We had never met before, but we sat down together. We read a Bible text, meditated, and shared our experiences. We immediately recognised each other as fellow travellers, basically the same family, as seekers together. We were a community going deeper than it often does when people meet within the same denomination.

I have had similar experiences at retreat centres and ecumenical conferences, where we meet with all our different liturgical clothing and expressions, with our different affiliations and opinions, music and artefacts—yet there is a deep cohesion and perhaps mutual acceptance and indulgence towards each other. This is because we share what is most important to each of us, and we discover that what unites us is stronger than that which divides.

A critical look at Ignatian accompaniment

Luther and Ignatius lived in the same time period, in the sixteenth century. They were influenced by the same theological currents, and both came into conflict with the church, albeit in different ways. A

Spaniard and a German, one broke with the mother church, while the other one stayed.¹⁸

One of the criticisms that has been levelled against this form of guidance has been the claim that it makes people passive and leads to an overly individualised faith, but I do not recognise this as actually happening in practice. In Ignatian accompaniment, prayer, meditation and contemplation are always about finding God's will for us in our lives. There is a call to participate in God's continued creation in the world, so that we see 'with God's eyes'. We try to discern God's action and call, and we learn and are helped to participate in his action. Jesuits have always shown great social responsibility and care for vulnerable groups. Spending time with God before going out into the world can prevent us from going on our own and harming others instead of helping. We must first heal our own injuries before we can bandage those of others.

A real criticism, however, is that you can believe that you can 'fix everything' if you relate 'correctly' to God. I have heard some people say that relationships get better, life gets better, etc. Often that is true. But my experience is that sometimes we carry wounds and injuries that are of such a nature that they require treatment and therapy. In the same way that we do not expect someone in a wheelchair to start walking because they are receiving spiritual direction, trauma and personality deviations may not be corrected in this process. A difficult marriage or relationship with family, colleagues, etc. does not always change. People around us can remain the same. It will not always get better, but it will always get truer. The truth can be liberating, but also painful.

In my experience, Ignatian accompaniment can provide good help to people seeking God, but it must also be practised with caution. It requires knowledge of both psychology and theology to accompany people into deep processes where much that has been unconscious and suppressed can emerge.

Why Ignatian accompaniment is here to stay

The interest in spiritual direction can be understood as a reaction to the church as it is today. Given that there is spiritual wealth in every human being, is it not a great paradox that this wealth is not more visible in

¹⁸ Rainer Carls, S.J., *Ignatius teologiske profil* [Ignatius' Theological Profile] (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma bokförlag, 2013), 125–127. Author's translation.

our churches? This is probably because the inner life, including that of church employees, has been neglected. This can result in searching people looking elsewhere, other than to the church, to find the guidance and help that they need and desire. 'They do not leave the church because it is too religious, but because it is not religious enough.'¹⁹

It is also about rediscovering the personal spiritual conversation as the basis of Christian development and growth. Spiritual direction brings the whole person into a relationship with God and conveys a language in which it is possible to talk meaningfully about experiences of God, and it 'opens up' theology and raises new questions. There is room left, and discovered, for personal exploration and wondering, without any imposition of ready-made answers.

My guides have been a Pentecostal, a Lutheran and a Catholic sister. Each of them has led me through various paths towards a God who is significantly different from the one I brought with me.

Through many Bible meditations, prayers and conversations, I gradually met a God who was close, great, generous and who wants something with our lives. Something that is in harmony with who we deeply are. A God who wants to heal, challenge, co-operate and continue to create.²⁰

The gift I have received is a gift to pass on to others.

Ignatian spirituality helps us to mature; its purpose is to 'help souls' (cf. Ignatius)²¹ and to experience greater unity among ourselves. This is perhaps the decisive factor for the future of the church.

¹⁹ Notto Thelle, *Ditt ansikt søker jeg* [I Seek Your Face] (Stavanger: Oriens forlag, 1996), 71. Author's translation.

²⁰ May Bente Stuart Matre, *Luthersk Kirketidene* 03/2023: 71. Author's translation.

²¹ Cf. Martin, *Å finne Gud i alle ting*, 20. Author's translation.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON FREEDOM IN THE CHURCH

Christophe D'Aloisio*

Translated by Ingeborg-Marie Kvam

Originally a presentation at the XVII Orthodox Congress in Western Europe, this article,¹ slightly modified here, explores the notion of freedom within the Church. Taking as its starting point the Scriptures, especially Saint Paul, and fundamental tenets of Christian tradition and praxis common to all Christians, it reflects on the fundamental equality and unity of all humanity in Christ, and how this can be translated into ecclesial attitudes and structures. While its primary context is Orthodox, the conclusions drawn will be relevant for all Churches seeking to interact fruitfully with secular societies where the notion of freedom is held in high esteem.

Although the subject matter in question is of the greatest importance, it is necessary to formulate it properly, for the wording in which it was expressed in the programme of the Congress raises many questions.² The articulation of the notions 'Church' and 'freedom' is challenging because of the universal character of the aspiration to freedom. Indeed, this aspiration is a fundamental anthropological reality. Nevertheless, even if freedom is really something all humanity has in common, not all human beings—far from it—recognise themselves in, or as part of, the Church. Therefore, to the initial question: 'Are there modes of freedom which could be considered gifts the Church has to offer the

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¹ First published in French in *Contacts: Revue Française de l'Orthodoxie* LXXV No. 282 (April–June 2023): 186–207.

² The original title proposed for the presentation was 'Which Models of Freedom Can the Church Offer to the World?'

world?' a first reply would be a simple negative. At most, one could evoke the plurality of the ecclesial experience in time and space, inviting the interlocutor to distinguish between Christian theory and practice, and to envisage the latter only when it conforms to the former. I could stop here, but it is not without interest to seek to discern the boundaries of the articulation of Church and freedom, in theology and in Church history, so as to raise the awareness of Christians who desire to hear of those elements that can mar the testimony to freedom.

Return to the Gospel

To consider the Christian witness in its earliest form, it is indispensable to return to the person of Christ, as revealed in the Gospel. In fact, defining Christian witness means asking questions about the profound nature of the Church and the way she was first constituted. Of course, when we speak about the Gospel in our contemporary language, we first think of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. However, we must remember that 'the Gospel' is above all the actual content of the apostolic preaching, and that when the Apostle Paul, in particular, mentions the Gospel, he does not refer to one of the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, but to the preaching of the first disciples. The Gospel as Good News is preached not only in the four gospels but just as much in Acts, the epistles of Paul and the other New Testament writings. One can even add that the life of the first Christians was an incarnate witness to the Gospel, but we have relatively few sources available to study this in any depth.

Concerning freedom, one of the key '*evangelical*' or '*Gospel*' passages (*gospel* being used in the aforementioned sense) is found in the Letter to the Galatians. Paul is preaching and declares:

[F]or in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:26-28)

Having heard these words of the Apostle so often, Christians sometimes forget their liberating potential, both for themselves and for the world. Indeed, some two thousand years after this letter, can we say that, in today's world, differences of a national or religious character, differences in social status or between the sexes have been transcended? To the contrary, we observe that discrimination in these

areas persist and continue to be the object of struggle in almost every society in the world.

In the Churches, the challenge launched by this inclusive discourse proclaimed in the New Testament has not always been fully received. In these words from the Letter to the Galatians, the Gospel reveals that there exists a fundamental unity in human nature, a unity which is a ferment of freedom: to make room for Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female is a challenge in the life of each individual Christian as well as in the communal life of each Church. Within the Church community, even if one remains of Jewish or pagan descent, slave or free, man or woman, one is free in regard to the determinations these qualities may engender in society.

To really understand that it is liberation and human freedom Paul preaches to the Galatians, one must continue to read beyond this chapter, and look at a passage used by the Eastern liturgical tradition in a major celebration of the year, namely Christmas:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Gal. 4:4-7)

In other words, the Father sends the Spirit of His Son, in order that every person may say: 'I am a child of the Father, and so, I am liberated, delivered from all alienation, and so, I am free.' It is evident that this adoption by the Father represents a learning process which takes time for each and every one, sometimes an entire lifetime, but its goal is clearly established: freedom.

Saint Paul continues the proclamation of this evangelical goal a few verses later, in a formula which merits all our attention, as it can be translated in several ways, all equally worthy of reception and interest: 'For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Gal. 5:1).³ The first part of the verse

³ In Greek: Τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἡλευθέρωσεν· στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε. The English translation is from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised Catholic Edition). Other translations of this verse include: 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.' (New King James); 'Christ set us free, so that we should remain free. Stand firm, then, and do not

could also be translated as follows: 'By/through freedom Christ has set us free.' Freedom must be understood both as the goal of Christ's work, but also as the means, for Christ is the free being *par excellence*. Paul's exhortation to stand firm and not submit again to the yoke of slavery, here addressed to the Christians in Galatia but virtually to all the faithful, could be heard as an invitation to make freedom their point of orientation as they navigate their way through life. At the same time, it could also be heard as an invitation to consider themselves already free and to use their freedom as a means to arrive at their goal, without accepting any external alienating prescription, and so welcome Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as free, men as well as women, in the same assembly, all equal at the level of their being.

Paul teaches the exact same thing in another writing, one of the shortest books in the Bible—let us not forget that it is actually a whole library—the Letter to Philemon: Onesimus, Philemon's disobedient slave, had found refuge with Paul who had evangelised Philemon; Onesimus' journey of faith had led him to be baptised, like his master, by Paul. Consequently, the Apostle vigorously recommends that Philemon should receive him back not as a slave, and a disobedient one at that, threatened with heavy punitive sanctions, but as a brother, as his equal. Even more, Saint Paul reminds Philemon of his moral indebtedness in his regard: this slave master has received from Paul the light of eternal life, and is asked to consider the disadvantage of Onesimus' departure as being far outweighed by the greater good of having gained eternal life, and of being joined in this blessed state by a brother.

Apparent contradictions in Saint Paul's teaching

Alongside these words from the Letter to Philemon, we are aware of other occasions where the Apostle Paul was not so dismissive of the social order of his time. In other letters, the same Apostle urges Christian slaves not to rebel against their masters, but to obey them with docility as if their orders came from God. In the same way, he encourages wives to fear and obey their husbands,⁴ and the children to

let yourselves be fastened again to the yoke of slavery.' (New Jerusalem Bible); 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.' (New International Version).

⁴ The two verbs fear and obey, used in literal translations of the Bible, must, however, be understood within their historical context, and are thus softened.

respect the rights of the *pater familias*, an essential social institution in the Roman juridical order. Still, contrary to the Letter to Philemon, these exhortations are addressed to communities living in a given social and cultural context, not to an individual person.⁵

Within the intimacy of his relationship with Philemon, Paul exhorts him to draw the practical consequences of the fact that there is no ontological superiority or inferiority between Onesimus and himself. However, when the same Apostle (even if the identity of the author of certain texts attributed to Saint Paul is questioned by exegetes, as is normal in any scientific research, the theological authority of the New Testament writings need not be called into question for that reason) expounds, in a letter to a whole community his vision of the Gospel, that is the mystery of the Resurrection, he says that the heart of the preaching is the proclamation of the death of hate, the victory of love over death. The seed of liberation which is the Gospel leads to eternal life, that is the first and the principal objective and no intermediate objective however laudable, e.g. social justice, can attenuate the urgency to free humankind from the slavery of death, by definition a much more long-term slavery than any temporary slavery here on earth. In other words, the Apostle Paul holds vigorously that eternal life must be given precedence over the provisional life. The latter, whether it is relatively ephemeral or rather long judging by earthly standards, will not escape death, even when one is liberated from one's nationality, one's social determination or the characteristics of one's gender.

This discourse is not easy for all Christians to accept, in any day and age. Nevertheless, this hierarchisation of the two priorities is central in

To fear meant to respect. To obey meant to listen. Still, even these milder verbs should not be taken as actions normative for the wife only within a conjugal relationship. A marriage is always a reality dependent on the social context of the time. Today, one could rather say that in a healthy conjugal relationship, both spouses are invited to listen to each other and respect each other, based on and at the service of their mutual love. This would be a healthy pastoral interpretation of the Pauline teaching.

⁵ Cf. especially, 1 Cor. 11:3-16; 14:34-35; Eph. 5:21-6,4; Col. 3:18-4,1; 1 Tim. 2:8-3,1; 6:1-2; Tit. 2:1-10. The so-called 'pastoral' letters to Timothy and Titus, although at the narratological level they are addressed to a person, are still concerned with the communal reality of the Churches in which Timothy and Titus held a particular office. Thus, they cannot be compared to the personal note to Philemon.

the New Testament: first liberation from sin and death, and only secondarily, even if sometimes simultaneously, social and political freedoms. These considerations recall the words of Christ, a teaching given several times in the gospels:

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Matt. 10:37–39)⁶

To proclaim this total individualisation of the believing subject is a way of considering each human being as truly and irreducibly a unique person before God. Only on a secondary level is the person parent, child, master or slave. Yet, as history constantly confirms, Christians do not in general hate their parents and their close kin,⁷ despite the harsh teaching of Christ on this point. Therefore, neither should we despise the well-being of each person, social justice, and progress towards equal access of all to individual rights. One only needs to look at the active role often played by Christian communities in different societies. It seems that it is in the sphere of Christian civilisations, for example, that slavery and discrimination have been combatted most effectively, precisely because of this central element of the Christian teaching: the irreducibility of each human life in the eyes of God. It certainly cannot be ignored that Christian communities are flawed and can fail in their vocation, but the perpetuation within these communities of a word of judgement on their own existence is a pledge of renewal, at least potentially. By this principle, it is urgent to establish within the Christian communities, where the full ontological equality of all human beings can be realised without appearing as just another social revolution, the full application of the balanced vision of fundamental human unity.

Understood in this way Paul's words to Philemon, on the one hand, and those to the Churches of Corinth or Ephesus on the other, should

⁶ See also Mark 8:34–35; Luke 9:23–24; 14:26–27.

⁷ One might claim that the great monastic accounts present us with an exception to this assertion: in the lives of certain monks or nuns, disdain for one's family of origin is considered a moral norm. While recognising that this extreme spiritual way may find its place in the Church, we must still highlight that this is not the interpretation favoured by the Churches in their efforts to make the teaching of Jesus Christ heard.

not be seen as contradictory but as pastoral approaches inspired by wisdom in face of the realities of the world and the concept of progress. Paul was not a hypocrite. He did not bask in extravagant living conditions while at the same time preaching submission to others. In this, he is quite distinct from sinister characters like those implicitly criticised by Nietzsche in his *Genealogy of Morality*.

Freedom and ascesis

In Paul's writings, several elements show yet other pathways to reach freedom: the Apostle compares the journey of the faithful to a race or a combat. As it happens, in antiquity athletes were often fighters and vice versa.

In some Christian ritual traditions, especially the one generally known as Byzantine, which is used in all Orthodox Churches, language related to racing is used in the celebration of baptism to speak about the efforts to be made to combat death through participation in the death of Christ and in His resurrection. The baptismal ritual gives the impression that Jesus Christ is the first athlete who, having successfully completed the first and hardest stage of a race, passes the baton on to the newly baptised declaring, 'I have run this stage, now it is for you to run the rest.' By this analogy, at the same time athletic and martial, following Christ, that is, *living in Christ*, appears as a trial both physical and moral, a challenge where the Holy Spirit is invoked to fill in what is lacking in the baptised. Ascesis then, for that is what this is, becomes for the Christians not a quest for suffering that might result in beneficial virtue, but a spiritual experience, a communion with the Holy Spirit, in which the road is already an opening towards the final goal.

In the Church's two thousand-year-long history, testimonies of ascetic life have shown that freedom acquired in communion with the Holy Spirit can be lived out even in prisons or in societies oppressed by totalitarian regimes. The inner freedom proclaimed by those who live by the Spirit is described, in words attributed to the third century martyr Saint Lawrence, as a 'night without darkness', the night of duress imposed by a despotic power, but without darkness because of the presence of Christ through the Spirit. In the same way, during the unending twentieth century, the multitude of martyrs and confessors, men and women, in communist regimes have demonstrated the possibility of inner freedom despite the yoke of totalitarianism. Handcuffs and chains can only bind the body. An inner freedom,

stronger than the exterior oppression, liberated them in spite of everything.

Finally, to conclude this rather theoretical wandering among the different theological interpretations of the notion of freedom, two anthropological remarks must be made: on the anthropological determination constituted by fear of death, and on the capacity to believe and to doubt.

Fear of death is not a uniquely human characteristic. Empirically, it has been established that every living creature tends towards the desire to self-perpetuate and, if possible, survive. The human being is no exception. However, the fear of death which kept humans in bondage is defeated even before the hope of a general resurrection is realised. The Letter to the Hebrews boldly proclaims:

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. (Heb. 2:14-15)

This first liberation, although only *in potentia* and in hope, is offered to humans. No longer bound by fear of death, Christians can live differently after their conversion to Christ.

Still, to hope, believe, and doubt are faculties operating in the heart of each individual and each one implies the others. To learn to doubt well, which is essential in the life of every person journeying towards freedom, one must learn to trust, that is, to believe. Doubt makes it possible to test, to question, and then to responsibly account for something. To paraphrase Descartes, before one can affirm *dubito ergo sum*, one must be able to say *credo ergo dubito*. If one has the capacity to believe, one can doubt as well. Contrary to certain simplistic representations, commitment in faith does not imply blinding human reason. Rather, it is an exercise, an ascesis, of the faculties of belief and doubt, and so, the beginning of a journey to freedom.

These few remarks on the freedom in Christian faith are by no means exhaustive. They are destined to reconcile, if needs be, Christianity and freedom at a time when these terms are sometimes presented as opposites. We will now turn to more practical considerations connected to an ecclesiological analysis on the realisation of this experience of freedom in the life of the Churches.

Theological perspectives regarding the Church

When the Creed affirms a belief in the Church, one cannot but observe that this is quite a curious phenomenon. In this fundamental theological text, the Christian professes faith in the triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, which is hardly surprising. What is surprising is that the text continues with a specific article of faith in the Church, which, in the fourth century when the Creed was composed, was already far from the theoretical purity one finds in Acts.⁸

This article is incomprehensible unless we call on theology. History, political science, law, sociology and all the other human sciences can also shed light on the phenomenon of the Church, but each according to its own methodology. In ecclesiology, the Church is a sacramental reality, always related to and in union with the person of Christ. Nevertheless, just as the Christological dogma is a mystery requiring much theological investigation, so too the essence of the Church must be explored in different ways and defined with critical reason, as dogmatic theology does.

Indeed, in theology, to speak about the Church is above all to express a programme, a project. This is what the very term *Ecclesia* means. The task of ecclesiology is precisely to discern when the historical Church realises this programme and when she strays from the vocation that is hers. To be relevant, theological analysis cannot do without other disciplines such as history, law, sociology and other human sciences, but each should stay within its own field of expertise and its own logic.

To affirm that the notion of *Ecclesia* constitutes a programme is in fact to define the Church not in relation to its past, but in relation to its future and its final goal: in ecclesiology, the roots of the Church are eschatological. This does not exclude—on the contrary, it implies—that the Church must understand itself as being always under construction, always journeying towards what she is called to be, in an already inaugurated eschatology.

Understood as a living organism, moving and growing in history, the Church must take into account the apostolic teachings, especially those evoked earlier, in order to better realise her vocation in every era and in every cultural and regional context. To be able to adapt in this way, it is clear that one cannot accept that the Church be restricted to a

⁸ Even if this evidence, too, should be called into question, but that is not our purpose here.

religious doctrine. She must be free of all religion, in the sense which religions are commonly understood, that is, as a body of supposedly divinely revealed doctrines, whether true or not. Even the Old Testament Law, considered by Jews and Christians to be revealed by God, is no exception. Once it is fulfilled in the person of Jesus, although unchanged as a revealed text, its status changes. From the time of the first disciples, the burgeoning Christian movement rejected the Old Testament legal prescriptions in all that was extrinsic to the faith. This does not mean that the primitive Church encouraged murder, lies and other acts contrary to the Law. However, because Christ has come, the Old Testament is fulfilled, its accomplishment is not awaited anymore, which leads Paul to say: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us' (Gal. 3:13). The Apostle can claim this because Christ repeatedly showed his freedom vis-à-vis the external prescriptions of the Law, preferring an inner interpretation to a literal one, always inspired by the underlying principle of love.⁹

To make the new Israel, which is the Church, understand the radical newness of the Gospel, that is the Incarnation of the Word, Saint Paul went as far as writing: 'But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor' (Gal. 2:18). What he has torn down is the old Law, or rather a certain way of relating to the Law, for the Scriptures were never disregarded by the first Christians, contrary to what can be observed in some contemporary Orthodox communities.¹⁰ It is, then, really the very notion of traditional religion that the New Testament is destroying here. Theologically speaking, the Church is the end of religion.

From there, ecclesiological conclusions can be drawn. If the Apostle Paul, rightly, does not esteem himself authorised to institute new religious regulations for Christians because that would make him a transgressor of divine law, how much less are ecclesiastics of any kind or rank authorised to proclaim religious prescriptions dogmatically binding for all the faithful? To observe a day of rest, to sanctify time, honour one's parents, avoid murder, adultery, stealing, perjury etc. are

⁹ In particular the way he related to the Sabbath, but also his closeness to people considered ritually impure, like lepers, prostitutes, pagans or tax-collectors.

¹⁰ In our time, it happens that Orthodox pastors, be they priests or bishops, go as far as recommending their faithful not to get a Bible at home, but to prefer prayer books or books of popular piety.

all very good things to build a society, but these are not the commandments given by God to the members of the new Israel, for them to follow like a religious moral code. It is within the human heart, in freedom, that the movement towards doing good should begin. Observing with pious veneration paraliturgical church protocol which is so richly developed in Orthodoxy, as in many traditional Churches, or observing the monastic fast are both absolutely secondary to the fundamental freedom of the baptised. Theologically, no such thing can be imposed from outside, it cannot find meaning except as part of an inner spiritual movement. For the one who contemplates God made man in Jesus Christ, prescriptive religious systems, even Judaism or ecclesiastical rules and customs, are like secondary philosophies with no need for God. Such prescriptions are secondary to the revelation of Christ himself. We must note in passing that non-confessional atheist or agnostic communities can arise, in the mentality of their members, from the same ethical movement as the religious moral systems. All these experiences of human wisdom, whether they refer themselves to the transcendent or not, are valuable to life in society, and collaboration with communities of wisdom can be agreeable as well as constructive for the common good. Still, the finality of moral action is differently defined in the Gospel and therefore, in principle, in the Church.

External elements to be welcomed without delay

In principle the Church is really the *locus* for realising the good in freedom. Yet we must admit that historically the Church has often been a place of alienation rather than liberation. This is where the eschatological awareness of the Church, of each Church, of each ecclesial community, must come into play. Each community is called to be an island of freedom, measuring its present reality against its eschatological calling, in fidelity to tradition.

However, being faithful to tradition does not mean simply repeating the answers of tradition. It means learning to analyse the questions asked by history, in the way that tradition has done so, and responding according to present parameters. It is clear that the Church of the first centuries, in the great freedom that was hers, learnt to understand the historical and cultural elements of her environment in three different ways. Of course, we follow here a basic typology which must be nuanced by practice. The first type of historical or cultural elements are those which, based on fundamental theological principles, are

unacceptable for the ecclesial conscience. For example, one can think of philosophical systems where humans are classified according to different ontological categories or hierarchical castes. Elements of this kind cannot be assimilated into life in Christ and thus have no place in the Church.

A second type of elements of culture and human wisdom encountered by the Church is represented by experiences which are wholly compatible with the divine humanity proclaimed in Christology. We can think of the Egyptian and Greek iconographic tradition, alien to the Old Testament, or certain forms of music or even Greek dramaturgy. These techniques, these experiences, coming from traditions of wisdom other than the Old Testament heritage, have been adopted, assimilated, included and practised by the Churches around the Mediterranean, where they have been kept alive and valued.

Finally, a third type of elements can be encountered in history which have often proved acceptable to the Church. The ecclesial attitude towards these consists in integrating exterior elements through transformation, one 'baptises' them, to make them compatible with the ecclesial body. One notable example is the conciliar or synodal tradition.¹¹ In the ecclesial understanding it is undeniable that the Church is synodal in its primary constitution, that is, even before the first council. Elements of synodality can be found in the way Jewish communities functioned in the Old Testament, but also in Greek and Roman societies. The Church has synthesised these traditions and, according to the times and exterior pressures—for civil authorities have played an important role in the conciliar practice of the Churches from the fourth century until today—she has chosen aspects and practices from each of these methods. The heart of the principle of ecclesial synodality was preserved, no matter which external practice served as the concrete model. This heart of the principle of synodality is the co-responsibility of all the Church's members. This novelty of the Gospel had to be cultivated, be that in the framework of a council resembling a Greek *koinon*, a Roman *concilium provinciae* or any other form of deliberative assembly. Alongside the principle of the co-responsibility of all, binding all to collaborate and prohibiting any Christian from pointing his or her finger at the Church without first pointing it at him

¹¹ In this presentation, we will consider the terms *synod* and *council*, as well as their corollary adjectives (*synodal*, *conciliar*) to be more or less synonymous.

or herself, stands another major conciliar principle: the recognition of the equal dignity of all the Church's members.

Equal dignity of all does not mean that it is impossible to distinguish different functions within the ecclesial assembly. This is even indispensable for the structuring and growth of the community. Certain functions appeared so essential to the perpetuation of the Church in history that they have been canonised by the ecclesial mind. We think here primarily of pastoral functions.¹² In his famous hymn to love,¹³ Saint Paul lists a series of functions, but insists forcefully that love surpasses them all. Not sentimental love in the romantic understanding of the term, but a love like the one Christ has for each person, total love and gift of self. Moved by love, the holder of any ecclesiastical office cannot consider himself, or be considered, to be of higher dignity than other members of the Church. In the same way, all members of a family are equal, even if some take on certain tasks with regard to others.

The equal dignity of all, proclaimed by the Church from the very beginnings of her historical existence, has not always been fully realised within the Christian communities. In our time and in our regions, however, this conviction of equality is now firmly established. It is crucial, therefore, for the Church to return to this original impulse and fully put it into practice.

Separation of powers in Eastern Christianity

Many conclusions can be drawn from the abovementioned principles of the co-responsibility of all, the equal dignity of all, and the distinction of different functions structuring the body of the Church. For their proper functioning, however, there is still a need to discern and test other elements of modern contemporary science that could serve the Church's structures and help her give a better witness to the hope that is in her, in accordance with the words of the Apostle Peter.

At the levels of administration and governance, the Church would profit from testing her ways of functioning against the discoveries of

¹² Here I prefer the title pastor, since, strictly speaking, it is a generic term covering a larger number of notions than those included in the ministries of bishop or priest today. The reader can find more ample discussion of this topic in my *Institutions ecclésiales et ministères chez Nicolas Afanassieff* (Louvain: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2020).

¹³ 1 Cor. 12:27–13:13. Coincidentally, this passage was read at the Congress in Merville, on the day of this presentation.

contemporary human sciences concerning participative management. To understand this necessity, one only needs to remember that before the Renaissance the same person could be both priest and doctor, whereas in our time, the understanding of medicine and pastoral care has changed and the respective fields of action of each of the two is now recognised. Medicine has known considerable development from the first, to the fifteenth and then to the twenty-first century. Just as it would be inconceivable today that a priest would claim a medical expertise superior to the doctor's when it comes to treating a medical condition, it should surprise us that Churches are governed without reference to scientific progress within the domain of administration and group management. This is especially true when the persons who are given these functions in the Church are generally not chosen because of their management skills.

Here, the Church of the first century appears very progressive in its historical context. She integrated foreign elements so as to enhance her internal functioning as well as her external witness. This is what should be considered the teaching of tradition concerning the way to respond to challenges.

Among the universally accepted evolutions that the Churches should without doubt integrate in depth into their modes of functioning, the principle of separation of powers holds a central place. This principle is applicable not only to political systems, but also to more banal activities such as sports games. No soccer player would accept that a member of the opposite team should be player and referee in the same match. Yet in the Church this is often the way things are organised. Certain ecclesiastical officials accumulate functions which in practice have become powers and which, in theory, should mutually monitor each other. Montesquieu is certainly no Church Father, but Christianity would do well to follow some of his insights.

So, both on the local and the global level of the Church, it would be beneficial to separate, on the one hand, the persons capable of moderating a deliberative process and, on the other, those who manage finances, those who monitor financial management etc. In the domain of discipline and law, it is striking that in the Orthodox Church, the same person is often in charge of conducting an inquiry and judging the matter. Even if very diverse forms of ecclesiastical tribunals exist, most of them are archaic, judging by humanity's contemporary standards. In today's world, justice should be rendered according to imperatives of

equity, and yet, in the majority of our ecclesial communities, the very notion of a fair trial remains an unexplored concept.

As for the confusion between the legislative, the executive and the judicial, it is more often than not observed *mutatis mutandis* (as these designations are not generally used to describe internal functions in Eastern tradition). An example is the current crisis involving the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Russia, a crisis in which the Christians of Ukraine are the first victims and in which all the Orthodox everywhere seem to become hostages. One of the parties, the Patriarchate of Moscow, crossed a red line by instrumentalising the Eucharist,¹⁴ but the other, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, finds itself judge in its own case because it is called into question precisely in its coordinating role, and does not seem to worry about the cracks in the unity of the Orthodox communion of Churches.¹⁵

Who started the fight? Is this not like asking which came first, the chicken or the egg? An in-depth examination is needed. Still, the most elementary of human wisdom today would suggest seeking mediation by a third party, a party not directly involved in the conflict, a conflict which is prolonged in a dangerous way within Orthodoxy. All parents experience similar situations in the upbringing of their children. In certain complex quarrels, it is difficult to see who is in the right, even difficult to see if anyone is in the right. The Church has both intellectual and spiritual resources to neutralise the explosive potential in this situation, but for this to happen, the two parties must each take a step to the side to create an open space for dialogue.

¹⁴ Even if one could definitively see in the surprising rehabilitation of Filaret Denysenko and Makariy Maletych issues directly connected to the Eucharist.

¹⁵ It is difficult to forget the major ecclesiological event of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's declaration during a pastoral visit to America in October 2021, commenting on the Russian Church's rupture of eucharistic communion with him: '*Skasila mou!*', which could be translated as 'Couldn't care less!' (<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/561563053/vartholomaios-skasila-moy-poy-den-me-mnimoneyei-to-rosiko-patriarcheio/>, accessed on 30 July 2024). Since then, Patriarch Bartholomew has never recanted and this declaration did not deviate from earlier or later declarations by the same Patriarch in anything other than its mode of expression. Coming from the person who seeks to be the guardian of unity, this raises questions for the ecclesial conscience.

The mode of conflict resolution on the world-wide scale is not operative in the Orthodox Church for the simple reason that global communication among Orthodox leaders is relatively recent, at least in its contemporary form. At the moment, there is no possibility of ruling in the conflict between Moscow and Constantinople, as no one is equipped with a whistle to signal the end of the match, or rather, the one holding the whistle is one of the players on the field. As long as he still wants to play, why signal the end of the game? There is nothing sacred behind this problem. Just as one cannot dispose of both the ball and the whistle in a soccer match, one cannot have one's role as coordinator of the relations between the Churches called into question and at the same time consider oneself the sole institution capable of convoking a meeting of the Orthodox authorities. In the era called the Byzantine, a similar conflict would have been sorted out rapidly, for better or for worse, by the imperial power, and no Patriarch would have been able to go against the ruler's will. The methodological solutions of contemporary human sciences are certainly more just and respectful of the sensibilities of all. It would be well worth calling on them to get out of the blocked situation causing gangrene in the body of the Orthodox Church for too long.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms

The recognition of the equal dignity of each person is a fundamental tenet of Christian anthropology, but it must be admitted that Orthodoxy is not a pioneer when it comes to acknowledging the fundamental rights of the individual. The fact that the teaching on human rights is of Western origin, while Orthodoxy is only beginning to establish itself in this part of the world, should not hinder Orthodox communities from welcoming such fundamental freedoms as are set down, above all, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To be coherent, the Orthodox Church should not deny these, but rather go beyond human rights as they are generally presented.

If the equal dignity of each person is proclaimed by the human rights, the Church should add, not only the purely physical and external respect for individuals but even, and especially, love for each one of them, something which the teaching on human rights does not reckon with. To be credible, Christianity must go far beyond external respect, and love persons, getting to know them, discovering their culture, respecting their community and their education.

Animated by a spirit of synodality, which is presupposed by the notion of catholicity—a theme to be revisited in a different context—the Church must acknowledge the phenomenon of collective intelligence, which is already there within her, but not named as such. This phenomenon must be seen as a possible way out of the monarchical mindset weighing down many a vital process in the Church. At this level, a distinction between collegiality and collective intelligence is imperative.

Understanding evil differently

Finally, we must warn against two further pitfalls threatening the credibility of the contemporary Church's witness to freedom: the banalisation of evil and the presumption of forgiveness.

Given the interconnection of several timelines in the life of the Church, historical time common to all and the *eschaton* inaugurated by the Resurrection, the Church herself, in and through her members, sometimes ends up approving certain evils, on the pretext that they are only provisional in the perspective of eternal life. Such banalisation of evil, even a transitory evil, is a grave betrayal of the testimony of freedom, especially if one is in a position of authority. What comes to mind is, of course, the abuse of minors or vulnerable persons, but one can also think of this banalisation of evil in relation to environmental issues. Too often, Christians have considered that because nature is not divine, they are free to ruin it, and God almighty will repair it.¹⁶ With a eucharistic posture vis-à-vis all of creation, the environment is a place of poetic dialogue between God and humanity, and between human beings.

The final trap to avoid in order to give witness to the world regarding freedom in the Church, still in connection with evil, is the presumption of forgiveness. To put it simply, premeditated evil is not good. The fact that we can hope for universal forgiveness cannot be a pretext for injustice. This is a perverted vision of freedom. Of course, God can forgive, other people can forgive, but ethical standards should be kept as high as possible for each and every one.

The present discussion does not in any way pretend to exhaust the theme of 'Church and freedom'. Its aim was to suggest a point of

¹⁶ Likewise, although this is not the main topic of this presentation, one sometimes encounters the divinisation—or at least the sacralisation—of things that should not be so considered, e.g. certain ecclesiastical structures.

reference, the Gospel, in order to enable a more ecclesiological understanding of the ecclesial reality, taking into consideration the most fundamental aspirations to freedom present in each human being.

Obviously, each and every Christian community could and should proceed to a transparent assessment of its inner functioning in the light of the Gospel and of the irrefutable humanist principles of contemporary societies. Finding a good balance between the historical legacy of a given Church and the wisdom expressed outside her traditional boundaries is an urgent task for the people of God all over the world.

So far, we have not entered into considerations of ecumenical theology proper—although that should be another urgent commitment for ecclesialologists. Indeed, being Christ's witness today implies that we all accept to give an account of our respective church experiences to each other, trying to know what a fellow Christian from another tradition is living and making it our own, in a spirit of love and fellowship.

DISCOVERING A PROMISING ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE IN INDIA: THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE MALANKARA ORTHODOX CHURCHES

Hyacinthe Destivelle*

This article presents a little known, but very fruitful ecumenical dialogue: the one between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Churches in India. After briefly retracing the history of the Malankara Orthodox Churches and their rapprochement with the Catholic Church, the author presents the on-going relations with both the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Malankara (Jacobite) Syrian Orthodox Church, considering four characteristics the two dialogues have in common, and how these can be an example for other Christian Churches.

In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has engaged in three significant theological dialogues at the international level with the Orthodox Churches. These include a dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Church as a whole, initiated in 1980; a dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, started in 2004, which incorporates the bilateral dialogue with the Coptic Church, opened in 1973; and a dialogue with the Assyrian Church of the East, launched in 1994. It is often overlooked in this presentation that another noteworthy dialogue was initiated towards the end of the 1980s with the Malankara Orthodox Churches. Yet, this unique dialogue has yielded remarkable results and could serve as an inspiration for other ecumenical dialogues. It is this hitherto little-known dialogue that we would like to present briefly. Following an overview of the Oriental Orthodox Churches of South India and their rapprochement with the Catholic Church following Vatican II, we will proceed to describe the principal outcomes of the dialogue and their defining characteristics.

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Saint Thomas Christians

The Orthodox Churches of South India are part of the tradition of the 'Saint Thomas Christians', who have been present since the Apostolic Age on the southwest coast of India, the Malabar Coast, and in what is now the State of Kerala. These Christians, who today represent approximately eight million believers belonging to various churches,¹ trace their origins back to the preaching of the Apostle St Thomas. Of Syriac tradition, and also known locally as 'Mar Thoma Nasrani' (a term probably derived from Nazareni), they were originally in full communion with the Catholicosate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, in Mesopotamia, the seat of the Church of the East. In the early centuries, it was this Syro-Eastern Church of Persia, distinguished by a profound missionary zeal, that sent bishops to India with the purpose of ordaining deacons and priests. From at least the eighth century (some sources cite the fifth century), the primate of the Indian Church was a metropolitan of the Church of the East, with autonomous responsibility for its spiritual care. The temporal administration was entrusted to an Indian priest with the title 'Archdeacon of all India'.

The Portuguese colonisation of the region at the end of the fifteenth century resulted in the union of the Christians of St Thomas with Rome (Synod of Diamper, 1599) within the Padroado, which entailed their forced Latinisation. This dependence was gradually rejected by a part of the Nasrani, resulting in various splits among them, the consequences of which are still felt today. A pivotal event occurred on 3 January 1653 in Mattancherry (a district of Cochin), known as the 'Coonan Cross Oath', when thousands of St Thomas Christians collectively resolved to no longer submit to the authority of the Latin archbishop. They were unable to re-establish communion with the Church of the East, which had previously been severed. In 1665,

¹ There are seven main Churches belonging to the family of St Thomas Christians: *Eastern Catholic*: Syro-Malabar Church (East Syriac rite), Syro-Malankara Catholic Church (Syro-Antiochene rite); *Oriental Orthodox*: Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (Syro-Antiochene rite), Malankara (Jacobite) Syrian-Orthodox Church (Syro-Antiochene rite) and also (although not part of the Oriental Orthodox family) Chaldean Syrian Church (part of the Assyrian Church of the East—East Syriac rite); *Oriental Reformed*: Mar Thomas Syrian Church (Syro-Antiochene rite); St Thomas Evangelical Church of India (Syro-Antiochene rite).

however, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch agreed to send a bishop to lead them, on the condition that they accept the Syro-Antiochene liturgical and theological traditions (in particular, the Council of Ephesus, which was not received by the Persian Church). This group was eventually received into the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch as an autonomous Church, the Syro-Malankara Church, while the Christians who remained faithful to Rome formed the Syro-Malabar Church, with a Syro-Eastern rite.

A further separation occurred in 1912, when a part of the Syro-Malankara Church in communion with the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch declared itself autocephalous, forming the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, with its own Catholicos (a term used from antiquity to designate certain church leaders outside the Roman Empire), with the official title of Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan. Presided over today by His Holiness Catholicos Mathews III, this independent Church belongs to the family of Oriental Orthodox Churches (of Coptic-Ethiopian, Syriac and Armenian traditions), with which it is in full communion. The Church currently has approximately 2.5 million faithful—many of whom reside in the diaspora—in 30 dioceses, with 32 bishops, and over 1700 priests. Additionally, it oversees dozens of monasteries, or ‘dayras’ (or ‘ashrams’), and runs numerous higher education institutions, schools and hospitals in Kerala.

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church should not be confused with the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, also known as the ‘Jacobite Syrian Christian Church’, which remained part of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch with the autonomous status of a ‘Maphrianate’. This Church also has its own Maphrian/Catholicos, who bears the title of the Catholicos of the East—currently His Beatitude Catholicos Mor Baselios Thomas I—but recognises the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East as its supreme authority—currently His Holiness Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II. This Church comprises around 1.2 million faithful (representing the majority of the faithful of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch), divided into 12 dioceses in Kerala, with 31 bishops. The Jacobite Church, which has approximately 1200 priests, owns around 35 monasteries, 50 schools providing primary to higher secondary education, and 15 colleges offering university-level education.

Although these two Malankara Churches are in full communion within the same family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, there have been tensions between them, especially concerning the ownership of church property. It should also be noted that in 1930, a part of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church under the leadership of Mar Ivanios Geevarghese joined the Catholic Church, forming the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, of Syro-Antiochene tradition, distinct from the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, which follows the East Syriac or Chaldean liturgical tradition.

Rapprochement in the wake of Vatican II

After centuries of separation and mistrust nurtured by the wounds of memory, the rapprochement between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches of South India commenced in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council.

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church sent prominent observers to the Council, including Revd K. Philipose, later Metropolitan Mar Theophilos Verghese; Revd Paul Verghese, who became Metropolitan Mar Gregorios; and Revd C.T. Eapen, a well-known Malankara Orthodox theologian. The participation of these observers played a pivotal role in the re-establishment of fraternal relations. In December 1964, the pilgrimage of Pope Paul VI to India provided the occasion for the first meeting between a Pope and a Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Mar Baselios Augen I (1964–1975), in Bombay. On 2–5 June 1983, the first official visit to Rome by a Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Mar Baselios Marthoma Mathews I (1975–1991), took place. During his meeting with Pope John Paul II the Catholicos proposed the establishment of a commission with the objective of fostering dialogue and collaboration.² The same Catholicos received Pope John Paul II three years later, on 8 February 1986, at Mar Elias Cathedral in Kottayam. During the meeting Pope John Paul II made the following declaration:

With you I desire that our Churches may soon find effective ways of resolving the urgent pastoral problems that face us, and that we may progress together in brotherly love and in our theological dialogue, for it is by these means that reconciliation among Christians and reconciliation in the world can come about. I can assure you that the

² Address of Catholicos Mar Baselios Marthoma Mathews I to John Paul II, 3 June 1983, *Information Service [IS]* 52 (1983/III), 74–75.

Catholic Church, with the commitment she made at the Second Vatican Council, is ready to participate fully in this enterprise.³

The relationship between the Catholic Church and the Malankara (Jacobite) Syrian Orthodox Church developed as part of the broader process of rapprochement with the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. In the aftermath of the Council, the Pro Oriente foundation in Vienna initiated informal theological dialogues with some Oriental Orthodox Churches, particularly those of Syriac tradition. These conversations culminated in 1971 with the drafting of what is known as the 'Vienna Formula',⁴ which established the framework for official joint Christological declarations with the various Oriental Orthodox Churches. The joint Christological declaration signed in 1971 by Pope Paul VI and the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mor Ignatius Jacob III was the first statement of this type. The Pope and the Patriarch asserted that

there is no difference in the faith they profess concerning the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become really man, even if over the centuries, difficulties have arisen out of the different theological expressions by which this faith was expressed.⁵

In 1984, a new declaration between Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas deepened this affirmation of the identity of faith and complemented it with a pastoral agreement allowing the faithful to receive, in certain circumstances, the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing of the sick in either Church.⁶ This agreement, the

³ Address of John Paul II to Mar Baselios Marthoma Mathews I, 8 February 1986, Kottayam, *IS* 60 (1986/I-II), 13–14.

⁴ The formula avoided the use of the word 'nature': 'We believe that our Lord and Saviour, Jesus-Christ, God the Son Incarnate; perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity. His divinity was not separated from his humanity, for a single moment, nor for a twinkling of an eye. His humanity is one with his divinity, without commixtion, without confusion, without division, without separation', *First non-official consultations between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches organized by the Foundation Pro Oriente, Vienna, September 7–12, 1971*, in *Document on Unity in Faith between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church*, Pro Oriente XXXVI, P. Hofrichter–J. Marte, eds (Tyrolia Verlag: Innsbruck-Wien, 2013), 13.

⁵ Common declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Mor Ignatius Jacob III, 27 October 1971, *IS* 16 (1972/2), 5.

⁶ Common declaration of Pope John Paul II and Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, 23 June 1984, *IS* 55 (1984/II–III), 61–63.

inaugural bilateral pastoral agreement between the Catholic Church and another Church, also encompassed the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church as part of the Antiochian Patriarchate. During his visit to Rome in 1984, Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas was accompanied by the Catholicos of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, Mar Baselios Paulose II (1975–1996). The same Catholicos met Pope John Paul II two years later, on 7 February 1986, in Cochin. During this meeting Pope John Paul II made the following declaration: 'It is my hope that shortly our Church will find new and effective means of going forward together in theological dialogue and in pastoral collaboration'.⁷

Dialogue with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

In this context, two parallel joint commissions for dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Churches were established at the end of the 1980s.⁸ The first dialogue commission was set up on 27 May 1988 with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. At its inaugural meeting in Kottayam in October 1989, the commission delineated its objective as follows: '(a) to promote full unity and communion between the two Churches; (b) to find mutually acceptable pastoral solutions to problems which cause friction and tension between the two Churches'.⁹

At this first meeting of the commission, a joint Christological declaration was agreed upon, which was subsequently endorsed by Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Mathews I and published on Pentecost 1990. This statement is frequently regarded as one of the most accomplished and well-written of all Christological agreements between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The document asserts that the content of our faith in the mystery of the Incarnate Word is 'the same', even if 'in formulating that content in the course of history, however, differences have arisen, in terminology and emphasis'. In particularly remarkable terms, the declaration states that

these differences are such that can co-exist in the same communion and therefore need not and should not divide us, especially when we proclaim

⁷ Address of John Paul II to Mar Basilios Paulose II, Cochin (India), 7 February 1986, *IS* 60 (1986/I–II), 12–13.

⁸ All reports and statements of the commissions are published in *Information Service* (now *Acta Oecumenica*) and are available on the website of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, www.christianunity.va.

⁹ See *IS* 72 (1990/I), 2–3.

Him [God] to our brothers and sisters in the world in terms which they can more easily understand.¹⁰

The inclusion of concern for kerygma in the Christological declaration evidences the pastoral attention of the dialogue commission from its inception, even in the context of addressing profound theological issues.

Since its inception, the Joint International Commission has convened in Kerala almost annually (with the exception of 2007, 2008, 2020 and 2021), hosted alternately by the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, co-chaired on the Catholic side by the Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity [DPCU]. A total of 31 meetings was held, with each concluding with a report that was subsequently approved before the following session and published. The discussions, initiated by presentations by members of the commission, focused on four themes simultaneously, and at times resulted in joint statements or agreements, which were occasionally endorsed by ecclesial authorities.¹¹

A first theme of the discussions has been the search for a *common reading of the history* of the Church in Kerala, both before and after the arrival of the Portuguese colonisers. This endeavour is driven by the aspiration to facilitate a process of 'healing of memory'. In 1999, these reflections resulted in the publication of a 'Statement on the Synod of Diamper' (A.D. 1599), a synthesis of the commission's reflections on the occasion of the fourth centenary of this event.¹² Other reflections were directed to the Coonan Cross Oath (1653), as well as liturgical developments in the Churches of St Thomas from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. A collection of documents on the history of Christianity in India, entitled *Source Book on Ecclesiastical History*, is currently being finalised and is scheduled for publication imminently.

The second topic of the dialogue is *ecclesiology*. The objective is to establish a shared understanding of '*communio ecclesiology*' as a

¹⁰ Declaration of the Joint International Commission between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, published on 3 June 1990, *IS* 73 (1990/II), 39.

¹¹ For the first decade of the dialogue, all the papers and reports were published in *Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Papers and Joint Statements. 1989–2000*, X. Koodapuzha–J. Panicker, eds, Kottayam, 2001.

¹² *IS* 102 (1999/IV), 251–252.

framework for the restoration of full communion. Numerous papers and exchanges were dedicated to the examination of a multitude of themes, including episcopacy, primacy and conciliarity, the Petrine ministry, the concept of unity in diversity, the relationship between the local Church and the universal Church, *communicatio in sacris*, and the principle of *oikonomia*. Nevertheless, no joint declaration has been published on the subject.

The third theme for discussion is that of *common witness*. Over the years, the Joint Commission has encouraged the implementation of local joint initiatives in various areas. These have included seminars for clerics or religious, sessions for married people, joint pilgrimages, initiatives in the social field, and so forth. In 1999, the commission published a 'Press release on attacks against Christians', in which it urged the Indian authorities to take action to prevent acts of violence against Christians in the country.¹³ Four years later, in 2003, the commission published an 'Agreed Statement on Proselytism' with the intention of fostering greater mutual understanding and respect at the local level.¹⁴ On several occasions, the challenges posed by Pentecostal movements and new Christian churches have been the subject of papers and discussions. Linked to this theme of common witness, the commission has compiled an anthology of patristic texts, entitled *Common Patristic Readings for 365 days*, also scheduled for publication imminently.

Finally, the dialogue has yielded encouraging results in a fourth area, namely *collaboration in the pastoral field*. In 2010, significant agreements were reached and subsequently endorsed by the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC) and the Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. One agreement concerns the sharing of sacred places, specifically church buildings and cemeteries, as outlined in the 'Agreement on the sharing of sacred place'. The other agreement, called 'Statement on the sharing of the anointing of the sick', allows for the possibility of receiving the sacrament of the anointing of the sick (called in Malayalam 'Rogikalude Thailaabhishekam' or 'Rogheelepana koodasha'), giving the faithful the possibility, in certain circumstances,

¹³ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁴ IS 114 (2003/IV), 196.

to receive this sacrament in either Church.¹⁵ Guidelines on pastoral cooperation are currently being drafted.

It is pertinent to note that a draft agreement on mixed marriages has been under discussion since the inception of the commission. In 1990, the commission published an 'Interim Report on Marriage',¹⁶ and several draft agreements on this subject have been prepared by the commission but have never been approved by the competent Church authorities.

A similar situation pertains to a draft agreement on the administration and reception of the Eucharist and penance in extraordinary situations. Despite the existence of provisions for such an agreement in both Catholic canon law and the Synodal decisions of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of February 1977, no finalised agreement concerning the sharing of these sacraments has been reached. As early as 1990, an 'Interim Report on Ecclesial Eucharistic Communion' was adopted and published by the commission, but never completed.¹⁷ In 2013, the commission drafted a 'Proposed Statement on the Administration and Reception of the Holy Eucharist and Holy Confession in Extraordinary Situations', which was signed by the two co-chairs but never confirmed.

Dialogue with the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church

In parallel with the ongoing dialogue with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, a joint dialogue commission was established by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church. A preliminary meeting was convened in December 1990 in Kottayam, bringing together approximatively ten representatives from each side. Since that time, like the other bilateral dialogue, the Joint International Commission for dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church has convened almost annually in Kerala, with alternate hosting responsibilities between the Catholic side (typically at the Spirituality Centre of the Syro-Malabar Church) and by the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church. 24 meetings were held, somewhat less than the 31 meetings of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

¹⁵ *IS* 135 (2010/III–IV), 132–133.

¹⁶ *IS* 77 (1991/II), 104–105.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105–106.

The commission has concentrated on the same themes as the dialogue with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (history of the Church in India, ecclesiology, common witness and pastoral collaboration), with a particular focus on pastoral collaboration, ecclesiology and common witness.

With regard to *pastoral and sacramental collaboration*, an important *Agreement on inter-church marriages* was approved by the commission in December 1993 and, following confirmation by the ecclesiastical authorities, published in January 1994, accompanied by *pastoral guidelines*.¹⁸ This agreement facilitates the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony in either Church, thereby 'allowing the bride/bridegroom the right and freedom to remain in her/his own ecclesial communion'. Furthermore, the agreement acknowledges the possibility for them and their families to participate in the Eucharist in the church where the marriage is celebrated, as well as in other circumstances. In 2011, a pastoral agreement was signed on the sharing of sacred places, namely on churches and cemeteries, accompanied by pastoral guidelines ('Agreement on the sharing of sacred place').¹⁹ A project of pastoral guidelines on ecumenical collaboration in pastoral care in universities and hospital chaplaincies is currently under discussion.

In the field of *ecclesiology*, numerous papers and debates were devoted to themes such as the Church as communion, the Petrine ministry, the local and universal Church, and the ecclesiology of the Syriac Fathers, among others. In 2002, the commission adopted an interesting declaration entitled 'The Episcopate and the Petrine Ministry'. This declaration recognised that Peter and his successors have a 'ministry of unity', namely a 'Petrine ministry', exercised in the Catholic Church by the Bishop of Rome and in the Syrian Orthodox Church by the Patriarch of Antioch.²⁰

With regard to the issue of *common witness*, the commission put forward a number of proposals. At its meeting in 2002, it proposed increased collaboration in spiritual and social fields. This included the organisation of joint forums for Bible teaching, the promotion of the common traditions of all St Thomas Christians, the establishment of joint programmes in the fields of education, family life, social assistance

¹⁸ IS 84 (1993/III-IV), 158-161.

¹⁹ IS 138 (2011/IV), 89.

²⁰ This declaration was published only in 2010: IS 135 (2010/III-IV), 131-132.

and development, and the promotion of joint prayer on particular occasions affecting the lives of individuals, families and society.²¹

A chronological analysis of the documents adopted and published reveals that the dialogue commission with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, in addition to the annual reports, led to the adoption of a Christological declaration approved by the heads of Church (1990), two interim reports on marriage and Eucharistic communion (1990), two joint statements on the Synod of Diamper (1999) and proselytism (2003), two pastoral agreements on the sharing of sacred places (2010) and the sacrament of the anointing of the sick (2010), endorsed by the ecclesial authorities. In turn, the dialogue commission with the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church has adopted three pastoral agreements on mixed marriages and accompanying guidelines (1994) and on sharing of sacred places (2010), both endorsed by ecclesial authorities, and has produced an ecclesiological declaration on the Petrine ministry (2002).

Four common characteristics

Beyond the documents adopted, it can be stated that the dialogues with the Malankara Orthodox Churches, in comparison with the other dialogues promoted by the DPCU, are original in four respects. Firstly, they are *bilateral dialogues*, whereas the DPCU usually promotes multilateral dialogues with the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. This is particularly the case since the establishment in 2003 of a multilateral Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, including the two Malankara Orthodox Churches. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church is represented in the multilateral commission by two delegates, while the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church is represented by a delegate who participates alongside another representative of the Antiochian Patriarchate. This multilateral commission has already published three documents, the first in 2009 on 'The Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church', the second in 2015 on 'The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion Today' and the third in 2022 on 'The Sacraments in the Life of the Church'. The establishment of this multilateral commission did not result in the dissolution of the

²¹ IS 111 (2002/IV), 226.

bilateral commissions with the Malankara Orthodox Churches. It can be posited that the different commissions, both multilateral and bilateral, mutually reinforce and enrich each other, even if some further improvements could be made.

A second peculiarity of these commissions is their *local* character. In general, the DPCU sponsors dialogues at the international level, with participants from different countries and meeting places that change from year to year. It is accurate to state that the dialogue commissions with the Malankara Orthodox Churches are designated as 'international' due to the involvement of the Holy See. Nevertheless, they are firmly anchored in the local context of Kerala, with all members hailing from this region. This is undoubtedly one of the key strengths of these dialogues. As Pope Francis observed when he received the members of the multilateral dialogue with the whole family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in 2022, 'ecumenism already exists as a primarily *local* reality'. 'Many of the faithful,' he stated, 'already experience *the ecumenism of life* in the midst of their families, their work and their daily encounters'. This is why, he further stated,

[t]heological ecumenism must therefore reflect not only on the dogmatic differences that emerged in the past, but also on the present experience of our faithful. In other words, the *dialogue of doctrine* must be theologically adapted to the *dialogue of life* that develops in the local, everyday relations between our Churches; these constitute a genuine *locus* or source of theology.²²

A third common feature of these dialogues is their multi-disciplinary nature. Rather than focusing solely on theoretical and abstract theological discussions, they jointly re-read history in order to heal memories, and engage the Churches in processes of common witness and pastoral collaboration. This could serve as an example for other dialogues that are sometimes overly confined to theological discussions that have little relevance to the lives of the faithful and are, therefore, poorly received locally.

The fourth defining characteristic of the dialogues with the Malankara Orthodox Churches is that they are fundamentally *pastoral* in nature. It is noteworthy that the official titles of these commissions,

²² Pope Francis, Address to the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, 23 June 2022, *Acta Ecumenica* [AEC] 4/I (2022), 18–19.

in contrast to those with the Eastern or Oriental Orthodox Churches, do not include the word 'theological'. This peculiarity is particularly evident in the context of the establishment of the multilateral 'Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches', which is specifically dedicated to theological dialogue. The latest document of the multilateral commission, on the sacraments, notes the pastoral character of the Malankara dialogues. Its third chapter, entitled 'Pastoral Conclusions', dedicates two paragraphs to the bilateral dialogues between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Churches, emphasising their primarily pastoral dimension. Referring to them, the chapter concludes:

These many and varied projects of common study and pastoral collaboration can be an effective factor in developing a wider ecumenical awareness among the clergy and the faithful and could be a source of inspiration for other models of closer relations between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.²³

In June 2022, receiving the same multilateral commission, Pope Francis also emphasised that 'ecumenism always has a *pastoral* character' and noted that 'Among our Churches that share apostolic succession, the broad consensus noted by your Commission, not only on baptism but also on the other sacraments, should encourage us to develop more fully a pastoral ecumenism'. The Pope provided two examples of previous agreements: the first was the 1984 declaration between Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas; the second was the 1994 agreement on mixed marriages with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. He observed that:

All this was made possible by looking to the concrete life of the members of the People of God and to their welfare, which is greater than ideas and historic divergences, and to the importance that no one be left without the means of grace.

Pope Francis called for the multiplication of such pastoral agreements:

Now, on the basis of the theological consensus noted by your Commission, would it not be possible to extend and multiply such

²³ Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, 'The Sacraments in the Life of the Church,' 2022, n. 53–55, *ACE* 4/II (2022), 744–745.

pastoral agreements, above all in those situations in which our faithful are a minority and in the diaspora?²⁴

Dialogue of life and synodal processes

In the light of the aforementioned characteristics, it is evident that the Catholic–Oriental Orthodox dialogues in Kerala have yielded fruitful outcomes. It is possible to identify a certain slowness in the rhythm of these dialogues, with a tendency for the agenda of meetings to be repeated on numerous occasions. One might also regret that more statements or agreements have not been published. It would be beneficial for these dialogues to reflect more on their purpose, methodology and reception. However, it is also the case that one of the principal objectives of these dialogues is to foster a climate of trust and mutual understanding between our Churches, both at local level in India and between the Church of Rome and the various Churches in Kerala.

It is evident that the ‘dialogue of truth’ espoused by these commissions would not be possible without a ‘dialogue of love’ between the heads of Churches and the ‘dialogue of life’ between all faithful. With regard to the dialogue of love, the deepening of fraternal relations and the frequent visits of Kerala Church leaders to Rome are to be welcomed. In September 2013, Catholicos Paulose II (2010–2021) paid a visit to Pope Francis, marking the second occasion on which a primate of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church had visited Rome. His successor, Catholicos Matthews III, visited the Vatican in September 2023.

With regard to the dialogue of life, it is noteworthy that numerous students from the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (including its current Catholicos) have benefited from scholarships from the DPCU to pursue studies in Rome or have participated in study visits for young clergy and monks from the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which are organised annually in Rome by the same Dicastery. Furthermore, reciprocal visits are conducted: a delegation of Catholic priests engaged in ecumenism, will visit Kerala in August 2024 at the invitation of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

²⁴ Pope Francis, Address to the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, 23 June 2022.

A particularly crucial aspect of these contacts is the participation of Church representatives in the synodal processes of the Catholic Church. As Catholicos Paulose II stated during his visit to Rome in 2013, recalling the presence of observers at Vatican II and of fraternal delegates of his Church to the Synods on Asia in 1998 and on the Word of God in 2008:

The participation of representatives of the Malankara Orthodox Church in the conciliar process of the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council has been of fundamental importance for the growth of mutual understanding.²⁵

The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church is currently represented at the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops by Metropolitan Geevargese Mar Barnabas, who was ordained in 2022 after studying in Rome.

In his address to Catholicos Mathews III in September 2023, Pope Francis referred to the participation of this fraternal delegate, stating:

I am convinced that we can learn much from the age-old synodal experience of your Church. In a certain sense, the ecumenical movement is contributing to the ongoing synodal process of the Catholic Church, and it is my hope that the synodal process can, in turn, contribute to the ecumenical movement. Synodality and ecumenism are in fact two paths that proceed together, united by a common goal, that of communion, which means a more effective witness by Christians 'so that the world may believe' (Jn 17:21).²⁶

The dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches of South India provides a valuable illustration of a potential for synodality between our still divided Churches, a synodality that is none other than their 'common path' towards full communion.

²⁵ Mar Baselios Marthoma Paulose II, Address to Pope Francis, 5 September 2013, *IS* 142 (2013/II), 8.

²⁶ Pope Francis, Address to Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, 11 September 2023, *ACE* 5 (2023), 39.

SYNODALITY AND ECUMENISM: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Maurizio Mirilli*

Translated by John McAreavey, retired Bishop of Dromore

In this essay, a revised version of a presentation given at the Centro Pro Unione event 'Synodality at Your Fingertips' during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024,¹ the author offers his personal testimony to the impact intertwined experiences of ecumenism and synodality have had on his priestly ministry. The oral style of the presentation has been maintained.

I do not want my contribution to be an academic lecture on the theological meaning of synodality; rather I want to offer a stimulus to ecclesial reflection based on my personal experience. I will focus on four images that are full of meaning for me, and have marked my personal faith journey. The first, I call 'classmates'. It comes from the time when I studied moral theology at the *Alphonsianum* in Rome. The second is that of 'a mission to young people', which I coordinated for many years as Director of Youth Ministry in the diocese of Rome. The third is 'the house of joy'; this image comes from the time when, as parish priest, I was committed to the service of the parish community of the Blessed Sacrament Tor de Schiavi in Rome. The fourth is the image of a hospital room, which comes from my current priestly ministry as assistant spiritual director at the Policlinico Tor Vergata in Rome.

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¹ The original text was published in Italian in the *Bulletin Centro Pro Unione* n. 105 (Spring 2024).

Classmates

After completing my doctorate in philosophy and theology at the Lateran University, in the period between my years of priestly formation in the seminary and my ordination as a priest, I attended the *Alphonsianum* and completed a licenciate in moral theology. During those years, I got to know a Lutheran classmate from Germany who was preparing to become a pastor. For the first time, I was dealing with a non-Catholic Christian. The time of study enabled us to become friends, as we were both interested in deepening our theological understanding in preparation for our future service in our churches. We were anxious to understand the things that united us. We were aware of our shared faith in Christ, and the things that divided us. We were anxious to grow in mutual respect.

We worked side by side for those two years; we got to know each other personally and discovered the riches in our respective ecclesial traditions. Through him, I was struck by how Lutherans value the Word of God and the laity, and I realised the need for Catholics to be more mature, prepared and open to synodal dialogue. On the other hand, my Lutheran friend was struck by the way in which we Catholics live our relationship with the Pope. He took part in my ordination as a priest in St Peter's basilica in 2004, presided over by Pope John Paul II who ordained me and my companions from the Pontifical Roman seminary. My Lutheran classmate told me how fascinated he was by the celebration, especially the moment when we expressed our intention to be obedient to our Bishop, the Pope and his successors. He told me that the strong point of reference that we have in the Pope was missing in his experience. I quote these two examples to illustrate how our experience as classmates enabled us to understand that the principal means of ecumenical dialogue, even before theological engagement, is the synodal pathway, mutual knowledge and walking together.

A Mission to the Young

In the years when I was Director of Youth Ministry in the diocese of Rome, I was blessed to coordinate the *Gesù al centro* [Jesus at the centre] programme. This was organised every year with the help of many parish organisations, movements, lay associations and religious institutes that were committed to the evangelisation of the young. The programme of preparation for the young missionaries that lasted for a year involved formation meetings, prayer, work-teams that organised

public events, evening gatherings, meetings in schools, hospitals and prisons. The aim of the mission was to enable young people who loved Jesus to meet other young people in the first week of October each year, in order to share their experience of life after encountering the Lord. The process was fundamentally synodal. Jesus was placed at the centre, both during the preparation and in the mission week, by means of prayer and the Gospel. All of us involved worked together and took on different responsibilities, so that other young people could have the experience of encountering the person of Jesus, the mercy of God and true joy.

It was hard to work with so many people, to bring together different elements of the Church with different spiritual sensibilities, to get young people from different backgrounds and gifts to work together. A big part of my work was to create an environment where all felt involved, and to overcome obstacles to communion. This worked only if I and other group leaders were willing to walk together, not following our own agenda, but finding a common way of announcing the Gospel. Those were marvellous years, when we experienced the gift of unity and witnessed the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the lives of many young people who came to know the Lord during those missions. Walking together in a synodal way, even in this situation, was for me a fundamental way of understanding what it meant to be an open and welcoming Church.

House of Joy

During the nine years that I was parish priest, I had the joy of bringing into being something that initially was only a dream for me and for the parents of some disabled people in the area where I served. The dream was to build a house for disabled orphans. In the early months of my service in the parish, I came to know several mothers who were terminally ill, and who shared with me their desperate need to provide, before they died, for the care of their disabled children. I remember not being able to sleep at night, thinking of their distress. I went to a priests' retreat with a desire to find a response for those mothers. When, during the retreat, I happened to read a Gospel passage, 'they removed the roof' was the phrase that struck me. Just as the four stretcher-bearers (cf. Mk 2:1-12) who brought the paralytic to Jesus found an imaginative solution, removing the roof of the house in Capernaum where Jesus was curing the sick, I realised that I too, with the cooperation of parishioners, could remove the roof of the parish church to create what

we later called the 'house of joy'. It seemed an absurd thing, but walking together with those concerned mothers and other lay supporters, religious sisters who were willing to help the project progress, and many parishioners who were willing to help, we managed in a providential way to find, in the attic of the church, a space that now hosts eight disabled orphans. On my own I could not have thought of this, much less have brought it about. However, following a synodal path in a parish community that was open to the action of the Holy Spirit, the 'house of joy' came into being: On the first floor of the church, the Eucharist that is celebrated on the ground floor finds expression in a work of charity that God still carries forward, now that another priest is in charge of leading the parish.

The experiences lived with young people during the 'Jesus at the Centre' missions, allowed me to discover realities coming from various ecclesial communities, with their own special characteristics as well as limitations. All this made me understand that there is not only one way to be Church, to announce and live the Gospel. Therefore, while I was a parish priest, my approach towards the youth ministry was definitely not ideological. I had the chance to listen to young peoples' needs, as they are, with their own diversities, and I have proposed journeys of faith thought out specifically for them, also revising my way of approaching youth ministry with the methodologies which were best suited to the group of young people I was dealing with.

A Hospital Room

I now live my priesthood at the service of the sick, their relatives, the carers who look after them, and the students who study and are preparing to care for them in the Tor Vergata Polyclinic in Rome. In this new situation, I experience fully what it means to be an outgoing Church, living among people, where they live, suffer, work and study, not waiting for anyone to search for me but walking with the Lord along the corridors of a hospital.

However, the chaplaincy, like a parish, needs a synodal way for a genuine pastoral activity. A chaplain, like a parish priest, cannot, and should not, do everything. It is vital that there is a group of people—those who care for patients in the hospital, volunteers, consecrated men and women, collaborators in spiritual care—to ensure there is an ecclesial dimension that values being present in a place where it is difficult to belong.

Through a process of listening and engagement in the pastoral council of the chaplaincy, we decided in my early months at the Polyclinic to offer a presence to those who live in the hospital, so that they can feel the maternal care of the Church. We try to offer a discreet presence that does not impose Jesus, but rather shows him through listening and tender gestures. In this period, through many personal encounters, I have engaged with non-believers, people belonging to different religions, and especially with Christians of different traditions. With the latter, as well as helping them in their search for meaning through spiritual conversations, it has been beautiful to share an ecumenical experience, finding and sharing our common faith in Christ, invoking together the gift of the Holy Spirit, praying the Our Father or reflecting on a phrase from the Gospel. This ecumenical experience is something that I have not lived so frequently elsewhere.

My friendship with the young Lutheran student whom I met at the time of my moral theology studies, was very important in this regard, because it allowed me to appreciate what is so beautiful within other Christian churches. It made me realize that we all have a lot in common, firstly the love for Christ and the desire to announce to everybody his Gospel and the message that his resurrection is for the salvation of all men and women of the world. Now, in my work as spiritual assistant in the hospital, where I have the chance to meet people of various Christian confessions, I see it demonstrated that, faced with illness, it is not the theological differences that prevail, but the faith in the one and only Saviour, who suffered and died for us.

From my experience, as shared in the four sections of this presentation, I can say that the more the Church operates in a synodal way, the more we will journey towards unity, and in this way we will be salt that gives flavour to the men and women of our time.

GOD IN CHRIST RECONCILING: ELEVENTH REPORT OF THE METHODIST–ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE

David Carter^{*}

The most recent report of the Methodist–Roman Catholic dialogue was published in 2022 after a slight delay at the request of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. The chosen theme was Reconciliation, the title ‘God in Christ Reconciling.’ The theme is being looked at in an holistic way, starting with God’s offer of reconciliation to an estranged humanity, and going on to consider reconciliation between the partner churches, as well as rites and practices of reconciliation *within* their corporate lives and the Church’s mission in commending reconciliation in and to the world. It is concerned to stress that the Church is called to model a truly reconciled community in a dysfunctional world.¹ In its final summary chapter, the Commission commend their report as having established an unexpectedly high degree of theological convergence on many matters.²

The sub-title of the report is ‘On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments and Mission.’ It is an important indication, both of the intention behind the report and the Commission’s estimate of what it has been able to achieve. The latter is certainly greater, though, as yet, still far from complete convergence on many matters which would need to be agreed on for full mutual recognition and communion.³

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¹ *God in Christ Reconciling* (World Methodist Council, 2022), paras 116–141 (hereafter cited as *Report*).

² *Report*, para. 143.

³ *Ibid.*, para. 143, referring to ‘an unexpectedly high degree of theological convergence in several areas’.

Following tradition in this particular dialogue, a key biblical passage is cited as shedding light on the core issue. Here, the parable of the Prodigal Son is chosen as stressing the compassionate concern of the Father for his two sons and his offer of reconciliation to both. It also deals with the differing ways in which each son had to repent and receive that reconciliation: the younger of his prodigality and desertion of his father, the elder of his failure to truly understand his father and also, of course, his antagonism towards the generously treated younger brother.⁴

The dialogue partners are called to reflect on the ecclesiological and ecumenical implications of the parable for their relationships.⁵ Both communions are reminded that, before Vatican II, relationships were very poor, even antagonistic, and based on mutual misunderstanding.⁶ Indeed, there are still areas of misunderstanding, even though in many others, relations have become much warmer, a warmth to which Pope Francis personally contributes much. In 2017, addressing a Methodist delegation, Francis rejoiced that we are strangers no longer but rather partners, walking together on the way.⁷

In the light of the parable, paragraph 2 of the report poses three tough questions: whether we recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, whether we share the Father's longing for the reunion of his divided family, and whether we share his readiness to forgive?

The report contains five main chapters, the first being on God's reconciliation offered in Christ, the second on the Church, involving reconciliation with one another in Christ, the third on our respective rites and practices of reconciliation, the fourth on common witness and mission. The final chapter is entitled 'Reconciliation and Mutual Recognition'. It sums up how members of the two communions can discover communion of faith in diverse practices and structures.⁸ This

⁴ Ibid., paras 5–6.

⁵ Ibid., para. 2.

⁶ A matter also referred to in the tenth report, *The Call to Holiness* (2016), para. 174.

⁷ *Report*, para. 36.

⁸ Ibid., para. 147, which emphasises how 'the lived experience of growing communion has enabled us to see our differences in a new light, and at times, discover beyond our differing emphases, our differences in theological language, liturgical and pastoral practices a common understanding of the basic truths of faith.'

could apply in other bilateral relationships between differing Christian communions. We can seem so different at first sight, yet discover how much and how deeply we are at one, despite differences in structures and practices, in our common vocation to serve Christ in God's world.⁹

Chapter 1: Reconciliation

This chapter stresses reconciliation as God's initiative in the face of a world, tarnished by human sin, which disregards the essential nature of the whole created order as good, exploiting it for the gain of human beings at the expense of the common welfare in harmony of *all* God's creatures. Scripture teaches us that all creation is sacred and belongs to God. Sin disrupts the relationship with creation, with God and universal human fraternity.¹⁰

God acts in Christ to restore the harmonious relationship of all creatures in his care. Through His Son, He seeks to enlist those who accept His offer in a ministry of reconciliation offered to all humanity. God offers the gift. 'Reconciliation is God's medicine for a landscape scarred by dividing walls of hostility.'¹¹ It is the work of the triune God who draws near to humanity precisely to restore and fulfil the original communion of creation.

Paragraph 18 forcefully makes the point that God's offer of reconciliation has social dimensions. Reconciliation with others must accompany that with God. Paul particularly stresses this, 'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation' (2 Cor 5:17). Effectively, every reconciled believer is placed in a new and restorative relationship with creation, which is seen anew, to be treated as a harmonious whole. Pope Francis is cited:

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love that God has for each of his creatures and that also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.¹²

Moreover,

⁹ A similar phrase was used in the 2013 report of the commission for advancing the Anglican-Methodist Covenant. It asserted 'how different we are yet so much how the same'.

¹⁰ *Report*, para. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, para. 15.

¹² *Ibid.*, para. 8, citing *Laudato Si* 92.

the Holy Spirit changes the alienated sinner into the relational being he or she is called to be. By grace disinherited prodigals become children of God, crying, Abba, Father (cf. Gal 4:6), co-heirs with Christ of the divine promises, and friends of all creatures.¹³

In this sentence, traditional Methodist teaching on the spirit of adoption and the assurance that it brings of being in a state of salvation is beautifully melded with Pope Francis' earlier stress on Christians being on a pilgrimage, woven together by God's love for all creatures. Methodism sees such a development as the sign of the Church on pilgrimage towards the new creation, as in Wesley's hymn 'Great is our redeeming Lord', with its couplet in the final verse:

To the new Jerusalem
He our faithful guide shall be.¹⁴

This is then capped by Francis' beautiful vision of eternal life as 'a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured shall take its rightful place.'¹⁵ The Commission sums up: 'God's reconciling act is the base of all reconciliation with self, with neighbour and creation.'¹⁶

The remaining paragraphs of this section assert the call of the Church universal to a ministry of reconciliation. The communion that God establishes with the Church is both gift and calling. The path is that of conversion of heart. The means are 'those of loving attention to God's world, to personal and community prayer and the sacraments, true signs of reconciliation.'¹⁷ The Church is to be 'a prophetic sign of the reconciliation that God wills.' This, in turn, calls Methodists and Catholics alike to recognise and repent 'of the manner in which we have sinned against God and one another.' All this calls for 'a mutual reassessment of each other' and a 'new understanding of the past.' We need now to tell the past differently in a way that acknowledges the mistakes and misunderstandings that both led to and continued division.¹⁸

¹³ Ibid., para. 19.

¹⁴ *Singing the Faith* (current British Methodist hymnal, published 2012), no. 683, v. 4.

¹⁵ *Report*, para. 20, citing *Laudato Si*, para. 243.

¹⁶ Ibid., para. 21.

¹⁷ Ibid., para. 23.

¹⁸ Ibid., paras 26–29.

In that re-telling, we need to note the debt of both communions to the wider Ecumenical Movement, also acknowledging the huge strides towards closer mutual understanding that have been made since. In particular, we Methodists need to acknowledge the depth of debt we owe to Pope Francis both for his teaching and his personal style of leadership and service to the whole *oikoumene*.

The final paragraph (30) stresses that we need 'to grow in appreciation of each other, see in each other the common faith we confess' and 'share humbly the gifts and graces that God has bestowed on the other'. Others may also benefit from the lessons of this paragraph for all previously estranged ecclesial relationships.

Chapter 2: Reconciliation within the Church

The initial paragraph is more widely relevant ecumenically, arguing that 'the unity and catholicity of the Church exist in a certain tension', also asserting that 'within the unity of each Christian community, there exists a legitimate diversity'.¹⁹ One could stress also the *enriching* nature of such diversity both within each communion and in terms of the gifts which it has to offer other ecumenical partners in what Margaret O'Gara calls the 'gift exchange'²⁰. The paragraph ends with the statement that

a church in which Methodists and Catholics were to be reconciled would require renewed structures to reconcile our two communions whilst maintaining the rich diversity of our distinctive spiritual endowments and heritages.

To implement that suggestion would require a long and complex process. It would be infinitely worthwhile if it lead to a communion in which both churches became all the stronger, and successful in implementing their joint mission from Christ. That mission might benefit the whole of creation, as well as coming to involve the considerable number of ecumenical partners with which both churches also seek unity. *Pari passu*, this paragraph holds out a vision to all other communions seeking unity in legitimate and enriching diversity.

The first main section of this chapter recalls the progress of the two communions from an initially very negative relationship between the

¹⁹ Ibid., para. 31.

²⁰ M. O'Gara, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1998).

time of the Wesleys and Vatican II, and a vastly improved relationship since. Till the early 1960s both communions were guilty of failing to realise that they had 'left the Father's house' in their estranged relationship. The more recent positive relationship was affirmed by Pope Francis in 2017, as already mentioned above.²¹

The second section, 'The Unity We Seek', spells out further consequences of the already commonly accepted goal, since 1986, of 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life.'²² It balances a stress on unity as not being uniformity, with reminding us that ecclesial communion is not so infinitely elastic as to embrace any and every diversity. It asserts what will be required.

Visible unity between Catholics and Methodists will involve each communion retaining its distinctive ecclesial identity and structures in a relationship that nevertheless binds them together in mutual accountability, shared discernment and decision making, the common confession of faith, in the shared witness of a common mission, and a practice of mutual sharing in sacramental life.²³

The stress on each communion retaining its distinctive identity and structures will be reassuring to all other churches, which may still fear that unity with the Roman Catholic Church, the church of slightly over half of all Christians, would mean the inevitable swallowing up of their particular treasured traditions. Paragraph 39 also reminds us that 'communion involves holding in common the many gifts of God to the Church. The more of these gifts we hold together, the more we are in communion with each other'.

Paragraph 42 reminds us that, in many ways, 'communion in sacramental life is the most challenging aspect of the goal of theological dialogue between Catholics and Methodists', though at the same time it does refer to the very real advances made in this, particularly in the ninth dialogue report.²⁴

The next three sections of this chapter examine the ways in which structures of communion serve the Church's reconciling mission. They

²¹ *Report*, para. 36.

²² *Ibid.*, paras 37–44.

²³ *Ibid.*, para. 38.

²⁴ *Encountering Christ the Saviour. Church and Sacraments* (2011). See especially the very impressive chapter 3 on the eucharist, on which I commented in my article 'Encountering Christ the Saviour,' *Ecumenical Trends* 40:9 (October 2011): 129–137.

look at the structures of the two communions at the local level, the regional and the global. They stress the importance of synodality at every level, adducing, in this context, the particular Methodist term ‘conferencing’ for mutual discernment of the pilgrim way of the Church at every level. Synodality/conferencing ‘is essential for the active engagement of the sense of the faith by the *whole* community of believers’(my italics).²⁵

One can argue that both churches can come closer to each other through mutual discernment of how synodality/conferencing can serve in increasing rapprochement and effective joint mission. Both, to use a traditional Methodist ecclesiological term, are *connexional* churches, believing in the *interdependence* of all Christian communities and local churches. At present they have different ministerial structures and organs of decision making, but with the same ultimate aim, serving God’s mission to which He calls us in Christ.

The Pope and the entire Catholic college of bishops share a common concern for the welfare of the whole Church, which is paralleled in each separate Methodist conference where ministers and lay leaders ‘watch over’ the relevant connexion ‘in faith and love’. In each communion there is a common stress on the role of the *entire* people of God, participating in the *sensus fidei*. In Methodism, this is particularly expressed in many of Wesley’s hymns, such as ‘Thou God of truth and love’, which emphasise the continuing pilgrimage of the entire people of God in ever greater mutual fellowship, witnessing to and serving the world.²⁶

At a global level, the differences appear greatest. The tight influence and control of the papacy and the Vatican curia contrasts with that of the World Methodist Council, which exists for fellowship, but has little authority beyond requiring member conferences to accept a basic statement of Wesleyan Principles.²⁷

A final section looks at ‘Papal Primacy—Reconciling Ministry or Obstacle to Reconciliation?’ It briefly records developments in the early Church which culminated in the local church of Rome and its bishop

²⁵ *Report*, para. 45.

²⁶ *Singing the Faith*, no. 620. See also more generally the entire section of ‘hymns for the Society meeting and parting’ in *Wesley’s Hymns* (1877 edn) nos 478–539.

²⁷ It has been suggested in recent years, e.g. by the Australian Methodist, Robert Gribben, that the structures of the WMC need more tightening in authority.

increasingly playing a key role in the affairs of the wider Church.²⁸ It examines the role of John Paul II, in calling, in *Ut Unum Sint*, for the leaders and theologians of the other communions to engage with him in ‘a fraternal conversation’ as to how his ministry might ‘find a way of exercising the primacy’ that ‘is open to a new situation’.²⁹ Pope Francis later called for a reconsideration of this appeal and the need to find a way more relevant to the urgent needs of evangelisation. He ‘invites us to consider the Church as “an inverted pyramid”, in which those with oversight stand beneath, in humble service of the people of God.’³⁰ Finally, the Commission stresses that there is a need for ‘a much clearer articulation of the relationship of the Bishop of Rome with the other bishops and their local churches’ and of ‘the responsibility of the Bishop of Rome to consult the local churches with a view to open and transparent discernment and authoritative decision making.’³¹

Never, perhaps, has there been a more opportune moment for further progress on this issue. Much in Francis’ teaching, from *Evangelii Gaudium* through to *Fratelli tutti*, accords very closely with that of the other churches in addressing current urgent issues. It strikes instant chords with the Methodist tradition!³²

Chapter 3: Rites and Practices of Reconciliation

The third chapter reflects on ‘how our respective communions have developed liturgical rites and spiritual practices of reconciliation to serve growth in Christ’. It asserts that ‘both churches see their practices of reconciliation as making present Jesus’ own ministry of reconciliation in each successive generation.’ They continue with beautiful words about the richness of grace experienced in baptism, ‘the sacrament of unconditional grace’, the sacrament in which ‘God incorporates people into the divine life and fills them with the Holy Spirit’.

Baptism is a living, continuous reality, in a very real sense renewed in every act of congregational worship, as God’s call to worship is an

²⁸ *Report*, paras 60–67.

²⁹ *Ut Unum Sint*, paras 95–96.

³⁰ *Report*, para. 65.

³¹ *Ibid.*, para. 67.

³² Most particularly in the two documents specifically mentioned.

invitation to enter again into God's story of salvation and to reorient our lives towards God's vision of all humankind and all creation.³³

Paragraph 81 reminds us of the high priestly role of Christ as intercessor and of our privilege, and duty, as the common royal priesthood to intercede for others. Whilst Catholics pray for the dead, Methodists, though often giving thanks for particular departed, do not normally do so. That could change in the future, as more Methodists give thought to the very interesting teaching of Pope Benedict in *Spe Salvi*, a point raised in the immediately previous MRCIC dialogue on the call to holiness.³⁴

The report gives a very careful account of Catholic teaching on the practice of the sacrament of reconciliation. It is interesting to see that a use of the distinction between venial and mortal sin, so characteristic of pre-Vatican II theology, is revived to clarify that sacramental confession is only required when a person feels guilty of mortal sin, a sin in which one deliberately flouts God's will as opposed, say, to trivial impatience or cross words; moreover, this is linked to Wesley's distinction between 'sin, properly speaking' and 'sins of infirmity', the result of weakness of resolve rather than deliberate disobedience to God.³⁵

There has been some convergence between the two traditions on reconciliation of individual sinners. The British Methodist Worship Book contains both a service of Repentance and Reconciliation and a broader service of Healing and Holiness, set in the context of a eucharistic rite and involving either the laying on of hands or anointing, this latter corresponding to the Catholic sacrament of healing.³⁶

Other Methodist forms of celebration of forgiveness are also explained. There is the institution of the class meeting, obligatory well into the nineteenth century upon all Methodist members. Classes met weekly under the guidance of appointed leaders to give account of Christian experience, to pray together and indeed, to give an opportunity to members to confess their sins and seek spiritual guidance. The meeting thus shared in a tradition that related both to

³³ *Report*, paras 73–6.

³⁴ *Call to Holiness* (2016), para. 153. It has also been pointed out to me that a prayer in the *Methodist Worship Book* (1975), B9 might be interpreted in such a way.

³⁵ *Report*, para. 109.

³⁶ *Methodist Worship Book* (1999), 422–425 and 407–422.

the Catholic tradition of the sacrament of reconciliation and to the wider tradition of spiritual counselling.³⁷

Briefly mentioned, and worthy of wider explanation, is the corporate congregational exercise of the Covenant Service, instituted by Wesley and recommended to the societies as a liturgy particularly appropriate for the beginning of a new year. In it, Methodists confess their failure to live life in Christ as fully as they ought, express their need for both forgiveness and spiritual renewal, and renew their covenant by pledging themselves to fuller consecration to God's personal will for each of them in a prayer that is deservedly famous and indeed admired in other traditions and which indicates a willingness to give oneself over to God's will and plan, in the well-known words:

I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you...I freely and heartily yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.³⁸

Clearly, this section is an important contribution to mutual understanding between members of the two traditions on questions of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Chapter 4: The Church's Ministry of Reconciliation in the World

This chapter deals with the reconciling ministry that the Church is called to offer in a world riven by so many injustices, inequalities and points of antagonism, plus the urgency of the ecological future which may threaten the very existence of life. Methodists and Catholics alike recognise that work together on such issues is imperative when we acknowledge our common baptism and that 'the greater the communion, the more effective the mission, especially in parts of the world where people are sceptical about religion and claims to authority'.³⁹

We are reminded that Jesus began his ministry by preaching 'Good News to the Poor'. Reconciliation involves the hard work of building

³⁷ On the class meeting, see D. Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

³⁸ Cited from (British) *Methodist Worship Book* (1975), D10. On the history and development of this service, see D.H. Tripp, *The Renewal of the Covenant in the Methodist Tradition* (London: Epworth Press, 1969).

³⁹ *Report*, paras 116, 117.

just relationships and listening to the voice of the poor. The Gospel has always inspired such action within both communions. The Catholic Church has long had, from the time of Pope Leo XIII, a strong tradition of teaching on social justice, as has British Methodism. Much of our teaching ran in parallel even well before Vatican II.⁴⁰

Paragraph 124 stresses the duty of Catholics and Methodists to ‘listen to the voice of the poor’ and ‘grow in understanding of their suffering and dislocation’. Paragraph 126 specifies a few prophetic witnesses from both traditions, who help us understand and, ‘like the prodigal son, come to our senses’ and ‘awaken us to overcoming sinful actions and situations’. There is an increasingly strong common witness against the evil of war, in which Pope Francis has even raised the question of whether there can ever be such a thing as a just war.⁴¹

Particular attention is given to ‘Reconciling by Caring for our Common Home’. Pope Francis’ seminal *Laudato Si* is cited:

The ecological crisis is a summons to profound interior conversion. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of Christian experience.⁴²

This section might, conceivably, have been further strengthened in a more holistic way by reference to Francis’ masterly presentation in *Fratelli tutti*, where he particularly calls for fraternity and social friendship across the whole of human society, plus the need for all to be accompanied at every stage of life and be enabled to give of their best, however limited.⁴³ Like John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*, he commends dialogue at every level of human relationships, not just on

⁴⁰ My own first paper to the British Catholic–Methodist dialogue in 1990 was on a comparison of the teaching on social justice in *Gaudium et Spes* and the teaching of two British Methodist Conference statements on industrial society in 1934 and 1949.

⁴¹ *Report*, para. 130, with citations from *Fratelli tutti*.

⁴² *Laudato Si*, para. 217.

⁴³ I have tried to stress the holistic nature of Francis’ approach in my article ‘*Fratelli Tutti*: a personal faith, bearing hope for the world,’ *One in Christ*, Vol. 55, no. 1 (2021): 93–110, in which I also point out similarities to Methodist thinking. See especially, 99, 101. *Fratelli tutti* in connection with these points is mentioned in the final, summative chapter of the report.

religious belief.⁴⁴ Francis calls for what in the Wesleyan tradition is called 'responsible discipleship', both in affairs secular and religious.⁴⁵

Chapter 5: Reconciliation and Mutual Recognition

This last chapter summarises the conclusions that can be derived from the first four. It also adds a few further points worthy of note. It stresses that 'Methodists and Catholics are now able to recognise more clearly the elements of sanctification and truth at work in each other.'⁴⁶ It stresses the need to respect and serve Christ's ministry of reconciliation in the world.⁴⁷ It warns against complacency in the face of continuing disunity as a factor seriously impeding the common mission.⁴⁸ It gladly notes that the differing structures of the two communions are increasingly recognised as intended to serve unity and catholicity in such a manner that unity in diversity can be maintained, further accepting that both have much to learn from each other's structures.⁴⁹ Within that context, both probably need a better balance between the personal and the collegial. It argues that a stress on the papal ministry as being for the building up of the Church might lead to progress on that subject.⁵⁰ In view of the particular style of approach practised by the present Pope, it is a timely suggestion.

Conclusion

An increased level of agreement has been achieved on the way to fuller unity, but there is, however, still much distance to cover. Much might depend on two factors: the degree to which the varying structures of the two communions can be held to equally protect internal unity in faith and order, and the extent to which an agreed act of mutual recognition can take place, in which the validity of the two ordained ministries are mutually affirmed. The fourth dialogue hinted at the possibility of such a procedure. Perhaps the action of laying hands on

⁴⁴ *Ut Unum Sint*, para. 28.

⁴⁵ See e.g. *Fratelli tutti*, where he advocates social friendship and even the accompaniment of every person as he/she seeks meaningful work within the limits of their capabilities.

⁴⁶ *Report*, para. 144.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 146.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 148.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 153.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 157.

Paul and Barnabas as they began a new stage of the apostolic mission provides a suitable precedent in terms of establishing mutual recognition and invoking the blessing and enablement of the two communions as they mark the beginning of a new life of full communion in faith, sacramental life and mission?⁵¹

I hope this report will be more fully received in both communions than has been the case with some of its predecessors. It should undoubtedly prove useful in terms of establishing greater awareness of the teaching and practice of both. It should be widely studied by parish/congregational clergy and local lay leaders. I am deeply grateful to the Commission concerned for their work and have no doubt they can make further progress.

⁵¹ Acts 13: 1–3.

UNDERSTANDING OUR PAST, SHAPING OUR FUTURE: REFLECTIONS FROM IRELAND IN LIGHT OF IARCCUM

+ Niall Coll and + Adrian Wilkinson^{*}

Some historical background to the specific Irish context is helpful in elucidating the significance of advances in relationships between both Anglicans and Roman Catholics in the country, north and south, over recent decades. Such progress was underlined by the presence of two bishops, one from each tradition respectively, at the recent meeting of the International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) held in both Rome and Canterbury. Before discussing the particular shape of that gathering, we will offer a brief sketch of some key elements of the Irish Christian experience—one in which recourse to physical force and violence has sadly been a recurring theme¹—to help readers appreciate better the journey in reconciliation and hope that is underway in our country.

The Deep Roots of Christian Faith in Ireland

It is a truism to say that Ireland has long been associated with Christianity. Never a part of the Roman Empire, the first Christians in Ireland were probably traders and slaves from Roman Gaul and Britain. The earliest surviving written record of a Christian footmark in the country dates back to 431 AD when Pope Celestine sent Palladius, a high-ranking deacon from the church in Gaul, as the first bishop of ‘the Irish believing in Christ’.² Tradition teaches that the country was substantially converted to the faith in the lifetime of the renowned missionary figure, St Patrick the Briton, in the mid-fifth century, and as

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¹ Fifth Working Party of the Irish Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church Joint Group on Social Questions, *Violence in Ireland: A Report to the Churches* (Belfast: Christian Journals and Dublin: Veritas, Revised edition, 1977), 13.

² Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3.

a result of his personal mission.³ Over the next two centuries and more, after the collapse of the western empire, Irish missionaries began their extraordinary campaign to re-evangelise Europe and as they did so, preserved the Western intellectual heritage. During the seventh century, theological disputes—most notably one concerning the calculation of the date of Easter—lead to the development of a culture of biblical, patristic and legal scholarship which brought many students from Francia and England to study there.⁴

Conquest and Reformation

The Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169 and the colonial occupation of much of eastern Ireland would in time give rise to a divided church, Gaelic and Anglo-Norman. However deep these divisions, the truth is that in the centuries before the reformation period, ‘the peoples of Ireland were held together not by a common culture, language, or ethnicity, but by a shared allegiance to the church’.⁵ The Irish reformation began because of religious change in England under Henry VIII and would soon extend to his Irish kingdom, an expression of the consolidation of Tudor power on the island.⁶ It arrived into a context quite different from England since there had been no early sixteenth-century movement for a reformation of the church. Indeed, as Kenneth Milne points out, there had actually ‘been a considerable spiritual revival’ among Catholics, particularly in Gaelic areas because of the ministry of several orders of Friars.⁷ The majority of the clergy and laity in contact with the government of Ireland gave nominal assent to the Irish Act of Supremacy (1537) and in 1569 the Anglican Church in Ireland, the Church of Ireland, was established by the Irish parliament. Historians debate the level of support that the

³ Patrick J. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Study* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), 1.

⁴ Crawford Gribben, *The Rise and Fall of Christian Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2, 45. See T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 391–415.

⁵ Gribben, *The Rise and Fall*, 85.

⁶ In 1541 as a copingstone to this consolidation policy, Henry’s royal title was changed by the Irish Parliament from lord of Ireland to king of Ireland. See Bartlett, *Ireland*, 77.

⁷ Kenneth Milne, *A Short History of the Church of Ireland*, 5th ed. (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022), 38.

early Reformation attracted in Ireland,⁸ but it was soon clear that while institutional change could be accepted and the monastic lands dispersed, doctrinal change would be resisted by both the Gaelic Irish and the Old English (the Anglo-Normans) alike.

The accession of Elizabeth as queen of both England and Ireland (1558) and soon after as Supreme Governor of the Church of England (1560), and confirmation of England as a Protestant state, were greeted with outright hostility by much of Ireland, whether Old English or Gael.⁹ In these circumstances, the Church of Ireland (the Established Church) greatly depended on government support for its very survival in the country. Thus, as Milne points out, 'the impression of the Church as an agent of the English conquerors could not easily be avoided'.¹⁰ In one way or another, it has to be acknowledged that religion since has been an important ingredient in the history of conflict in Ireland. This is particularly so in the north of the country, Ulster, where the arrival and settlement of Protestants (mostly Scottish Presbyterians) in the seventeenth-century sowed the seeds of bitter divisions on ethnic, political, economic and religious matters which continue to resonate in our own times.

By the end of the seventeenth century the Church of Ireland (Anglicans) was in a privileged position, the 'Established Church' or 'state church' with its position secure. Some historians argue that the Anglican establishment was never very ambitious about converting the Irish natives. While the New Testament was available in Irish from 1602, it was not until 1685 that the Old Testament was translated and so it was over 150 years after Martin Luther lit the Reformation fuse, that the readers of Irish were provided with a complete Bible in their own language.¹¹ More to the point in terms of popular imagination, the delay in providing an Irish translation of the Book of Common Prayer—only introduced in 1608—gravely hindered the advance of the Reformation

⁸ See, for example, Steven G. Ellis, 'The Irish Reformation Debate in Retrospect,' in Mark Empey, Alan Ford and Miriam Moffitt, eds, *The Church of Ireland and its histories: history, interpretation, and identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), 255–65.

⁹ Bartlett, *Ireland*, 83.

¹⁰ Milne, *A Short History*, 44. Those who most readily came to accept the changes made in the Established Church were the 'New English', a label attached to those who arrived in Ireland in the 1590s. See Bartlett, *Ireland*, 95.

¹¹ See, for example, Corish, *Irish Catholic Experience*, 67–68.

in over two-thirds of the country.¹² By the time the scriptural and liturgical resources were available, the work of the Counter Reformation was well underway. In a similar vein, other scholars contend that the penal laws against Catholics (and to a lesser extent against dissenters) in the eighteenth century were designed to uphold Anglican privilege rather than to evangelise the Catholic masses. By the early nineteenth century the evangelical revival that had begun in the 1730s brought many Protestant dissenters and Anglicans together. While Presbyterian involvement in the formation of the United Irishmen in Belfast and their participation in the 1798 rebellion briefly held out a broader political vision which transcended denominational allegiance, the repercussions of this failed rebellion meant that in the future, Irish Protestants lined up, whatever their theological and ecclesiological differences, to support the union with Great Britain.¹³

Disestablishment, Partition, Troubles and Secularisation

Both the 'disestablishment' of the Church of Ireland (1869) and the settlement of 1922 by which the greater part of Ireland left the United Kingdom put significant strain on the Church of Ireland, the latter meaning that a considerable majority of its members lived in the six counties of Northern Ireland.¹⁴ Protestants—Anglican, Presbyterians, Methodists and others—now found themselves in a subordinate position in the south,¹⁵ their numbers falling from 10 percent to 7 percent of the population during the years 1911–26.¹⁶ While the small Protestant population was irked by the Catholic 'confessional' character of the new Irish Free State in terms of moral and social policy during the first few decades of its existence, in general 'they accepted the inevitability of the situation ... [and were] in many ways influential in

¹² Ellis, 'The Irish Reformation,' 263.

¹³ Gribben, *The Rise and Fall*, 148. See A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Shape of Irish History* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2001), 152, 155.

¹⁴ Milne, *A Short History*, 89. Political partition in Ireland in 1922 was not followed by an ecclesiastical one. The main Christian traditions—Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist—continued to organise on an all-island basis and still do so.

¹⁵ Gribben, *The Rise and Fall*, 179.

¹⁶ Bartlett, *Ireland*, 433.

areas other than politics'.¹⁷ One aspect of Irish life that they found particularly difficult was the strict Catholic Church application of the *Ne Temere* papal decree of 1907 requiring that children of a 'mixed marriage' be brought up as Catholics.¹⁸

The experience of the Catholic minority (one-third of the population in 1922) in the new Northern Ireland state was more troubled. There the Protestant unionist government exercised power unfairly over the Catholic nationalist minority, leading to the emergence in the 1960s of the Civil Rights Association to protest against injustices. The distinguished Catholic ecumenist, Michael Hurley SJ, has sympathetically acknowledged that '[b]ehind this discrimination lay a deep-seated fear of Rome.'¹⁹ Irish Protestants have a long history of fearing and attempting to subjugate the native Catholic population and their faith. Their outlook—often rather bluntly summarised in more recent times as a policy of 'No Surrender'—meant that Catholic grievances were never taken seriously following the establishment of the northern state. The Provisional IRA emerged in December 1969 and by 1971 had acquired an offensive capacity. Simultaneously, different forms of Unionism and Loyalism coalesced in the Ulster Defence Association, formed in December 1971. The gun had reappeared with a vengeance in Irish politics and the world looked on in disbelief and horror.

Though both the Catholic Church and the mainline Protestant denominations were caught unprepared by this development, happily they did not take sides and events would ensure that ecumenical structures, made possible for Catholics by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), would develop against the background of escalating politico-religious violence. While opposition in some Protestant quarters to ecumenical initiatives towards the Catholic Church in the North remained a real issue,²⁰ the emergence in 1968 (and when called for afterwards at times of particular tension) of the four church leaders—

¹⁷ Kenneth Milne, 'The Church of Ireland since Partition,' in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh, eds, *Christianity in Ireland: Revisiting the Story* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2002), 224.

¹⁸ Bartlett, *Ireland*, 373.

¹⁹ Michael Hurley, 'Northern Ireland and the Post-Vatican II Ecumenical Journey,' in Bradshaw and Keogh, eds, *Christianity in Ireland*, 262.

²⁰ Roy F. Foster, *Luck and the Irish* (London: Penguin, 2008), 59; See Dennis Cooke, *Persecuting Zeal: Portrait of Ian Paisley* (Dingle: Brandon, 1996).

both archbishops of Armagh, Anglican and Catholic, the Presbyterian Moderator and Methodist President—as a working group to calm fears and promote peace is generally regarded as the first sign of Catholic–Protestant co-operation, and were to become regular features.²¹ Central to this work was the Irish Inter-Church Meetings established in 1973 (initially called the Ballymascanlon Talks because of its early venue) which developed out of initiatives which began in May 1970. Significantly, it has been noted that at difficult times in Northern Ireland, ‘Churches were more ready than the political parties to stretch out hands of friendship’.²² The new Irish Catholic ecumenical Directory of 1976 underlined the importance of ecumenism and the conditions under which Catholics could participate in it. Interestingly, the director of the Irish School of Ecumenics (established 1970), Michael Hurley SJ, felt that while many would find in it encouragement and guidance, others would regret that it opened up so few new horizons for the ecumenical apostolate in Ireland.²³

By the time of the 1994 ceasefire, over 3600 people had lost their lives in an ethno-sectarian conflict known colloquially as ‘The Troubles’.²⁴ The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 (also termed the Belfast Agreement) brought an end to violence and established what is termed a ‘consociational’ model of power-sharing government involving the main political parties, unionist and nationalist, to help achieve ‘conflict regulation’.²⁵ Almost a quarter of a century later, Northern Ireland remains a hotly contested political terrain, geographically part of the island of Ireland but politically part of the UK. Its internal divisions and divided loyalties have returned to international attention in recent times due to protracted and ongoing tensions between the European Union and the UK over the region’s special status inside the EU single market following Brexit.²⁶

²¹ Hurley, ‘Northern Ireland and the Post-Vatican II Ecumenical Journey,’ 265.

²² Eric Gallagher and Stanley Worrall, *Christians in Ulster 1968–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 138.

²³ Michael Hurley, ‘New Directory on Ecumenism,’ *The Furrow* 27 (1976): 393.

²⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798–1998*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2010), 390–409.

²⁵ Brendan O’Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume 3, Consociation and Confederation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1–2.

²⁶ Cathal McCall, *Border Ireland: From Partition to Brexit* (London: Routledge, 2021), 48–67, DOI <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429504211>.

Meanwhile, both the Church of Ireland and the Catholic Church have to minister today in an Ireland, north and south, which is increasingly secular. This trend has moved faster in the south, going further there, it has been argued, than in any other part of Catholic Europe.²⁷ As elsewhere in the West, and in the context of the sudden emergence of a much more multicultural and multireligious society,²⁸ many Irish Catholics and Anglicans are concerned about spiritual decline and loss of Christian faith.²⁹ This process has intensified since the early 1990s because of attention to abuse allegations especially in the Catholic Church.

Growing Rapprochement

After the Second Vatican Council, as is well known to readers here, there flowed a series of ecumenical dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian traditions, notably the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) established in 1966. The first phase of ARCIC’s work (which carried through until 1981) arguably ‘the most impressive to date’ in its consideration of the issues of Eucharist, Ministry and Authority was co-chaired by a former Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Henry McAdoo. One ‘offshoot or offspring’ of ARCIC or perhaps ‘even grandchild of Vatican II’, as Church of Ireland Archbishop Richard Clarke has strikingly termed it, is the work of IARCCUM. In the Irish context it means regular meetings of Anglican and Catholic bishops to discuss common concerns, an exercise in ‘receptive ecumenism’.³⁰ While lauding the genuinely warm, personal and transparent relationship between the bishops involved,

²⁷ Desmond Fennell, ‘From *Aggiornamento* to Recovery I,’ *The Furrow* 61 (2010): 552.

²⁸ Social Justice Ireland, ‘Embracing Ireland as a Multicultural Society,’ 24 April 2019, <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/embracing-ireland-multicultural-society>, accessed on 1 August 2024; Oliver Scharbrodt, ‘Introduction,’ in Oliver Scharbrodt, ed., *Muslims in Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 1–24.

²⁹ For example, Donal Murray, *Let God Speak: Reflections on Renewal in the Irish Church* (Dublin: Veritas, 2011), 102; Richard Clarke, *A Whisper of God: Essays on Post-Catholic Ireland and the Christian Future* and Michael Paul Gallagher SJ, ‘Imagination Gone Secular?’, *The Furrow* 57 (2006): 589–93.

³⁰ <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2019/09/26/annual-meeting-of-the-irish-episcopal-conference-and-the-bishops-of-the-church-of-ireland-takes-place-in-dublin-2/>, accessed on 1 August 2024.

Archbishop Clarke has cautioned that its work has met with mixed results since more needs to be done at a national rather than a largely diocesan level to chart ways in which shared initiatives might enhance the mission and witness of both traditions.³¹ With that point in mind, this essay will now move to share the story of a recent IARCCUM event which sought to consolidate and celebrate the fact that, following four centuries of conflict and separation, the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion globally have now been on a walk, however bumpy at times, towards reconciliation for almost six decades.

Joint Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Rome and Canterbury

Both of us, the Anglican and Catholic bishops of Ossory, in January 2024 attended a summit organised by IARCCUM. Honouring both traditions, the proceedings took place in both Rome and Canterbury, the first IARCCUM gathering since 2016. On this occasion over 50 bishops from 27 different countries, mostly in national pairs, spent January 22–29 together to listen, pray and discuss how growing together as churches might strengthen our joint Christian witness and mission in the world. In what follows, we two Irish pilgrims offer a brief sketch of our shared experience.

Rome

Visiting holy sites to pray in both Rome and Canterbury was very much part of the process. On 23 January it was moving for us to be part of an Anglican Choral Evensong being held for only the second time ever in the Choir Chapel of St Peter's Basilica. The eight-day meeting coincided in part with the annual Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity which always ends on 25 January when our respective churches mark the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul. Appropriately, that evening all the bishops attended Catholic Vespers at the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, where the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury both preached and commissioned the IARCCUM delegates in their pairs for their ecumenical work. In his homily during the Vespers for the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, Pope Francis said, 'the right question is not: "Who is my neighbour?" but "Do I act like a neighbour?"' adding that 'everyone in this world is my brother or my sister', and, 'only a love that

³¹ Richard Clarke, 'Vatican II Fifty Years on: Some Anglican Reflections,' in Niall Coll, ed., *Ireland and Vatican II: Essays Theological, Pastoral and Educational* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2015), 49.

becomes freely-offered service, only the love that Jesus taught and embodied, will bring separated Christians closer to one another'. Archbishop Justin Welby, preaching at the same Vespers service asked, 'why was the Samaritan able to help the injured man?' He answered, 'because he was free, and what made him free was love'.³²

For us and many of those attending the liturgy, it was encouraging to observe church leaders from their respective countries clearly at ease in each other's company and all committed to the goal of working for Christian unity.

Earlier that same day, the Archbishop of Canterbury had presided at an Anglican Eucharist in the Basilica of San Bartolomeo. Before the service he and the participating bishops visited the Sanctuary of the New Martyrs, which is a memorial space in the crypt of this church. Opened last year, this permanent exhibition commemorates the stories of the Christian martyrs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Here the vestments worn by Archbishop (now Saint) Oscar Romero and a book owned by St Maximilian Kolbe were on display. Martyrs from churches other than the Catholic Church are also commemorated in the sanctuary. Among them are the seven martyrs of the Melanesian Brotherhood, an Anglican religious order, who were murdered by rebels in the Solomon Islands in 2003. One of those attending IARCCUM was the Anglican Archbishop Leonard Dawea from the Solomon Islands. As a young man, he spent twelve years as a member of the Melanesian Brotherhood and so knew some of those martyred. At the end of the service, the Archbishop of Canterbury laid a wreath at the chapel where the martyrs of Oceania are commemorated.

On the last day in Rome, the bishops visited the church where in 595 Pope Gregory the Great commissioned St Augustine (the first Archbishop of Canterbury) to convert the Anglo-Saxons. In light of the importance of Canterbury and its first bishop to the Anglican Communion this was a most touching experience. From there we made the same journey he did, albeit using the comfort and speed of Easyjet!

³² The IARCCUM Bishops' Call: Our Common Witness, Calling and Commitment, Rome and Canterbury, 22-29 January 2024, para. 6, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/info/2024/02/03/240203b.html>, accessed on 1 August, 2024.

Canterbury

The second phase of the summit was based in Canterbury and most of the delegates stayed at Cathedral Lodge in the shadow of the great cathedral. There we had time to reflect on many of the issues discussed in Rome and craft the final document entitled *Our Common Witness, Calling and Commitment*, which was issued shortly after our ecumenical pilgrimage ended. Among its highlights were: the concerns of the Brazilian bishops on the need to defend the rights of indigenous people living in the rain forest; the extremely fraught political situation in the Holy Land described by the bishops from the Middle East; the challenge of secularism raised by Western bishops and the challenge of religious fundamentalism underlined by bishops from both Africa and Asia. As the week unfolded, it was obvious that some of our episcopal colleagues were returning to situations of political instability, religious discrimination even persecution, all very far removed from our experience in Ossory.

Looking to the future

For us as bishops from Ireland, the summit's focus on partnership and friendship was best summed up by Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau-yan (Bishop of Hong Kong), who preached at the final Sunday Eucharist at Canterbury Cathedral. He said:

the twelve apostles and disciples were not called to form camps working for their own missions or competing against each other. They were called to become an assembly, a community, a communion, a synodal *koinonia*, praying and discerning, teaching and serving for the mission of our Triune God. We are resolved to bear witness to the hope of God's love as we preach and celebrate the sacraments with God's holy people.³³

The memory of IARCCUM will live long with us and our hope is that it will be a stimulus for continued fruitful ecumenical engagement, not only between the two of us as friends and fellow bishops, but for the wider diocese and church too.

³³ Cardinal Stephen Chow, 'Our Common Witness, Calling and Commitment,' para. 18.

ANGLICAN PRIMATES' MEETING IN ROME

+ **John McDowell***

The meeting between the Primates of the world-wide Anglican Communion and Pope Francis which took place on 2 May has been described as a significant event in the life of the Communion. While continuing to acknowledge our many differences, the warmth of the relationship between the Provinces of the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church has deepened in every way, and the meeting with Pope Francis was another example of the closeness of that relationship.

A theological commission involving Anglicans and Roman Catholics (ARCIC) has been in more or less continuous session since the 1970s and has produced regular reports which have been considered by theologians and the faithful in both traditions. All across the world, local Anglican and Catholic parishes meet in groups and ecumenical fellowships to study and to worship together. The same is true of Anglican and Catholic bishops. Here in Ireland we meet semi-formally each autumn to discuss matters of common concern.

At national level the friendship and fellowship in the gospel which I enjoy with Archbishop Eamon Martin has been a tremendous encouragement to me. I know too, for instance, from their comments to Pope Francis during our audience, that many Anglican Provinces, especially in countries where Christians are a tiny minority, derive great heart from cooperation with their Catholic counterparts.

I do not suppose we will ever manage to find anything like complete convergence on the details of the Faith, although by careful listening we can at least ensure that we do not misunderstand or misrepresent each other. However, we can work towards a deepening relationship in terms of faith, hope and love—faith in the sense of standing outside the shelter of our own limitations and depending solely on the Lord of the

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Church with all the trust and expectancy of the earliest disciples; hope, not in the sense of a false optimism that all is well, but in the conviction that the Lord of History is drawing us closer together in the building of the Kingdom to look just a little bit more like a new heaven and a new earth; and the deepening of our bonds of love and affection—actively caring for one another in a world where the challenges of the day are so vast and so complicated that no one can carry this moment alone.

When we were in Rome, the Anglican Primates had asked also for the opportunity to hear a little more about the work being done (it has to be said with very typical Roman thoroughness) in the area of synodality. Anglicans are no strangers to synodical government, although, because our Synods are usually a curious hybrid of a legislative body and a deliberative assembly, they are very different in function and character to what seems to be in view in the Roman Catholic Church.

We were fortunate enough to have a session with Cardinal Mario Grech, who has been given special responsibility by Pope Francis for progressing the practise of synodality throughout the Church. It was a very wide-ranging lecture and ensuing discussion, but one aspect of what was said and discussed stands out in my memory, because it involved a strong example in a particular situation of the role of Petrine Primacy *in discerning the presence or otherwise of the Holy Spirit* in decisions that were being reached.

In his address to the Primates, Pope Francis had also referred to the difficulties which he knew many Anglicans had with the Petrine Primacy and urged us to focus instead on the Primacy of the Holy Spirit in the Church as a whole. I do not think that Pope Francis' words and Cardinal Grech's comments were in any sense coordinated, but they provided food for thought on the spiritual rather than the juridical functioning of the Petrine Primacy.

In 2001, ARCIC had produced a study document on the subject of the Petrine Primacy offering it (in the words of the title) as *The Gift of Authority*. I think it is fair to say that the document received a fairly cool reception in those Anglican Provinces which provided responses. Certainly the Church of Ireland's response, which was written after much discussion and study by a working group, was more or less a polite 'thank you for the thought, but we'd rather not all the same'. Perhaps a greater emphasis on spiritual discernment would have yielded a richer discussion.

As is often the case with such visits, the Primates' time in Rome was marked by significant personal encounters. Next to the meeting with Pope Francis, for me the most memorable was the little address given by Cardinal James Harvey during Vespers at St Paul's Outside the Walls, when this obviously shy man, in great humility, and very tentatively, compared our presence to the form of visit *Ad limina apostolorum*. Given the site of the tomb of St Paul in the basilica, it was a moving suggestion. Cardinal Harvey also presented each of the Primates with a cross of St Benedict which I know will be worn and treasured.

However, speaking personally for a moment, the meeting with Pope Francis went deeper for me than even these great things. Our attitudes and character are formed much more by early impressions and relationships than they are by almost everything else in later years. My early years were marked by close friendships with Catholic neighbours, and you can rest assured that as children and adolescents we were not talking about the Petrine Primacy or the modalities of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The wax of our personalities was still soft and the impression went very deep—the impression of warmth and affection, of great fun and of love. We shared our dreams and lived a common reality which the investment in division which has marked the ordinary experience of Northern Ireland has no power to erase. Much friendship; much laughter; great happiness.

Meeting Pope Francis was a great and a moving event. In part because of the personal warmth and geniality that he radiates, only half obscuring a profound mind and an iron will. But also because it was simply a continuation of all those years of happy meetings and happy memories which I have experienced since my childhood and which have gone so deeply into my soul.

REPORT FROM THE FOURTH GLOBAL GATHERING OF THE GLOBAL CHRISTIAN FORUM

Jan Eckerdal*

Translated by Ingeborg-Marie Kvam

From 15 to 20 April 2024, the fourth global meeting of the Global Christian Forum (GCF) was held in Accra, Ghana. Around 250 church leaders from around the world and from a wide range of Christian traditions participated, gathering for worship, lectures, Bible study, group discussion and study visits.

The GCF is a recent ecumenical initiative, and during these days in Accra, its twenty-fifth anniversary was celebrated. Founded in 1998, as a complement to the World Council of Churches (WCC) and similar organisations, its purpose is to be an open meeting place for all churches in the world, including those who have no established relations with the ecumenical movement. In particular, the GCF seeks to build bridges between the historical churches and the growing Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches of the global South—churches which now represent a large part of world-wide Christianity.

The idea of a new, independent meeting place was first suggested by Revd Dr Konrad Raiser, at that time General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. The realisation of the idea was then entrusted to an autonomous Continuation Committee, which since 1998 has convened various meetings, working to refine and advance this vision.³⁴

The theme for the 2024 GCF was ‘That the world may know’ (John 17:23). It is connected to the vision of unity that Jesus expresses in His farewell discourse, central to the entire ecumenical movement. Bible

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³⁴ <https://globalchristianforum.org/about-us/our-history/>, accessed on 16 July 2024.

studies, sermons and lectures mostly revolved around this vision and sought new perspectives on the oft-cited words. The GCF General Secretary, Casely Essamuah, highlighted in his opening speech that the Forum does not meet with the presumption that we will erase the tensions and contradictions we find in the world-wide Church of Christ. Rather, as a place of encounter, it seeks to be a kind of 'nonetheless'-sign of unity. In the midst of, and with all our differences, it is enriching to meet, to pray, worship and cultivate relationships and friendships. In Dr Essamuah's words: 'The fact that we are all here, is already a miracle.'

The GCF has a particular focus on paying attention to and relating to the changes in global Christianity. The keynote address was held by sociologist and mission historian Dr Gina Zurlo, who noted that, in the year 1900, around a third of the world's population was Christian, and that this figure is relatively constant. On the other hand, there is a shift in numbers from the northern hemisphere to the southern, and Dr Zurlo presented the prognosis that by 2050, if the current development continues, the majority of Christians in the world will be Pentecostals, with their centre in the global south.

The ecclesial landscape in Ghana itself is home to a long list of Christian traditions. Of the 31 million people living in this country, around 71% are Christian. The largest group are Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians, who make up 31,6% of the whole population. The GCF participants visited, among other things, one of Accra's mega churches, the Charismatic Action Chapel International, and celebrated a prayer service with them, where praise and worship songs had pride of place.

Sweden had three representatives present in Accra. In addition to the author of this report, representing the Swedish Christian Council, there was Dean Niclas Blåder from the Church of Sweden, and Cathedral lector Johannes Zeiler who was part of the Lutheran World Federation's delegation.

To ensure good encounters marked by the broadest possible ecumenical reach, the GCF gives much space to the personal testimonies of the participants. There was much time given for participants to share with each other how the Christian faith had come into their lives and what it had meant to them. In my own group, there were representatives from Finland, Ghana, Togo, Germany, South Korea, Kenya, Palestine and Sweden. This small group contained a great variety of traditions. Stories about the value of being carried by one's

belonging to a Christian tradition handed on for generations met testimonies about how the faith had entered a person's life through powerful conversion experiences that turned his or her world upside down.

A few examples from my group's sharing: Nick, a Pentecostal Christian from Togo, related how he was on his way to the USA but ended up in Hamburg where he now is the leader of a Charismatic migrant congregation. Greek Orthodox Maria from Jerusalem told of how she is marked by the hope in Christ as the God of peace in a place where religion all too often is expressed in violence. She spoke of how her family in generations has considered it their particular vocation to stay and be the body of Christ in that place, despite all the difficulties.

The gathering also included a visit to Cape Coast Castle, one of the slave forts in Ghana, from which over 3 million human beings were sold as goods and sent over the Atlantic. The visit reminded us of the brutal history of the slave trade and the wound it has left in West Africa as well as in those parts of the world who were involved in the trade. A particularly painful ecumenical aspect of the story is that this happened with the blessing, and sometimes the active involvement, of many churches. In a subsequent service of lament in Cape Coast's Wesley Methodist Cathedral, attention was drawn to the fact that even today, millions of men and women live in slavery or slave like conditions.

One of the principles of the GCF is that participants do not attend with a view to make others 'just a little more like myself'. The purpose is not to arrive at agreements or common declarations, but rather to meet, converse, worship together, and be enriched by the differences.

My personal reflection based on the experience of this fourth global gathering is that when such sharing is the foundational stance, the church-dividing differences do not need to be put at the centre. This open attitude is not, however, simply closing one's eyes to differences that are both challenging and at times provoking. One does indeed come across aspects of other parts of the Christian Church that are not immediately congenial, charming or exciting to get to know. That said, setting the important discussions on divisive questions aside for a few days to simply rejoice in the colourful diversity of the Church of Christ, gives new hope and strengthens faith. It reminds us that the call to unity is not, in the end, a heavy burden. Unity is created by God and can be discovered also in situations and contexts where we did not expect it.

For example, I listened and was touched by the man who talked about how a Charismatic Kenyan mega church, with a theology so far from my own, patiently supported his family for years, keeping them from starvation. I was inspired and encouraged to hear about faith in action in a church whose preaching of the prosperity gospel I still feel I need to distance myself from. Differences remain. Still, it is evident that the vocation of the Church is, in the end, not to define ourselves by the differences. The days in Accra became an important reminder that it is wise to retain an attitude of openness to be inspired by the strengths of other churches and devote ourselves to remedy, as best we can, our own shortcomings.

'DISCIPLESHIP OF THE HEART' ECUMENICAL MEETING FOR PRIESTS AND PASTORS, SWEDEN 2024

Malina Abrahamsson^{*}

Translated by Ingeborg-Marie Kvam

In front of the assembly, by the altar rail in the church of Vårdsnäs outside Linköping in the south of Sweden, Sister Siluana Tengberg OSB and Pastor Runar Eldebo stand together. Sister Siluana is dressed in her black monastic habit, Runar Eldebo in a light blue jacket; a woman and a man, from different church communions, and with many years between them. This evening, however, these differences have no importance. Sister Siluana and Runar Eldebo join in intercession for the priests, pastors and deacons proceeding up to the altar, accompanied by chants from Taizé and worship songs. The two of them listen attentively to what each person shares of his or her struggle, and then, each putting their hand on the person's shoulders—one on the right, one on the left—they pray to the God they both believe in. What a beautiful icon of ecumenism, I thought.

In Lent 2024, the Swedish review *Pilgrim* organised, for the fourth time, an ecumenical meeting for priests and pastors. During three days, in two different locations, Nya slottet Bjärka-Säby (belonging to the Pentecostal church) and Vårdsnäs stiftsgård (Church of Sweden), the 350 participants attended lectures, prayed the divine office together and engaged in conversation. Most of the participants came from Swedish parishes, but there were also those who had travelled from other Nordic countries.

When Peter Halldorf, editor of *Pilgrim* and organiser of the meeting, welcomed the participants the first evening, he evoked the late Martin Lönnebo, Bishop Emeritus of the Church of Sweden, who died in 2023. Lönnebo, who was very passionate about ecumenism, was present at the ecumenical meeting for priests and pastors in 2015, and had expressed great pleasure when he heard that it would be organised once

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again. Just a few weeks before he died, he had telephoned Halldorf to make sure the days marked for the meeting in his diary were correct. He also sent a greeting: 'The most important thing for us to talk about as priests and pastors is discipleship.' Inspired by Lönnebo then, the theme of the 2024 meeting was 'Discipleship of the Heart'.

When I spoke with Peter Halldorf after the meeting, he mentioned the crisis institutional Christianity has experienced in the West for a long time now. Churches and convents are emptied all over Europe and tens of thousands are leaving the Church. He says that this puts leaders in the Church under great pressure, and that it is therefore not surprising that priests and pastors, more than many other professional groups, suffer burnout.

'The solution to this crisis,' he holds, 'is not to turn back the clock or to reform the external forms and structures. Only a truly spiritual and theological renewal can give the Church and the Christian faith back their vitality.'

The ecumenical meetings for priests and pastors at Bjärka-Säby and Vårdsnäs have always focussed on the question, 'how can we support each other in our desire for a deeper faith?'

'Given the fact that we meet outside the current ecclesial structures, it is not the agenda or identity of any one church which dominates. We meet in a place away from the roads most travelled, in order to draw near to the deep wellsprings of faith together,' Halldorf continues. 'When we do this with sincere hearts, we also find that we come closer to each other, without forcing anything. Christian unity is imperative, and there is no other way for it to emerge.'

The choice of main speakers at this year's meeting reflected the ecumenical intention: the Trappist Monk and Bishop of Trondheim, Erik Varden OCSO, and the Church of Sweden Bishop of Uppsala Stift, Karin Johannesson. Erik Varden opened the meeting with a reflection on 'walking a road where the heart slowly dilates', taking as his point of departure the meaning of the expression *conversatio morum*. He discussed the etymology of the words and mixed his Norwegian with Latin. From time to time he would also burst into song. The audience was stunned. The next morning, Karin Johannesson spoke on the topic 'to practice what we preach'. She showed how everyday Christian practice can be connected with spiritual growth.

One of the participants at the meeting was Carin Dernulf, president of Immanuelskyrkan (Immanuel church) in Stockholm. She belongs to

a community called Equmeniakyrkan (Equmenia church) and has been a regular at Bjärka-Säby ever since she made her first retreat there twenty years ago. She also frequently participates in ecumenical events. 'I find it very enriching to meet Christians from different churches and communities,' she explains. 'It is marvellous to get to know new people and to discover that although we have different traditions and ways of expression, we are all disciples of Jesus. What is essential, we have in common.'

'Being reminded that each Christian is a child of his or her own tradition, where certain things are emphasised more than others, has been a liberating experience,' Dernulf says. 'It has made me better understand both myself and others. When we meet, we discover that God's family is even greater—the faith is greater!'

Between lectures, the priests, pastors and deacons had their meals together. Many expressed deep gratitude for the fact that they, who are usually the ones preaching and accompanying others, were allowed to come to a place and simply receive.

Peter Halldorf was struck by the good and relaxed atmosphere. 'There is a lightness in the air and a joy at being in a context free from prestige and rivalry, where ecclesial belonging is secondary, where we can breathe and be vulnerable without fear of exploitation.' He believes that this experience 'is balm for the soul of a Christian leader. It leaves an aftertaste of gratitude and a renewed desire to put out into the deep.'

THE MALINES CONVERSATIONS GROUP ‘COMES OF AGE’

Keith F. Pecklers*

On Friday 15 December 2023 at Westminster Abbey in London, the Malines Conversations Group celebrated its tenth anniversary with the presentation of the volume *Malines: Continuing the Conversations*, Thomas Pott, O.S.B., James Hawkey, Keith F. Pecklers, S.J., eds (London: SPCK, 2023).¹ An international group of Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians committed to dialogue and unity, the Group takes its name and inspiration from the original Malines Conversations (1921–1926).

Those early informal conversations, which gathered together a small group of British Anglicans and European Roman Catholics, were made possible because of the bonds of friendship between an Anglican, Lord Halifax (+1934), and a Catholic (Vincentian) priest from France, Etienne Fernand Portal (+1926) when the two met by chance on the Island of Madeira in the winter of 1899. In that pre-ecumenical age during long walks around the island, their discussions often focused on Anglican and Roman Catholic relations, and specifically on Leo XIII's 1896 declaration just three years prior on the invalidity of Anglican orders. For the British Anglican aristocrat and the French Catholic priest, both would later admit that theirs was a journey of ongoing conversion and mutual appreciation for the ecclesial tradition of the other, recognizing that there was much more in common between Anglicans and Catholics than points of division. Such ‘conversion’ was especially poignant for Portal, who came to believe that Anglican reunion with the Roman Catholic Church could not mean submission to Rome but rather convergence. Indeed, he became convinced that the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church were essentially one despite their sad division, thus a Roman re-examination of Anglican orders would be essential.

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¹ The three editors are members of the Malines Conversations Group Steering Committee chaired by Thomas Pott. (Editor's note: The book is reviewed in the current issue of *One in Christ*).

Those private conversations between two friends would bear fruit some thirty years later in 1921 in what became known as the Malines Conversations, hosted by the Archbishop of Malines-Bruxelles Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier (+1926), at his residence in Malines. As plans proceeded to establish a methodology and working model for the first Conversations, Mercier called upon his Benedictine friend Lambert Beauduin (+1960) of the Abbey of Mont César to serve as architect. The *magna carta* of their discussions was Beauduin's working paper '*L'Eglise Anglicane Unie non Absorbée*.' Beauduin had proposed a recognition of Anglican orders and respect for Anglican patrimony in the hope of eventual reunion.

The role which friendship played in those Conversations cannot be underestimated and indeed, it was those bonds of affection within the group that sustained and energized its deliberations. Mercier and Beauduin shared a close friendship, as did Halifax and Portal, Mercier and Halifax. In fact, Halifax was at the Cardinal's deathbed, and received the gift of Mercier's episcopal ring which is now set in a chalice at York Minister and used there regularly in the celebration of the Eucharist. The concept of the ring of a Catholic archbishop set in an Anglican chalice is hugely significant for ecumenical relations in the twenty-first century, and underlines the importance of what I have called elsewhere 'an ecclesiology of symbols.' This was especially evident in 1966 when Pope St Paul VI (+1978) removed his ring and placed it on the finger of Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey (+1988) at the Basilica of St Paul's 'Outside the Walls.' That symbolic gesture paved the way for the beginning of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) and the founding of the Anglican Centre in Rome which serves as a sort of embassy of Canterbury to the Holy See. To this day, every Archbishop of Canterbury wears that ring on official visits to Rome.

Since Ramsey's historic visit, subsequent Archbishops of Canterbury have received pectoral crosses from Pope St John Paul II (+2005) and from Pope Benedict (+2022). In 2016 when Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby visited Rome to mark that memorable visit of his predecessor in 1966, Pope Francis presented him with a pastoral staff modelled on the crosier used by Pope St Gregory the Great (+604). The giving of such gifts embodies great ecclesiological import as we consider the question of Anglican orders and the future of Anglican-Catholic relations. After all, if these men are not bishops, why would

they receive pectoral crosses and a pastoral staff? Moreover there have been shared blessings by Popes and Archbishops of Canterbury: during Pope St John Paul II's visit to Canterbury Cathedral in 1982; at Westminster Abbey during Pope Benedict's visit in 2010; and during Ecumenical Vespers at the Church of San Gregorio al Celio in 2016 during which Archbishop Welby joined Pope Francis in imparting the final blessing. In ecclesiological terms, such gifts—such shared blessings—are not mere tokens but rather rich in symbolism, and their significance is not to be taken lightly. Thus, there would appear to be a certain distance between what is written in Leo XIII's decree *Apostolicae curae* of 1896 which rejected the sacramental validity of Anglican orders, and the lived reality of Anglicans and Catholics living side by side today. Indeed, when Anglican bishops attend the General Papal Audience on Wednesday mornings, they are vested in cassock with pectoral cross and episcopal ring, and are seated alongside their Roman Catholic counterparts. When the Holy Father receives the Catholic bishops present at the end of the audience one by one, the Anglican bishops are received as well without distinction. This could not have been imagined prior to the Second Vatican Council.

In March 2013, in light of Vatican II and fifty years of ecumenical dialogue, the Malines Conversations Group was founded and wished to take up once again the agenda of those original Conversations when it held its first meeting at the Benedictine Monastery of Chevetogne in Belgium. Poignantly, that meeting occurred during the same week as the installation of Pope Francis as Bishop of Rome, and the enthronement of Justin Welby several days later as the one hundred and fifth Archbishop of Canterbury. At Chevetogne, the Group began its work by exploring the anthropological, historical, social and ecclesial developments from the Malines Conversations of the 1920s to the post-Conciliar period within our respective Communion. Discussions then proceeded to treat issues of communion and reception, liturgy and ethics, memory, identity, difference, and the changing face of our churches as we walk together into the future. The Group's work has proceeded to treat questions of sacramentality and ordination, with particular focus on apostolicity, liturgical theology and the relationship between anthropology and ordination in both Communion.

Today the Malines Conversations Group is under the patronage of Cardinal Jozef De Kesel, Archbishop Emeritus of Malines-Bruxelles, and former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. Like those original

Conversations, this is an informal dialogue and not officially sponsored by the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church, though it has received the blessing of both the Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity and Lambeth Palace. Since its inception it has included members of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) and the International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) including the co-Moderators of both official dialogues. The Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity sends an observer to the meeting each year as does Lambeth Palace, so there is regular communication on the Group’s deliberations with the leadership of both Communion, as well as with the two official Anglican–Roman Catholic international dialogues. In 2021 the Malines Group published an important document, *Sorores in spe*, which tackled the arguments stated in *Apostolicae curae* and offered a systematic response. In many ways it represents the Group’s coming of age and reflects the maturation of ten years of dedicated dialogue.

Like the original Malines Conversations, the Malines Conversations Group is based on friendship, and those bonds of affection within the group have only grown deeper these past ten years. As an informal dialogue, the Group, which consists of eight Anglican and eight Catholic members, offers greater space to explore questions and issues which the official dialogue is not free to discuss. The presence of bishops, liturgical and moral theologians, ecclesiologists and church historians, all with strong ecumenical interests, have added a richness to the Group’s deliberations based on an interdisciplinary methodology. Following the practice of ARCIC, meetings each year alternate between Anglican and Roman Catholic venues.

At this year’s meeting held at the Sofia Center in Helsinki, the Group discussed Christian anthropology, ordination, and other issues related to unity among Anglicans and Catholics. During their working sessions they were joined by several experts, among others Dr Alexandre Étaix who presented aspects of St John Chrysostom’s vision of the human person and free will, and Prof. David Roef Niewejaers, who led the group in a philosophical and prophetic exploration on the idea of an ‘ecclesiology of symbols.’

The Group further explored its work on anthropological aspects of sacramental theology, and how anthropology influences discussion on questions of validity and the ecclesial recognition of ministerial orders within the theological and pastoral reality of other Christian churches,

with particular reference to the Anglican Communion. Assisting those deliberations were important contributions offered by Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Old Catholic, and Orthodox theologians. This issue will be taken up again by the Group when it meets next year in Jerusalem.

Finland, where both Anglicans and Catholics are minority churches, provided a unique context for the 2024 meeting, helped by discussions with both Lutheran and Orthodox representatives along with visits to their respective churches. At the Sofia Center, encounters with Orthodox Metropolitan Ambrosius, Lutheran Bishop *Emerita* Irja Askola, and Catholic Bishop of Helsinki, Raimo Goyarrola expanded the ecclesiastical landscape of Finland in their joint presentations. The meeting opened by attending Sunday Mass at the Lutheran parish in Porvoo, where the Anglican–Lutheran Porvoo Agreement was signed in 1992. Appropriately, Anglican Bishop David Hamid, a member of the Malines Conversations Group, concelebrated the Mass. Also present was the Lutheran Bishop of Porvoo Bo-Göran Åstran. Following the Eucharist the parish staff hosted the Group for lunch at a nearby restaurant.

The Malines Conversations Group normally meets from a Sunday to a Friday, and on the Wednesday of this year's meeting in Helsinki, the Group travelled to Turku, the Primatial See of the Church of Finland where working sessions were held throughout the day at the Diocesan Centre. In addition to visiting the Cathedral and participating there in Finnish Lutheran Evening Prayer, they also learned about the Finnish devotional tradition under the guidance of the Cathedral parish staff and volunteers, and heard about Lutheran–Anglican collaboration in the city. That evening the Group was received by the Primate of the Church of Finland Archbishop Tapio Luoma at his official residence. During dinner the Archbishop spoke about the ecumenical work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, relations between the Church and Finnish government, and current issues. The Group then presented to the Archbishop a summary of its own work, objectives and methodology, and the fruits of its visit to Finland.

During the days together in Finland while praying and discussing together and recognizing ever more clearly a common call on the path to Christian unity, the Malines Conversations Group was left ruminating on the new perspectives that had emerged. The *Sorores in spe* document concludes by pointing out that when we walk together,

we talk, and when we talk together our eyes are opened to recognizing the presence of the risen Christ anew as on the road to Emmaus. Indeed, when we talk openly about the experiences of our own churches and our common experience as Christians, we are keenly aware that so much has changed since the time of the Reformation, and that our common baptism sets us on a firm path as we walk together on pilgrimage into the future as the Church of Christ: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

The Malines Conversations Group is next scheduled to meet in late March 2025 at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem.

BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas Pott, James Hawkey, Keith Pecklers (eds), *Malines: Continuing the Conversations* (London: SPCK, 2023), 228+7 pages. ISBN 978-0-281-09035-0.

The volume under review marks the centenary of the Malines Conversations (1921–1927), which sought to respond to the judgement of Pope Leo XIII that Anglican Orders are ‘null and void’. It appears as the last in a long list of discussions between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, of which we will briefly retrace the history.

Informal conversations were going on throughout the twentieth century, notably between Archbishop John Habgood and Cardinal Godfried Danneels in 1985–1995, but, in fact, ever since the Reformation, there had been a number of exchanges between senior Anglicans and Roman Catholics aimed at healing the breach between the two communions.

In 1609, for example, conversation occurred between Bishop Lancelot Andrews and Sir Robert Bellarmine which led to exchanges over the next three decades. In 1632, Pope Urban VIII sent Fr Leander, a Benedictine scholar of note, and a fellow student of Archbishop William Laud, to study the church order and doctrine of the Church of England. Fr Leander noted extensive agreement with the doctrine of his Church, noting that any differences between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church were due to a different manner of expression. Three areas of difference, however, were identified—the Eucharist: sacrifice and presence, apostolic succession, and the role of the bishop of Rome. These issues were also identified in subsequent conversations. Thus Archbishop Laud and Bishop Montagu of Chichester, and Fr Davenport and the Apostolic Delegate, Mgr Ponzini, engaged in conversation and judged that Anglican Orders and theology were legitimate expressions of catholic tradition.

Later that century, Archbishop William Wake entered conversation with divines of the Sorbonne—Dr E. du Pin and Pierre Girandi. Once again the principal issue to be resolved pertained to ordination, ministry and apostolic succession. They also emphasised the distinction between fundamentals and less essential doctrines.

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of what came to be called the Tractarian or Oxford Movement, associated with the scholars John

Henry Newman, Edward Pusey, John Keble, Isaac Williams and Alexander Forbes. Through the study of the Early Fathers of the Church, they sought a renewal of catholic thought in the Anglican churches.

All of these conversations arrived at similar conclusions. In fundamentals there was agreement, even when differently expressed. However there were differences that needed to be addressed—the above-mentioned points concerning the Eucharist: sacrifice and presence of Christ, the role of bishops, apostolic succession and the primacy of the Pope.

Of particular importance for relations between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, was the encounter between Lord Halifax and Abbé Portal. In 1899 they had met while on holiday, struck up a friendship and engaged in conversations to address the divisive issue identified in the earlier dialogues. They continued their exchanges over the next five years, producing pamphlets on the issue of Anglican Orders and eventually, at his invitation, met Pope Leo XIII, and presented him with the results of their discussion. For many reasons, theological and political, the Pope finally issued an Apostolic Letter, *Apostolicae Curae*, with its famous judgement that Anglican Orders are ‘null and void’. This elicited a carefully argued and comprehensive response and refutation from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in their *Saepius Officio* in 1897. The document so impressed Lord Halifax that he gathered a group of Anglican and Roman Catholic churchmen and scholars to explore some of the divisive issues which hindered unity and positive relations between the Churches. These conversations, which took place with the knowledge and encouragement of Pope Pius XI, were under the auspices of Cardinal Mercier of Malines and the Archbishop of York. Their major focus was that of the judgement by Pope Leo XIII on Anglican Orders.

The present volume is thus the last chapter—so far—in a long story. It reports on a series of meetings which took place in this century to address once again that verdict. It includes presentations made over a ten-year period as this new Malines group sought to discuss these issues and to finalise their response in the document *Sorores in Spe Resurrectionis*.

Meeting under the auspices of Archbishop Rowan Williams and Cardinal Danneels of Malines, this group included liturgical scholars, moral and biblical theologians, church historians, ecclesiologists and

ecumenical theologians. Significantly, it included the chairmen of ARCIC III and of IARCCUM (International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission), thus drawing on those official ecumenical discussions and experiences. The eighteen members of this current group, replicating the original Malines Group of Lord Halifax and Abbé Portal, see themselves as a group of friends with a passion for the unity of the Church.

It is clear that there is now a vastly different climate in the relations between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. As with other Churches and Christian World Communions, both have been involved in and influenced by the twentieth century's liturgical and ecumenical movements. As *Sorores in Spe* notes: 'Much inspiration can be drawn from their [the liturgical and ecumenical movements] ideas, proposals and achievements [...] these movements were at root organically linked.'

The climate change was also in large part due to the work of the Second Vatican Council, at which the different Churches and Christian World Communions were present as participant observers. The Council initiated theological change with a renewed emphasis on the Church as sacrament (here the members of the group draw helpfully on the insights of the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann), on the Church as the Body of Christ, the people of God, and *koinonia*—communion through the Holy Spirit. Significantly for this study, Vatican II had affirmed that all the baptised participate in the *triplex munus* of Christ. The Second Vatican Council signalled an openness on the part of the Roman Catholic Church to engage in dialogue, and to journey together to heal past wounds and misunderstandings. This is evident above all in *Lumen Gentium*, the *Decree on Ecumenism* and the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, and these documents are drawn on in *Sorores in Spe*.

In the Vatican Council documents, as in the reports of the World Council of Churches, the language and awareness of being on a pilgrimage together, implying learning from fellow pilgrims on the way, occurs frequently. The pilgrimage has been pursued through the international bilateral dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, evident in the work of ARCIC and IARCCUM, the latter of which was mandated to promote response to

¹ *Sorores in Spe*, section 7, p. 209.

the ARCIC agreements. As a mark of this new climate, relationships have been strengthened through meetings of Popes and Archbishops, marked by symbols, gestures, and gifts exchanged.

At the very outset of their work, a careful analysis of each of the meetings of the earlier Malines Conversations of 1921–1927 was undertaken by Nicholas Sagovsky. New approaches, hermeneutical insights to Scripture are then discussed, and lessons learned from liturgical studies. Reflection on the signs of the times widens the horizon of the discussions. A major reflection explores the understanding of sacramentality, out of which the ordinals of both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church are carefully presented. A final section of the volume explores steps towards the Healing of Memories. All of these essays and presentations feed into *Sorores in Spe Resurrectionis*, the full text of which is given in the penultimate chapter.

On the basis of these papers and of the discussions over the years, *Sorores in Spe* posits a renewed understanding of the issues which have been contentious over the centuries. It reinforces the concept and awareness that the two communities have been on a pilgrimage together, where each learns from the other.

By drawing on this growing relationship, on new insights in hermeneutics and liturgical studies, and on some wider ecumenical discussions, the Malines group have overcome some of the previous divisive understandings. Thus, *Sorores in Spe* embraces the growing distinction in the Faith and Order documents *BEM* and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* between apostolic succession and apostolic faith: 'We have come to understand apostolic succession as faithful transmission of all the various aspects of ecclesial life which constitute the Church as a living communion.'²

The document then emphasises that all the baptised participate in Christ's threefold ministry of Prophet, Priest and King—the *triplex munus*—before going on to explore ordained ministries. The first of these is the ministry of Deacons. The discussion draws on the insights of Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* and the subsequent *Motu Proprio* and *Directories* of the appropriate Vatican Congregation. This section could have been enhanced by incorporating insights from the Church of

² *Sorores in Spe*, section 8, p. 209.

England's report *For Such a Time as This: A Renewed Diaconate in the Church of England*.

Discussion of the Priesthood draws on the text of ARCIC 1, and asserts that the priest presides when the church meets to make the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ. It goes on to emphasise the importance of understanding anamnesis as the root for understanding the meaning of 'remembrance of Him'. It would have been helpful if the text cited for this the extensive study on anamnesis by Max Thurian, *The Eucharistic Memorial*, which was essential for the Faith and Order document *BEM* and the Lima Liturgy which was based on it. If this did not fit into the style of the text elsewhere, footnotes could have been employed, and perhaps more use could have been made of this mechanism both here and for other issues.

The ordination of women in Anglican Churches is noted. Clearly this presents a problem, but it is underlined that the document *Sorores in Spe* is addressing the condemnation of Anglican Orders by Pope Leo XIII. At that time there were no women priests or bishops, so that no judgement was made on the issue of the ordination of women. Clearly this is not adequate. It is particularly ironic that in a document whose very title is 'Sisters', no such discussion is presented! (The title of the document, of course, is taken from the tomb in Westminster Abbey of Queen Elizabeth and Mary Tudor.) No differentiation between man and woman is evident in the Anglican Ordinal, and since the Church of England ordains women to the priesthood, they could share their experience of such a ministry as an aspect of their journey on the pilgrim way. It seems obvious that a conversation on the issue is necessary, and this group of Malines friends would be well placed to undertake such a task.

The discussion of the ministry of bishops draws on a number of appropriate biblical texts to outline the role of the bishop in the church. The role of the episcopate here reflects a number of recent ecumenical agreements. While such elements are evident in the document, it would have been good to have had a reflection on the episcopate as 'communal, personal and collegial', as expressed in *BEM* and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. In Faith and Order discussions, the late Fr Jean Tillard OP emphasised the importance of these three being held in tension with each other.

It is not clear in this Malines study whether the episcopate belongs to the *esse* of the church or to the *bene esse*. It would have been good to

have a note acknowledging that in the New Testament there is evidence of a variety of structures of the church. A number of Anglican divines had discussed this over the centuries, as is documented in Norman Syke's study *The Church of England and Non-Episcopal Churches in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. *Sorores in Spe* is of course reflecting on the understanding of the current practice of the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, but it does so in the context of a wider ecumenical horizon.

A great deal of attention is paid to the ordination rites of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Church of England. Undoubtedly, the discussion on ordination rites was drafted by members of the group who specialised in liturgical studies. The important comprehensive study of ordination rites by Fr James Puglisi in *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry* could have offered an important resource for such a discussion.

A discussion on the Healing of Memories concludes the document. It is interesting that the two examples of this in the document involve actors who were not present in the Malines meetings. Both examples draw on agreements with the Roman Catholic Church, namely *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, which is an agreement between the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation, and the Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. *Sorores in Spe* would have benefited from a discussion of what is involved in reconciling memories. The group could have drawn on the Vatican Theological Commission report *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, among other studies on the theme, and offered some suggestions for the steps which might enable healing on the pilgrim way.

Sorores in Spe Resurrectionis is an important contribution to ecumenical dialogue. It offers a pathway through an historic hurt which has determined relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. However, in his important epilogue to the volume, Archbishop Rowan Williams points to the limitation of the group members. They were largely from European Roman Catholic Churches and Religious Orders and from the Church of England. Thus the document does not necessarily reflect the experience of relations between the Roman Catholic Church and Anglican churches in other parts of the world. The Archbishop comments that:

they [The Malines Conversations Group] show little awareness of any non-European dimension to ecclesial life; they barely notice the potential of Eastern Christian thought, let alone classical Reformed theology, to breaking certain kinds of deadlocks; and they never quite get down to the fundamental question of what the integrity of the Church as Church consists in.

He goes on to welcome the approach of the group, their attitude of standing back from the purely defensive mode of argument, and their awareness that both partners have much to learn from each other as they continue on the pilgrim way.

The report and the essays, however, do not chart a way forward. It is not clear whether *Sorores in Spe Resurrectionis* will be sent to the various Provinces of the Anglican Communion for information or for comment. Will it be presented to the latest phase of ARCIC discussions or to the General Synod of the Church of England?

Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England are members of a number of ecumenical bodies, particularly the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. While the Malines group has evidently been influenced by two major Faith and Order studies—*BEM* and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*—benefit might have been gained from drawing on the consultations on *Episcopate and Episcopacy* and *the Quest for Visible Unity*, at which the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church were represented by theologians from their Churches.

This leads me to ask about the ecumenical nature of this pilgrimage. The Church of England has taken part in a number of bilateral dialogues on Ministry with various Reformed European Churches, and reached agreements, most notably the Meissen, Porvoo, Reuilly and St Andrews accords. When engaging in current dialogues have such agreements been taken into account? Are these partners on the ecumenical pilgrimage present, even if they are not there physically in the dialogical space? Is *Sorores in Spe* compatible and consonant with these earlier commitments?

Malines: Continuing the Conversations is an important contribution to the continuing discussions on ministry, and an invitation to engage further as we continue on the ecumenical pilgrim way and it should be allowed to inform the current and ongoing dialogues between these two Church Communions.

Revd Dr Alan Falconer

Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum, Pro Oriente Foundation (ed.), *Listening to the East. Synodality in Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Traditions*, Collana Ut Unum Sint 4 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2023), 667 pages. ISBN-10 8826608385.

The volume under review publishes the papers presented and workshops held at two conferences 'on the understanding and practice of synodality' in the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches held at the Pontifical University St Thomas Aquinas (*Angelicum*) in Rome in November 2023.

In the conference devoted to synodality in the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the papers and workshops were divided into thematic sections: 1. Communion: Walking together in the Holy Spirit; 2. Participation: Walking together with the whole people of God; 3. Mission: Walking together in the contemporary world.

In the conference dedicated to synodality in the Ancient Oriental Churches the contributions were grouped according to the single Churches: 1. Antiochian Syriac Orthodox Church; 2. Armenian Apostolic Church; 3. Assyrian tradition (Assyrian Church of the East and Ancient Church of the East); 4. Coptic Orthodox Church; Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church; 5. Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church; and also 7. Synodality in regional ecumenical networks (synodality in the Middle East and in the Christian Conference of Asia).

At the end of the papers there is a 'Synthesis Paper by Catholic Listeners'.

In a review that is perforce limited in length, it is impossible to give an adequate account of each single contribution, or even to name all the individual contributions. It is likewise difficult to give a meaningful synthesis of the contributions. Except for the keynote addresses in the various sections, the contributions are very short, often giving only a brief general description of a situation or indicating a problem.

Synodality for the Eastern Orthodox and Ancient Oriental Churches is not a theoretical question, but is of the nature of those Churches. Hence, it is often contrasted with the mode of governance in the Roman Catholic Church. There is no one model of synodality, and certainly no one perfect way of exercising it. Synodality functions in various forms in the various Orthodox Churches, but if Orthodoxy is viewed universally, one cannot be blind to the grave problems that today beset how synodality functions in the pan-Orthodox world. As one keynote speaker, Sorin Șelaru, stated:

when we speak of the synodality of the Orthodox Church, any simplification could be misleading because it reduces the concrete experience of this ecclesial reality or its modes of manifestation over time to a single idealized and abstract model, which fails to grasp the full diversity of perspectives and experiences within Orthodoxy' (pp. 55–56).

Present-day problems with synodality are in the back of the mind of many other Orthodox speakers at the conference.

One of the problems today is the existence of national autocephalous Churches. Bishop Maxim (Vasiljevic) touches on this when he says in his keynote address that:

the fact that there were no national churches in the earliest times is [...] not a matter of mere historical accident. The main reason that the actual form of synodality we have today would not fit easily into the pattern of theology of that time is a profoundly theological one' (p. 51).

One would have welcomed further and deeper reflections on this problem. The problem is mentioned also by other speakers, but besides voicing their frustration with the present state of things (and anyone not well-versed in the present situation of the Orthodox Churches would have difficulty in understanding their often cryptic allusions), they do not carry the discussion forward.

Closely related to the problem of national autocephalous Churches is the relationship between synodality and primacy, this time not so much in the individual autocephalous Churches as in the Orthodox Church as a whole. One would like to ask what in the world Svetoslav Riboloff means by saying that:

The formation of two ecclesiastical centers in the Roman Empire had a defining character for the council institution in the West and in the East. In this way, Rome and Constantinople represent to the present as [sic] exclusive bearers of the event of synodality' (p. 73).

In the Roman Empire there were more than two ecclesiastical centers. Here one senses the tension between the Greek and the non-Greek Churches, but finds little insight into the crux of the problem. Casting all the blame on one side, as this speaker does, does not illuminate the problem. Other contributors who likewise speak with the present political and ecclesiological situation in mind (such as the tensions between Constantinople and Moscow) often reveal their bias rather than attempt to present the complexities of the present state of the Orthodox Churches.

In both parts of the volume, that dealing with the Orthodox Churches and that dealing with the Oriental Orthodox, while descriptions are given of how synodality functions (or fails to function), while there is talk about synodality, primacy, and 'democratic' organs, there is no general reflection on the exercise of the authority of primacy and the limits of 'democracy' (a term used by a number of speakers).

The short contributions under the headings of 'Responses', 'Practices of Synodality', and 'Workshops' for the Orthodox Churches and 'Experiences of Synodality—Workshops' for the Ancient Oriental Churches, provide readers outside these Churches with at least a first introduction to some aspects of church life today, especially as regards the laity and women in particular.

The English of the contributions could have been better edited, and the volume as a whole better proof-read.

In spite of the shortcomings I have pointed out, the volume is a useful introduction to the exercise of synodality in the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, and will be especially helpful to all who are engaged in ecumenical dialogue with these Churches. They often reveal the very real tensions that exist today among the Orthodox Churches. Since not a few authors compare aspects of synodality in the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches with the practices of the Catholic Church, the volume will be useful too for further reflection on synodality in the Roman Catholic Church. The questions raised in the various contributions can also be useful in stimulating further theological reflection on many topics, especially those regarding ecclesiology.

Sr Sophia Senyk, Monastery of Bose

A. Melloni (dir.) and L. Ferracci (ed.), *A History of the Desire for Christian Unity. Vol. 1. Dawn of Ecumenism* (Brill, 2021). 792 pages. ISBN 978-90-04-44669-4.

This book is like a box of chocolates; however much you are tempted, do not attempt to consume it all at one sitting. It has 32 chapters over 743 double-column pages which cover the period from the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. The time line is long, and the geographical spread is wide, from Orthodoxy to North and Latin America, and a chapter on the Congo. The authors are similarly diverse, and include Bishop Zizioulas and Paul Avis, who are well known here, and also Martin Browne, formerly a member of the Editorial Board of *One in Christ*, as well as other less familiar names. All the writers are academics. Each chapter provides an extensive bibliography.

This review is being written in May 2024, notable for the fact that the Anglican Primates have just had a meeting in Rome, and had an audience of the Pope, who said to them, ‘even if we are not yet one, our imperfect communion must not prevent us from walking together.’ (2 May 2024) Such a speech on such an occasion, passes these days as fairly routine. Only by looking back can the distance travelled be seen. This book provides a measure of that distance.

One notable feature of the book is its spread, and the title indicates this, the word ‘Desire’ implies more than just a dry history of facts. From the first two chapters, Zizioulas’ dealing with theology, Eastern and Western, and Lamberigts’ dealing with the French and the North American revolutions, the horizons are stretched. The political dimensions of ecumenism (and anti-ecumenism) are not neglected and should be noted.—Do not be put off by the title of the chapter, ‘Historiography of the Ecumenical Movement: The State of the Question’, which provides some interesting detail about the political background to some historical ecumenism.

The desire for union between churches (and its accomplishing) has a long history. An early chapter provides intriguing detail of unions between Reformed and Lutheran Churches following the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and continues describing the genesis and import of the Evangelical Alliance and other bodies, such as the Swiss Evangelical Alliance, whose secretary was Henri Dunant, who founded the Red Cross.

Although about history, the book is not irrelevant to today’s challenges. The chapter on the long ecumenical history of Orthodoxy

provides an insight into the present difficulties of the Orthodox Patriarchates, and it needs to be read with the chapter on the Russian Church. Likewise, the chapter on an indigenous movement in the Congo is relevant to the discussion on inculturation, and the impact of 'foreign missions' to native cultures. Again, politics are part of the story. It is regrettable that in the text Congo is sometimes thus, and sometimes Kongo.

For a book published by a Dutch company, edited by two Italians, there is considerable space devoted to the United Kingdom: the Oxford Movement, the Edinburgh Conference, both appear, and Avis uses Hooker, Arnold, Maurice, Coleridge, Halifax, Gladstone and others to display the wide field of Anglicanism. Avis concludes with extracts from the eirenical *Response* of the Church of England to the more trenchant *Apostolicae Curae*. Barlow and Browne end their chapter on the Malines Conversations with the recollection of Pope St Paul VI spontaneously placing his papal ring on Archbishop Michael Ramsey's finger in 1966.

German ecumenism is represented by articles on von Döllinger, Möller, and von Harnack, and the Hochkirche Movement. It was interesting to read of Döllinger's contacts with the Church of England, in the persons of Pusey and Gladstone, and Anglican participants in his Conferences of 1874 and 1875. I found Fédou's chapter on Möller and von Harnack interesting, in particular his comment that both were historians of the early church. Möller's influence on Congar and de Lubac is well known. It is intriguing, and a lesson in political geography that von Harnack came from a German family who lived in what is now Estonia, but was then part of the Russian Empire. Using the modern term 'receptive ecumenism' it can be noted that von Harnack wrote of the monks and Franciscans who influenced the growth of the church. Fédou cites von Harnack as suggesting that any reunification of the churches be based on the study of Scripture.

This is taken up in a chapter, 'The Catholic Biblical Movement between Fear and Hope' by Lamberigts. He points out that St Pius X linked modernism with Protestantism and describes the 'anti-modernist' approach of Rome to the study of the Scriptures until the 1930's. He notes the ecumenical approach to Biblical studies of the post-war period due to Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. It is interesting to learn that it was at the World Exposition in Belgium in 1958, that the congress for Biblical Studies there showed how Catholic exegetes had become open to various interpretations of the Biblical

texts. On the negative side he refers to (Cardinal) Bea, and (Cardinal) Willebrands and the disagreements between the Holy Office and the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Nevertheless, after *Divino Afflante Spiritu* more open Biblical studies were encouraged.

More positively, liturgy was a field of ecumenical collaboration and mutual assistance, and there are interesting chapters on the relationship between Catholic and Orthodox liturgy development, and Catholic-Protestant influences. However, there is nothing on the pre-Second World War 'Parish Communion' movement in the Church of England, and the similar encouragement of frequent Communion by Catholics under the changes to the Eucharistic fast under Pope Pius XII in 1953 and 1957. Likewise, there is a parallel between the (eventual) production of Common Worship of the Church of England via Series 1, 2, and 3 Holy Communion in the Church of England and the changes in the Catholic eucharistic liturgy after the Second Council of the Vatican.

War and, paradoxically, the work for peace both have provided opportunities for the churches to work together, and there are two interesting chapters on the churches in World War I and peace movements from 1907 to 1919 and the conversations in which von Harnack was involved. The footnotes to both chapters offer varied and many windows into a largely unknown area. One pines for a good library on one's doorstep. Indeed, the footnotes are one of the gifts of this book. Given a reader's card to libraries with these volumes, the enthusiast would be kept chained to the chair/computer terminal for hours and hours.

Various other ecumenical 'notables' are honoured with chapters: Beauduin, Brent, Mott and Söderblom, a Belgian, a Canadian, an American and a Swede. Brent's includes notes on the YMCA, Mott's on the World Student Christian Federation. Beauduin and Söderblom remind us that geography does not limit influence. Ideas will travel.

Opposed to the idea of ecumenism was Pius XI, and his encyclical *Mortalium Animos* of 6 January 1928 is discussed by Marie Levant, who puts it in its historical context of the battle against modernism, and the desire to restore a fully Christian (=Catholic) society in Europe. The context too, is one of post First World War ecumenical conferences and also the Malines conversations. These events spoke of a union between churches, but not under Rome. True unity for the Pope was to be accomplished under Rome, and so, Catholics were forbidden to attend them.

Two chapters offer insights into areas which are not usually familiar to Europeans: the 1898 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago and the Panama Congress of 1916. This last was equivalent to, and inspired by, the Edinburgh Conference of 1910. The chapter on the Edinburgh Conference also has details of earlier missionary conferences: London 1888, New York 1900, Madras 1902, and Shanghai 1907. Another area possibly unfamiliar, is the American Social Gospel movement. This united white churches, concerned about worker exploitation, and black churches worried about racial terrorism. The churches together sought to change the existing social structures in the cause of justice.

There is also a chapter on Liberal Theology and the congresses of the 'International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religions' which began in London in 1901, and went to Amsterdam in 1903, Geneva in 1905, Boston in 1907, Berlin in 1910, and Paris in 1913. This is an interesting area, and the congresses are described by the author, Mark D. Chapman, as undogmatic ecumenism, based on a universalist understanding of religion.

One omission from this volume, perhaps it will be in one of the promised three following volumes, is the contribution of patristic studies to ecumenism. The first Oxford Conference was in 1951, organised by F.L. Cross (of the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church) and it attracted a wide number of scholars. It was the first time that such an ecumenical event had happened in England, and also one which Catholic clergy were allowed to attend without sanction. Patristics was not considered to be a dangerous area even by the English Catholic hierarchy. The Conference has been repeated every four years. Like the Bible and liturgy, patristics presents a common field that all can plough with profit, and share the discovered delights.

The volume concludes with a long essay by Kenneth R. Ross on the International Missionary Council between 1910 and 1961. In 1961 the Council became part of the World Council of Churches. It is a reminder that ecumenism is not an end in itself, but the crucial means to give a better witness of Christianity to the world: that there be a truly universal Church whose mission it is to convert the whole world (Mt. 28.19; *Unitatis Redintegratio* §1).

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