



**CHRIST CALLING TO CHRIST:  
RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM, ARCIC DIALOGUE AND  
THE GIFT OF PRIMACY**

CRISTO CHAMANDO A CRISTO:  
ECUMENISMO RECEPTIVO, O DIÁLOGO DA ARCIC  
E O DOM DO PRIMADO

CRISTO CHIAMA A CRISTO:  
ECUMENISMO RICETTIVO, IL DIALOGO DELL'ARCIC  
E IL DONO DEL PRIMATO

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**ABSTRAC**

The article proposes an interesting reflection on the dimension of the reception of the international Catholic-Anglican dialogue on the question of primacy.

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## RESUMO

O artigo propõe uma reflexão interessante sobre a dimensão da recepção do diálogo católico-anglicano internacional sobre a questão do primado.

## RIASSUNTO

L'articolo propone un'interessante riflessione sulla dimensione della recezione del dialogo internazionale cattolico-anglicano sulla questione del primato.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This platinum jubilee of the World Council of Churches is a significant occasion for us who bear Christ's name. We look back gratefully at what His grace had enabled us to do for the sake of His Broken Body. We also look ahead with hope, straining the ears of our hearts to hear more clearly what His voice is yet calling us to do that He may realize in us the full, visible unity His one, undivided Body given for the life of the world. An echo of this call may be heard in the emergence of a new methodology for dialogue: receptive ecumenism.

In its recently published statement of *Walking Together on the Way (WTW)*, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) describes receptive ecumenism as a dynamic process that involves being,

prepared both to discern what appears to be overlooked or underdeveloped in one's own tradition and to ask whether such things are better developed in the other tradition. It then requires the openness to ask how such perceived strengths in the other tradition might be able, through receptive learning, to help with the development and enrichment of this aspect of ecclesial life within one's own tradition (§18).

In his commentary on *WTW*, Ormond Rush noted, "This spirit of openness captures what Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has said of ecumenical dialogue: 'There is a duty to let oneself be purified and enriched by the other.'"<sup>1</sup> I would add that receptive

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1 Ormond Rush, *A Catholic Commentary on 'Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal'* of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission, 4, citing "Ecumenismo: crisi o svolta? Dialogo tra il Card. J. Ratzinger e il teologo protestante P. Ricca," *Nuova Umanità*, 15 (1993) 101–21. Rush's commentary is online at:



ecumenism expressed the kind of conversion Vatican II declared indispensable for ecumenism: “There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart.”<sup>2</sup> As John Paul II noted in *Ut Unum Sint*, this conversion must be communal as well as personal (see §15).

In this article celebrating this anniversary of the WCC, I shall examine the particular purification that ARCIC is calling the Catholic Church to embrace regarding the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome, specifically its relationship to collegiality taught by Vatican II. I shall do this by examining (1) ARCIC’s understanding of this relationship and the purification it calls for and (2) offering a Catholic response to this call, realized through a truer understanding of the instruments Vatican II called for to affect this relationship: the Synod of Bishops and Episcopal Conferences. I shall conclude by considering how this call for purification is fundamentally a call to conversion, so that we Catholics may more readily receive the gifts Christ desires to give us through our Anglican sisters and brothers.

## 2 ARCIC ON THE PRIMACY

While ARCIC had considered the primacy of the bishop of Rome (see *Authority in the Church I*, *Elucidation and Authority in the Church II*), it was in the statement *The Gift of Authority* (*Gift*) that ARCIC proposed its understanding of what this primacy is at its heart: a gift of God “to be received by all the churches (§47)” for building up that unity for which Christ prayed (cf. §60): “that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me (Jn 17:21).”

Of course, ARCIC was not proposing that this gift would take the shape with which Catholics are already familiar. That said, Catholics would not find dissimilar, only purified of those elements that have made it appear a caricature of its substance and a stumbling block to Christian unity. To appreciate what ARCIC proposed in *Gift*, it is

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[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20180604\\_walkingtogether-ontheway-commentary\\_en.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20180604_walkingtogether-ontheway-commentary_en.pdf).  
2 *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR), §7.



important to consider the ecclesiological basis in which this gift is rooted: the Church is a communion.

In its statement *The Church as Communion*, ARCIC named the concept of communion as the key to unlocking the mystery of the Church. Communion is a relationship based upon participation in a shared reality (§12). The Church is a communion because it shares in the life of the triune God, in whom its members enter into communion with one other (§13) and become an effective witness to the communion that God wills for all people (§§15-17). This communion transcends space and time. It links the present to past and future generations of believers (§31) as one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church (§5). This communion necessarily finds expression in visible human communities (§15), at every level of its life: local, regional and universal. Thus diversity is inherent to the Church (§23), which may rightly be said to be a communion of churches (§43).

While all the Church's members are responsible for their communion, particular responsibility falls on those exercising the ministry of episcopate, i.e., bishops. By means of their communion, the whole Church is made aware of the views and concerns of all the churches (§33). This "ministry of oversight," the fullness of which is entrusted to the episcopate, has both collegial and primatial dimensions. It is grounded in the community's life and open to participation in discovering of God's will. It is exercised so that unity and communion are expressed, preserved and fostered at every level. In the context of the communion of all the churches the episcopal ministry of a universal primate finds its role as the visible focus of unity (§45).

It was on the basis of this ecclesiology of communion that, in *The Gift of Authority*, ARCIC proposed the primacy of the Bishop of Rome as a gift to all the churches: a primacy, rooted in collegiality in the service of the Church as communion.

The universal primacy of the bishop of Rome is a particular expression of the authority every bishop has to ensure that the faithful of the local church entrusted to him maintain communion and "walk together in Christ," i.e., synodally. "The term synodality (derived from syn-hodos meaning 'common way') indicates the manner in which believers and churches are held together in communion as they do this (§34)." As the bishops must

ensure that the bonds of the Church's communion are nurtured and fostered at every level of its life, their care for the synodality of its communion is of utmost importance. As ARCIC stated, in a paragraph that deserves to be cited fully, due to its density,

The mutual interdependence of all the churches is integral to the reality of the Church as God wills it to be. No local church that participates in the living Tradition can regard itself as self-sufficient. Forms of synodality, then, are needed to manifest the communion of the local churches and to sustain each of them in fidelity to the Gospel. The ministry of the bishop is crucial, for this ministry serves communion within and among local churches. Their communion with each other is expressed through the incorporation of each bishop into a college of bishops. Bishops are, both personally and collegially, at the service of communion and are concerned for synodality in all its expressions. These expressions have included a wide variety of organs, instruments and institutions, notably synods or councils, local, provincial, worldwide, ecumenical. The maintenance of communion requires that at every level there is a capacity to take decisions appropriate to that level. When those decisions raise serious questions for the wider communion of churches, synodality must find a wider expression (§37).

Among such wider expressions is the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome who from his place within the College of Bishops as servant of their communion, and hence of the communion of the Church of churches, may, when the Church's unity in faith is at stake (cf. §44), speak the Church's faith to the faithful of all the churches in the name of the College of their Bishops. Thus ARCIC stated, in another paragraph deserving full citation,

within his wider ministry, the Bishop of Rome offers a specific ministry concerning the discernment of truth, as an expression of universal primacy. This particular service has been the source of difficulties and misunderstandings among the churches. Every solemn definition pronounced from the chair of Peter in the church of Peter and Paul may, however, express only the faith of the Church. Any such definition is pronounced within the college of those who exercise episcopate and not outside that college. Such authoritative teaching is a particular exercise of the calling and responsibility of the body of bishops to teach and affirm the faith. When the faith is articulated in this way, the Bishop of Rome proclaims the faith of the local churches. It is thus the wholly reliable teaching of the whole Church that is operative in the judgement of the universal primate. In solemnly formulating such teaching, the universal primate must discern and declare, with the assured assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit, in fidelity to Scripture and Tradition, the authentic faith of the whole Church, that is, the faith proclaimed from the beginning. It is this faith, the faith of all the baptised in communion, and this only, that each bishop utters with the body of bishops in council. It is this faith which the Bishop of Rome in certain



circumstances has a duty to discern and make explicit. This form of authoritative teaching has no stronger guarantee from the Spirit than have the solemn definitions of ecumenical councils (§47).

Such an exercise of authority is not arbitrary, and though singly spoken, it is never isolated, neither from the communion of the College of Bishops nor from that of the Church's faithful whose sense of the faith is essential to the discernment of truth (cf. §30). Indeed, the bishop of Rome is accountable both to his brother bishops and to the Church. He is above neither criticism nor correction. For all that, he is Peter for the Church (§46). In this light, ARCIC chose to make the unprecedented step of proposing that such a Petrine Primacy of the bishop of Rome is a gift to be received by all the churches (§37) – even before they are in full communion – as “an effective sign for all Christians as to how this gift of God builds up that unity for which Christ prayed (§60).”

Tellingly, ARCIC called for such a reception – or re-reception – of this gift by the Catholic Church (§62). On what basis? On the basis that in the centuries since the rupturing (or better put, various rupturings) of the Church's communion, aspects of its understanding of the gift of the primacy have become inadequate or even misleading (§25). As Vatican II acknowledged in *Unitatis redintegratio*, “the Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all her bearings (§4). In light of the tensions regarding the Catholic Church's realization of Vatican II's teachings on the relationship between primacy and collegiality, ARCIC's call for re-reception is indeed poignant.

Towards the end of *Gift*, ARCIC posed this question to the Catholic Church: Vatican II reminded Catholics of how the gifts of God are present in all the people of God. It has also taught the collegiality of the episcopate in its communion with the bishop of Rome, head of the College. Has the Council's teaching on the collegiality of bishops been implemented sufficiently (§57)? I shall now turn and consider a response.

### **3 A CATHOLIC RESPONSE TO ARCIC**

The question answers itself, really, and the tensions identified by ARCIC in *Walking Together on the Way* indicate that it remains as valid and timely as ever. This is manifest with respect to the instruments that Vatican II called for in order to realize its



teaching on collegiality – for “teaching the truths of faith and ordering ecclesiastical discipline.”<sup>3</sup> These instruments were the Synod of Bishops and Episcopal Conferences.

The Council called for the establishment of these instruments of collegiality in its decree *Christus Dominus* (CD). The Synod would render “more effective assistance” to the Roman Pontiff “in a deliberative body” and, by virtue of its acting in the name of the entire College of Bishops, would demonstrate that “all the bishops in hierarchical communion partake of the solicitude for the universal Church (§5).” The Synod established by Paul VI’s *motu proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo* (1965) did not meet that expectation, nor did John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Pastores Gregis* (2003) advance its realization. As ARCIC has (and more than a few Catholic bishops have) noted, far from being a deliberative body the Synod is fundamentally consultative in nature (WTW, §129), with discussion often so curtailed bishops have complained that its published documents – in particular the apostolic exhortations issued by the Roman Pontiff sometime after its close – have not adequately reflected the concerns of its participants (WTW, §139).

Episcopal Conferences had existed before Vatican II. What the Council did was to call for their universal establishment. A Conference would be, “as it were, a council in which the bishops of a given nation or territory jointly exercise their pastoral office to promote the greater good which the Church offers mankind (CD, §5). As ARCIC has noted, the Catholic Church has yet to articulate a formal theological basis for the nature and extent of a Conference’s teaching authority in relation to the Church’s ordinary teaching magisterium (WTW, §116), and how its authority relates to that of the individual bishop on the one hand, and that of the entire College on the other (WTW, §111). For all its intents, the resolution John Paul II offered this question by his *motu proprio Apostolos Suos* (1998) merely declared a Conference’s authority to the aggregate of the ordinary authority of its individual members. A less than unanimous would require a papal *recognitio* to take effect.

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<sup>3</sup> *Christus Dominus*, §36.





If the Council's intent regarding the establishment of the Synod and of Conferences was clear, why is it that, as some critics say, these institutions, in both origin and effect, look less like instruments of collegiality and more like servants of the primacy? The answer lies in a distinction not found in *Lumen Gentium* itself, but in a *Nota* that a "higher authority" ordered appended as to *Lumen Gentium* prior to its final vote by the Council – the most significant event in what some Council fathers called Black Week.

The distinction made in the *Nota* was between the "strictly collegial activity" by the College *per se* and (by implication) all other activities engaged in by groups of the College's members: "Though it is always in existence, the College is not as a result permanently engaged in strictly collegial activity; the Church's Tradition makes this clear. In other words, the College is not always "fully active [in actu pleno]"; rather, it acts as a college in the strict sense only from time to time and only with the consent of its head," i.e., the Roman Pontiff, who as "Supreme Pontiff can always exercise his power at will, as his very office demands (*Nota*, §4)." Such the state of affairs remains.

Or does it? Pope Francis, is promoting a deeper reception of Vatican II. This is particularly true with regards to his understanding of the relationship between collegiality and primacy. When in *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis reiterated John Paul II's ecumenical openness to finding a way of exercising papal primacy, he made reference to Conferences, specifically to their limited realization. On reform of the papacy he wrote,

we have made little progress in this regard. The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion. The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position "to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit" [*Lumen Gentium*, §23]. Yet this desire has not been fully realized, since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated [*Apostolos Suos*]. Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach (§32).

Given both the methodology he established for the Synods he has called and the freedom of participation and discussion he called for from the assembled bishops (to say nothing of the contributions from the laity), one could replace "Episcopal





conferences” with “Synods of Bishops” in the paragraph above and it would still accurately reflect his mind. In this light, one can argue – I shall below – that the Catholic Church has within itself, on the basis of the magisterial teachings of Vatican II, the resources it needs to realize an affirmative answer to the question ARCIC posed in *The Gift of Authority*, and in the process not only be truer to its own teachings, but also truly open to receiving the gifts our Lord seeks to give us by means of the rich traditions of our Anglican sisters and brothers.

#### *A. Vatican II on Primacy and Collegiality*

The basis for understanding Vatican II’s magisterial teaching on relationship between primacy and collegiality – on how the authority of the bishop of Rome relates to that of the College of Bishops, whose head he is – is, of course, the Council’s dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*. While a thorough review of teaching contained in the Constitution would defy the limits of this article, three points derived from that teaching suffice. These points are (1) the episcopate of the Roman Pontiff, (2) its sacramental ground, and (3) the web of collegial relationships this grace places him in with his brother bishops.

First, the episcopate that belongs to the bishop of Rome as “vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church (LG, §22)” is not of a different kind than that had by every bishop, who is the “visible foundation and principle of unity” of the local church he shepherds (LG, §23).” It is of a different degree. It belongs to him precisely because, as Vatican I affirmed:<sup>4</sup> as bishop of the Church that presides in love over all the churches (according to the oft-repeated saying of St. Ignatius of Antioch) and, as such, head of the College of Bishops who in communion with him “govern the house of the living God (LG, §18).”

The second point explains the first: it is by the sacramental grace of episcopal ordination that the Roman Pontiff is a member of the College (LG, §21). He is its head only by election. In this light the fullness of his succession to the primacy of the Apostle Peter becomes clear. As the Lord established Peter’s primacy precisely within the collegial fellowship he had with his brother apostles, so too is the primacy of his

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<sup>4</sup> Pastor aeternus, §2.



successor established within the collegial fellowship he has with the apostles' successors, his brother bishops (LG, §22). The bishop of Rome is vicar of Christ precisely due to his place within the collegial fellowship of all Christ's vicars, i.e., the bishops (LG, §27). Primacy is grounded in collegiality; the one who holds it is the "perpetual and visible principle and foundation for the unity of faith and communion" of the whole body of bishops (LG, §18), to whose care the Lord entrusted the unity and mission of His Church.

The third point regards the nature of this collegial relationship. Collegiality is not a linear relationship that exists strictly between the bishop of Rome and the entire body of bishops, i.e., head to College. It is a dynamic being-in-relationship that animates the various ways in which all bishops, including the bishop of Rome, serve the Church's communion at every level of its life: local, regional and universal. After all, in addition to being "pontiff" of the church of Rome and Supreme Pontiff of the Church Universal, he is also Metropolitan of the Roman Province, and Primate of Italy. It is within this dynamic that he and his brothers, each according to his role within the College (LG, §22), exercise their ministry that the communion of churches (LG, §23) may proclaim the Kingdom of God to all the peoples among whom and for whom it is present as God's sacrament of salvation (LG, §1 and §48).

The difference between this understanding of the relationship between primacy and collegiality in *Lumen Gentium* and that given in the *Nota* attached to it is striking. Whereas the *Nota* described collegiality in strictly limited and juridical terms, *Lumen Gentium* (and *Christus Dominus* echoing it) described it in dynamic and relational terms. It is precisely within dynamic that the primatial ministry of the bishop of Rome finds its very nature and *raison d'être*: to serve the collegial unity of his brothers, so that they may serve the communion of the Church of churches and its proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

As John Paul II stated in *Ut Unum Sint*, "The bishop of Rome is a member of the 'college', and the bishops are his brothers in the ministry (§95)." Primacy is grounded in collegiality. With this teaching in mind a new look may be taken at the collegial nature of the Synod and Conferences, one in which the relationship between primacy and collegiality envisioned by Vatican II may be realized, both for the sake of both our



communion as Catholics and the communion we desire with all our sisters and brothers in Christ.

### *B. The Synod of Bishops*

In his address commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis remarked on how,

synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. If we understand, as Saint John Chrysostom says, that “Church and Synod are synonymous”, inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the “journeying together” of God’s flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord, then we understand too that, within the Church, no one can be “raised up” higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person “lower” himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.

Francis went on to note where the primacy of the bishop of Rome stands within this “interpretative framework”: a primacy-in-collegality in service of the Church-of-churches.

I am persuaded that in a synodal Church, greater light can be shed on the exercise of the Petrine primacy. The Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time — as Successor of Peter — to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches.<sup>5</sup>

How to bridge the gap between the Synod established by Paul VI and what Francis, in terms that echo ARCIC, sees it can and should take? We can do so by realizing the Council’s teaching that the Synod as a collegial body fully manifesting that “all the bishops in hierarchical communion partake of the solicitude for the universal Church (CD, §5).”

When considering how the Synod is explicated by the Holy See, from *Apostolica Sollicitudo* through *Pastores Gregis*, two sets of questions come to the fore: (1) Is the

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<sup>5</sup> The Pope’s address is available online at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html) (accessed June 1, 2016).



Synod an expression of collegiality? To what extent does the College exercise its authority in the synodal process, or does the Synod act solely as a participation in papal power, i.e., as an advisory body to the Pope? (2) Does the Synod truly represent the entire Catholic episcopate? Related to this, in what sense can the Synod be said to speak for the entire body of bishops throughout the world? 6

In answer to the first set of questions, although the Synod was established by Paul VI *motu proprio*, it emerge from the Council's discussion of collegiality. Thus, it is difficult to deny that it was intended by Vatican II an expression of effective collegiality, in every sense of the term. Early in his papacy, John Paul II himself certainly did not deny it. Although in *Pastores Gregis* he spoke of the Synod as an affective expression of collegiality,<sup>7</sup> twenty-one years earlier he described it as "a singularly excellent display of episcopal collegiality to the Church—and is, in a particular way, its effective instrument."<sup>8</sup>

In what particular way is the Synod such an instrument? It is such as a true and authentic, albeit partial, expression. Collegiality is a dynamic reality, ranging from partial (the Synod) to the full (an ecumenical Council) expression. Collegiality's affective and effective aspects are necessarily complementary, rooted as they are in one and the same grace, i.e., that of the episcopacy. Thus were the Synod to act in a consultative mode, theologically and existentially it would also be acting in a collegial manner. Even if it were given a deliberative mandate by the Roman Pontiff, the origin

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6 In my treatment of the Synod, I am indebted to James Coriden, "The Synod of Bishops: Episcopal Collegiality Still Seeks Adequate Expression," *The Jurist* 64 (2004): 116–136.

7 See *Pastores Gregis*, 58.

8 James Coriden, "The Synod of Bishops: Episcopal Collegiality Still Seeks Adequate Expression," *The Jurist* 64 (2004): 126, citing: Allocution, *In fine huius Synodi*, AAS 76 (1984) 297. In a discourse to the Council of the Secretary General of the Synod, John Paul II elaborated: "Certainly the Synod is the instrument of collegiality and a powerful factor of communion in a way different from an ecumenical Council. However, we speak always of an instrument that is effective, agile, opportune, and promptly at the service of all the local Churches and of their reciprocal communion... The Synod is in fact a particularly fruitful expression and a most valid instrument of episcopal collegiality, that is, of the particular responsibility of the bishops in relationship to the Bishop of Rome. [New Paragraph.] The Synod is one form in which the collegiality of the Bishops is expressed... Between the Council and the Synod there obviously exists a qualitative difference, but, nonetheless, the Synod expresses collegiality in a highly intense way, even though not equal to that realized in Council. [April 30, 1983, in AAS 75 (1983) 648–651; translation by Coriden]"



of its collegial action would not be found in that mandate, but in the sacramental grace of episcopacy itself, strengthened by its reception by the rest of the College.<sup>9</sup>

The Synod's representative character flows from this. The Synod represents the College in a partial, but nevertheless legitimate way. Given that many Ecumenical Councils lacked anything near the full complement of bishops, it must be admitted that a collegial body can designate a representative group of its members to express the opinion of the whole College. This happens in the case of the Synod. As such, it is possible to speak of the Synod as a legitimate representation of the whole College, and its acts, in the strict sense, as acts of the College.<sup>10</sup> As John Paul II even expressed it in *Pastores Gregis*,

The bishops assembled in synod represent in the first place their own churches, but they are also attentive to the contributions of the episcopal conferences which selected them and whose views about questions under discussion they then communicate. They thus express the recommendation of the entire hierarchical body of the church and, finally, of the whole Christian people, whose pastors they are (§58).

In this light, the Synod of Bishops may fully and truly be seen as a concrete manifestation of the kind of collegiality taught by Vatican II: the Church's bishops gathered in communion with their head and brother to assist the faithful in all their churches to walk together as one Body in Christ for the salvation of the world.

### *C. Episcopal Conferences*

Any discussion of Conferences as effective expressions of collegiality must admit the validity of John Paul II's statement in *Apostolos Suos*, that at "the level of particular Churches grouped together by geographic areas..., the Bishops in charge do not exercise pastoral care jointly with collegial acts equal to those of the College of Bishops (§10)." True enough, but this statement does not answer the question of whether Conferences, as partial gatherings of the College, may act in an effectively collegial

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<sup>9</sup> See James Coriden, "The Synod of Bishops," 126–127, citing Angel Antón, "Verso un collegialità più effettiva nel Sinodo dei vescovi, *La Revista del Clero Italiano* 64 (1983): 482–498, 568–570.

<sup>10</sup> See James Coriden, "The Synod of Bishops," 129–130, citing Antón, 567–568.



fashion — a question to which the Catholic Church, on the basis of Vatican II, may offer a resounding “yes.”<sup>11</sup>

Three arguments can be made in favor of this yes. The first of these treats canon 753, of the revised Code of Canon Law:

Although the bishops who are in communion with the head and members of the college, whether individually or joined together in conferences of bishops or in particular councils, do not possess infallibility in teaching, they are authentic teachers and instructors of the faith for the Christian faithful entrusted to their care; the Christian faithful are bound to adhere with religious submission of mind to the authentic magisterium of their bishops

In this light, it is difficult to deny that the canon accords a genuine, effective teaching authority to Conferences per se.

The second argument draws a parallel between the present Conferences and the regional councils/synods of the early Church, which are still recognized as exercising a proper, authentic magisterium. It was with those councils/synods in mind that Vatican II spoke of Conferences, and this regardless of whether those bodies were established as permanent or temporary — as if the *munus docendi* bestowed upon their members for the good of the Church at their ordinations required further specific, canonically established forms in order to be effective. Therefore, to deny that Conferences effectively exercise their own proper, authentic magisterium would, in effect, deny the mind of Vatican II as the Council expressed its mind in the very documents it produced.<sup>12</sup>

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11 See Francis Sullivan, “The Teaching Authority of Episcopal Conferences,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 472–493. In this article, Sullivan developed his argument with reference to Avery Dulles, “Doctrinal Authority of Episcopal Conferences,” in *Episcopal Conferences: Historical, Canonical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Thomas Reese, 207–232 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1989); Ladislav Orsy, “Reflections on the Theological Authority of the Episcopal Conferences,” in *Episcopal Conferences: Historical, Canonical, and Theological Studies*, 233–252 (Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1989); Hermann Pottmeyer, “Das Lehramt der Bischofskonferenz,” in *Die Bischofskonferenz. Theologischer und juristischer Status*, ed. Hubert Müller and Hermann Pottmeyer, 116–133 (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1989). I am indebted to these sources for my argument here, to, which I also add Ladislav Orsy, “Episcopal Conferences: *Communio* Among the Bishops,” in *Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates*, 16–34.

12 See Orsy, “Episcopal Conferences: *Communio* Among the Bishops,” in *Receiving the Council*, 20–22.



The third argument is more speculative and depends upon the preceding arguments. Collegiality is partially and analogously verified when a group of bishops come together to serve the unity of the Church by their joint ministry. Since collegiality includes the power of the College to teach, it would follow that Conferences exercise the office of teaching. This exercise of these bishops' magisterium seeks to make the truth of the Gospel accessible and applicable in the lives of the faithful. This necessarily implies that a Conference will propose the one faith, albeit with different accents and nuances, in ways corresponding to the churches' differing cultural and historical circumstances. Since the Church's universal teaching authority cannot adequately serve the diverse pastoral needs of the churches in every region of the world, it is essential that there be a pastoral teaching agency intermediate between the individual bishop in his local church and the Holy See.<sup>13</sup>

Key to these arguments is Vatican II's ecclesiology of communion. Communion is an ontological reality, and the College is a manifestation of it. It finds full expression in a Council, but is also present in other legitimate assemblies. Thus, whenever a particular assembly of bishops, e.g., a Conference (or a Synod), teaches something pertaining to the Church's faith, their message is not without effective authority, even though the historical event of the gathering cannot be the final guarantee of the truth of that declaration and must await its reception by the faithful in all their churches — a dynamic not unlike that of the Church's reception of any authentic teaching of its faith.<sup>14</sup> In such instances, not only is a recognition of the Holy See unnecessary, but asserting its necessity denies the legitimate authority that bishops possess as successors of the Apostles and vicars of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

This may sound well and good, but does this understanding of the collegial nature of Conferences not compromise the Roman Pontiff's freedom to exercise his primacy as Supreme Pontiff? Not at all. This is clearly seen when one distinguishes two aspects of primacy's juridical power that, especially since Vatican I, have been lost: its facilitative and interventionist exercises – i.e., between the ordinary ministry of the

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<sup>13</sup> See Dulles, 217–226.

<sup>14</sup> See Orsy, "Reflections on the Theological Authority of the Episcopal Conferences," in *Episcopal Conferences*, 251.

<sup>15</sup> See Sullivan, "The Teaching Authority of Episcopal Conferences," 484–485.





Roman Pontiff whereby he “confirms his brothers” in their ministry, and his extraordinary acts as “Great Bridge-Builder” (Pontifex Maximus) whereby he intervenes in the affairs of churches when their bishops may not have effectively addressed threats (real or potential) to communion.

Far from implying a curtailment of the primacy in ways contrary to the teachings of Vatican II (and Vatican I), recalling this distinction corrects a misunderstanding of the primacy proper exercise-s. By so doing, it restores the primacy to its proper dignity within the life of the Church’s communion, i.e., its rootedness within the bishops’ collegial unity as successors of the Apostles so that the entire College, head and members, may enable the faithful of the Church of churches to “walk together” in faith and fulfill its sacramental mission for the whole of humankind (cf. LG, §1 and §48).

To put it frankly, until this distinction becomes evident, not just in rhetoric but also in practice, the Catholic Church’s overtures toward other Christian communities to restore full, visible unity to the One Church of Christ, served by the primatial ministry of the bishop of Rome are not likely to be effective – even when met with the kind of response exemplified by ARCIC’s latest agreed statement *Walking Together on the Way*.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4 CHRIST CALLING TO CHRIST**

As Rush noted in his commentary on *Walking Together on the Way*, Vatican II is “the pre-eminent authority for Catholics in the recent magisterial teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.”<sup>17</sup> It is the Council’s ecclesiology of communion that provides us with the context in which to understand the relationship between primacy and collegiality: the primacy of the bishop of Rome is rooted in collegiality; it is a particular expression of the ministry of episcopate that he shares with them as a member of the College, for the sake of the “synodality” of the Church of churches and its sacramental mission of affecting that communion which God desires all humanity to have with Him in Christ.

In this light, it is not only legitimate, but also necessary to ask how can the Catholic Church be open to receive the gifts offered us by another communion of Christ’s faithful

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<sup>16</sup> See Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 177–178.

<sup>17</sup> Rush, *A Catholic Commentary on “Walking Together on the Way”*, 4.



– in this case, our sisters and brothers in the Anglican Communion – for the realization of this understanding of the primacy if we do not begin to realize that understanding via the very underdeveloped (or perhaps better stated, mis-developed) institutions that Vatican II itself called for: the Synod of Bishops and Episcopal Conferences? This is not a rhetorical question. It is a question of faith – of faith in Christ.

As Vatican II stated in *Unitatis Regintegratio*, “There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart (§4).” Such a change of heart is nothing other than a call to conversion – to be purified of everything that keeps us from Christ and prevents His Spirit from realizing the “high calling” that is ours as members of His Body. If it has born any fruit (and it has born a great many), the ecumenical movement has taught the Catholic Church that this conversion does happen in isolation. It happens in dialogue between “separated brethren,” i.e., each responding to Christ as He speaks through the other members of His broken Body, sisters and brothers, calling them both to be united in Him again for the salvation of the world.<sup>18</sup>

This should come as no surprise to Catholics, fifty-plus years after the Council. For as Vatican II acknowledged in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, in this tragic state of division “the [Catholic] Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all her bearings (§4).” To realize our identity as Catholics, we need our sisters and brothers – be they members of the Anglican Communion or of other ecclesial communions – for we need to hear what our Lord is saying to us through them, precisely from within the integrity of their own lives of faith. We need to receive the gifts they offer. More so, we need to receive them, and be received by them. Only in common will we be able to perceive Lord’s gift of the primacy in its fullness and re-receive it for the sake of our communion with all Christ’s faithful as members of His Body – His Church – which He never ceases to give for the life of the world.

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<sup>18</sup> See LG, §8: “This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.” Also UR, §3: “The ecumenical movement is striving to overcome these obstacles [to unity]. But even in spite of them it remains true that all who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ’s body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.”



Of course, this is a process. It will not come about in the proverbial instant. Conversion never does, not for an individual believer (with all respect to St. Paul) and certainly not for an institution whose memory is a long and deeply rooted as that of the Catholic Church. What a blessing it is that Anglicans and Catholics can give thanks to the Lord for all that we, by grace, have achieved and, what is more, for our commitment to the work that lies ahead. As Pope Francis and Archbishop Welby recently stated,

Fifty years ago Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Ramsey took as their inspiration the words of the apostle: “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13–14). Today, “those things which are behind”—the painful centuries of separation—have been partially healed by fifty years of friendship. ... We have become partners and companions on our pilgrim journey, facing the same difficulties, and strengthening each other by learning to value the gifts which God has given to the other, and to receive them as our own in humility and gratitude.<sup>19</sup>

It was with faith-filled confidence, then, that in *Walking Together on the Way* ARCIC was able to innumerate the work (indeed, the conversion) that the process of receptive ecumenism is calling us to do for the sake of Christ’s Body, particularly with respect to the primacy of the bishop of Rome. What is more, it is with that same sense of confidence that we Anglicans and Catholics may together engage in that that work – that process of conversion through which we open ourselves to receive all that Christ is offering us in and through one another. In this light, we can confess, as the then-members of ARCIC did in *Gift*,

When the real yet imperfect communion between us is made more visible, the web of unity which is woven from communion with God and reconciliation with each other is extended and strengthened. Thus the “Amen” which Anglicans and Roman Catholics say to the one Lord comes closer to being an “Amen” said together by the one holy people witnessing to God’s salvation and reconciling love in a broken world (§63).

In celebration of this seventieth anniversary of the World Council of Churches, what better confession of ecumenical faith can be made than that?

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<sup>19</sup> Common Declaration (5 October 2016), as cited in *WTW*, §150.



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