

# **A Catholic Commentary on *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal* of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission**

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Entitled *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal* (henceforth, *WTW*), this is the first Agreed Statement of the third phase of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III). The commentary that follows will situate *WTW* within the history of ARCIC, highlight its underlying ecclesiology and ecumenical methodology, summarize its salient points, and evaluate, from a Catholic perspective, its possible contribution to contemporary Roman Catholic self-understanding and practice. The commentary will refer to *WTW* as ‘the document’ or ‘the Agreed Statement’. Its chapters will be referred to as ‘sections’, with their numbered elements as ‘paragraphs’ (§).

## **The Background**

Since ARCIC was established in 1966 and began its work in 1970, there have been three major phases of dialogue. *WTW* is the result of the third major phase, which began in 2011. While the document builds upon the results of previous Agreed Statements from ARCIC I and ARCIC II, two Agreed Statements in particular have proved to be important, one from 1991 and the other from 1999. Firstly, the 1991 ARCIC II Agreed Statement *Church as Communion* provides the fundamental communion ecclesiology which *WTW* explicitly presupposes. In 1999, the third of ARCIC II’s statements on authority, *The Gift of Authority*, brought further clarity to the issues around the notion of authority which emerge from a communion ecclesiology. This Agreed Statement ended with a list of questions that had been raised for Roman Catholics during the dialogue:

*[I]s there at all levels effective participation of clergy as well as lay people in emerging synodal bodies? Has the teaching of the Second Vatican Council regarding the collegiality of bishops been implemented sufficiently? Do the actions of bishops reflect sufficient awareness of the extent of the authority they receive through ordination for governing the local church? Has enough provision been made to ensure consultation between the Bishop of Rome and the local churches prior to the making of important decisions affecting either a local church or the whole Church? How is the variety of theological opinion taken into account when such decisions are made? In supporting the Bishop of Rome in his work of promoting communion among the churches, do the structures and procedures of the Roman Curia adequately respect the exercise of episcopate at other levels? Above all, how will the Roman Catholic Church address the question of universal primacy as it emerges from ‘the patient and fraternal dialogue’ about the exercise of the office of the Bishop of Rome to which John Paul II has invited ‘church leaders and their theologians’? (The Gift of Authority, §57)*

These would turn out to be questions which ARCIC III set out to address, and the current document *WTW* is the result.

When ARCIC III was constituted in 2011, it was given the mandate to explore the double theme: 'The Church as Communion, local and universal, and how in communion the local and universal Church come to discern right ethical teaching.' When work began, the Commission deliberately chose to limit its focus initially to only the first of these, the Church as communion, local and universal, leaving the second matter of ethical teaching to a later document. However, as explained in paragraph 11, the Commission decided to broaden its focus beyond just the local and worldwide/universal levels of church life, and address the intermediate regional level.

The reason given by the Commission for this addition to its mandate is the simple *de facto* existence of regional structures in both communions. On the Catholic side, this is evident in the administrative organization of dioceses into regions, often national, with accompanying episcopal conferences; or at a smaller level, canon law's provision for metropolitans and provinces. Moreover, *WTW* recalls the regular practice of regional synods in the early Church and their 'utility' (§11); these regional bodies were found to be beneficial both at the local and at the universal levels, because of the opportunity they afforded for dialogue on common problems in church life, worship, and teaching. Citing the universal-level Council of Nicaea of 325 as a paradigmatic example of such benefits also on the regional level, the document asserts: 'At all times in the Church, from its earliest days to the present, controversy, debate, dialogue, and synodal processes have led—eventually and often not quickly—to clarification, and ultimately a more precise articulation of "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1.3) ... The development of doctrine shows that contested questions, often debated vigorously throughout the Church, locally, regionally, and globally, can lead eventually to a deeper common understanding and more precise articulation of the truth' (§12). These sentences could well summarize one major contribution that *WTW* might well make for the Catholic Church's renewed appreciation and promotion of regional levels of teaching and governance.

This present commentary is intended as a *Catholic* commentary on *WTW*, looking at only what the Roman Catholic Church has to learn; the Anglican Communion provides its own commentary, which considers the various suggested points of Anglican receptive learning from Catholics. How, then, can *WTW* be assessed from the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church? What criterion should be used? The fundamental criterion chosen here is the pre-eminent authority for Catholics in the recent magisterial teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). This ecclesial event, along with its sixteen documents, has known over fifty years of reception into the fabric of the Church's life and self-understanding. Pope Francis is currently promoting an even deeper reception of the Council through his programme of renewal and reform. The question may well be raised: can *WTW* help Roman Catholics incorporate into their ecclesial life aspects of the Council's vision which have yet to be fully received?

## **The Ecclesiology**

As ARCIC II's Agreed Statement *Church as Communion* shows, communion ecclesiology has been of great benefit in ecumenical dialogues, and ARCIC's own Agreed Statements in particular. *WTW* presupposes and builds on this ecclesiology. Paragraph 3 specifically names the document's ecclesiological emphasis: the interrelated notions of 'the Church as the pilgrim People of God' and 'the Church as communion (*koinonia*)'. These two ways of

speaking of the Church fashion the document's vision. The biblical phrase 'People of God' appears seven times throughout. But it is the biblical and patristic notion of 'communion' that overwhelmingly predominates as *WTW's* integrating principle. It is used 16 times in the introductory glossary for explaining other terms throughout the text; 18 times in the two-page preface; and 249 times in the main text (even apart from the 61 instances of the term 'Anglican Communion').

This ecclesiological framework certainly coheres with the self-understanding of the Roman Catholic Church as presented in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. More than any other characterization of the Church, the Second Vatican Council's documents most often refer to the Church as 'the People of God'. As used by the Council, the term refers to the whole body of the faithful: laity, religious, priests, bishops, Pope—together in relationship with the Triune God, who calls the whole Church on mission. The Council envisages the People of God bound together in unity by the Holy Spirit as a communion of all the faithful (*communio fidelium*), albeit living in local churches throughout the world, which together constitute a communion of churches (*communio ecclesiarum*); these churches are shepherded by bishops in communion with one another, with and under the Bishop of Rome (*communio hierarchica*). The 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, convened by Pope John Paul II twenty years after the Second Vatican Council, stated: 'The ecclesiology of communion is the central idea and the fundamental idea in the documents of the Council' (*Final Report*, II C).

In exploring the implications of communion ecclesiology, *WTW* uses some specific terminology. When speaking of the various dimensions of ecclesial communion (local, trans-local, regional, national, worldwide/universal), *WTW* uses the language of 'levels'. This usage, it states, is 'common ecumenical practice' (§10, note 4). The term 'trans-local' is used to refer to 'any expression of church life beyond the level of the diocese: that is to say, at the metropolitan, regional, national, and worldwide levels' (although there seems to be some inconsistency, with the terms 'trans-local' and 'regional' sometimes being used interchangeably). Because of the different nuances in Anglican and Catholic understanding, the descriptor 'worldwide' is used when referring to the former, and the descriptor 'universal' when referring to the latter.

Also, the document appropriates the Anglican term 'instruments of communion' to describe, for both traditions, 'structures, procedures, and ministries which serve to maintain the quality and reality of communion at the local, regional, and worldwide levels' (see the explanation of 'Instruments of communion' in 'Usage of Terms'). Importantly, *WTW* acknowledges that its deliberate focus on only 'structures and processes' (§14) is not intended to undervalue 'many other sources of influence on the shaping of church teaching, such as the tradition, the work of theologians, the lives and writings of the saints, and responses of Christians to societal evils' (§14). In other words, the ecclesiological vision of *WTW* is not intended to be simply juridical in its focus. Moreover, as the Co-chairs of ARCIC III emphasize, *WTW's* focus on 'instruments of communion' is intended to further the primary goal of 'visible unity and full ecclesial communion' sought in Anglican–Roman Catholic dialogue: 'The conviction is that by examining and reforming our respective instruments of communion alongside and in conversation with each other, we are also growing closer to each other and strengthening the imperfect communion that already exists between us' (Preface).

*WTW's* examination of the local, regional, and universal levels of communion in the Church draws upon two particular rubrics: (1) the four marks of the Church as one, holy, catholic,

apostolic; and (2) the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. These rubrics serve as investigative frameworks for examining points of commonality and difference and, together, provide coherence to the document's presentation.

Firstly, since both traditions profess the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, each treasures the ecclesial attributes of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. All four of these characteristics of the Church of Christ become in the document reference points for examining the need for conversion in one's own ecclesial life, and for possible receptive learning for both traditions. *WTW* shows how such possibilities for Catholic learning emerge in discussion of unity and catholicity, and apostolicity and holiness. For example, an emphasis on *unity* in the Church, so prized by Catholics, is balanced in Anglican practice with an appreciation of *diversity*. While diversity is also a quality officially affirmed by the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* §13 as a dimension of *catholicity*, in Catholic practice a tendency to emphasize uniformity can at times prevail.

Secondly, the rubric of the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king is regularly referred to in the text. At the Second Vatican Council, this rubric provided the background for one of the Council's most significant shifts: its movement away from an exclusively hierarchical understanding of the Church to a primary understanding of the Church as the People of God, that is, the whole body of the faithful, including the ordained (bishops, priests, deacons). The first draft of the document on the Church presented to the bishops spoke of only the bishops as participating in the threefold office of Christ, as prophet, priest, king—referring to the teaching, sanctifying, and governing aspects of Christian life and mission. Chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium* speaks of the whole body of the faithful participating in the three offices of Christ. *WTW* addresses mainly the teaching (prophetic) and governing (kingly) offices, at each of the three levels of communion.

These two rubrics serve as frameworks for examining points of commonality and difference on the issues of local, regional, and universal 'levels' of communion.

## The Methodology

There are at least two ways in which *WTW* is different from previous ARCIC Agreed Statements: its employment of a 'receptive ecumenism' methodology; and the very typographical arrangement of the text.

For the first time, ARCIC adopts 'receptive ecumenism' as its explicit methodology for dialogue. As summarized by *WTW*, the process of receptive ecumenism '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). 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>

An important nuance that *WTW* brings to the application of receptive ecumenism is its emphasis on fraternal care (although it is not precisely named as such in the text): sharing a

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<sup>1</sup> 'Ecumenismo: crisi o svolta? Dialogo tra il Card. J. Ratzinger e il teologo protestante P. Ricca', *Nuova Umanità*, 15 (1993) 101–21, available at: <https://www.cittanuova.it/cn-download/10730/10731>.

gift that the other may need is not a matter of proving who is right or better than the other, but rather, in Christian charity, of helping the other because they are in need and are experiencing 'tensions and difficulties' in their ecclesial life. This pervasive tone of care is captured in the very title of the document: *Walking Together on the Way*. Although this is not made explicit, there is a tone of mutual gratitude that characterizes the whole document. Also important in receptive ecumenism is the recognition that sometimes a different practice of the other tradition may not be judged to be of value, or to be of value in a different way.

Sections IV, V, and VI of the document in particular make explicit use of the method of receptive ecumenism. Each section follows the same pattern: (1) an exploration of the common heritage and shared understandings of both traditions; (2) an exploration of the tensions and difficulties that each is experiencing within its own life; and (3) an exploration of the possibilities which one tradition sees for itself if it were to appropriate what is a strength and grace in the life of the other. Here, differences can become graces, and sources of guidance from the Holy Spirit for addressing tensions and difficulties within one's own tradition. As paragraph 46 puts it: 'Anglicans and Catholics have some differing understandings, practices, and structures, as well as differences of vocabulary (see "Usage of Terms"). The aim here is not to eradicate these differences. *The point rather is to ask how each might be a resource for the other so that what is experienced as grace and benefit in one might help address what is less developed in the other*' (my italics).

The notion of 'receptive learning' illustrates the grace that the method of receptive ecumenism can be for the Roman Catholic Church. At the Second Vatican Council, triumphalism (along with clericalism and juridicism) was highlighted as a danger for the Catholic Church in a speech by Bishop Emile De Smedt at the end of the first session. The Council went on to offer a humbler Catholic ecclesial self-understanding. Its Decree on Ecumenism states as a general principle: 'It is hardly surprising if sometimes one tradition has come nearer than the other to an apt appreciation of certain aspects of the revealed mystery or has expressed them in a clearer manner. As a result, these various theological formulations are often to be considered as complementary rather than conflicting' (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, §17). Receptive ecumenism takes this general principle and proposes it as a method for ecumenical encounter. Receptive ecumenism invites each tradition in a dialogue to look humbly at the weaknesses and impasses in its own life, and to recognize perhaps that the other tradition lives out its life with different structures and processes that may well be gifts to be received.

All of this has resonances with particular emphases in the vision of Pope Francis. In speaking of the scandal of division among Christians and the call to Christian unity, he states: '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 better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §246). In their Common Declaration of 5 October 2016, Archbishop Justin Welby and Pope Francis implicitly allude to the methodology of receptive ecumenism when they state: '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.' It was this image of 'partners and companions on our pilgrim journey' that gave rise to the title of the present Agreed Statement: *Walking Together on the Way*.

## The Layout of the Document

The second way in which *WTW* is different from previous ARCIC Agreed Statements is in its physical (typographical) arrangement. This is not unimportant, and is related to the method of receptive ecumenism.

There are three kinds of page layout throughout the document. The first is where the paragraphs take up the whole width of page; such paragraphs generally examine a common heritage, something that both traditions continue to embody in their ecclesial life. The second is where there are *parallel* columns, side by side, with the left column treating Anglican belief or practice and the right column treating Catholic belief or practice; this arrangement provides a graphical way of presenting ‘the similar but differentiated ways in which our respective structures seek to serve our communions’ (Preface). The third arrangement is *sequential* paragraphs, but with those referring to Anglican belief or practice aligned to the left of the page and those referring to Catholic belief and practice on the right side of the page; this provides a graphical way of differentiating between what are ‘quite different processes’ (Preface) in the two traditions.

These three ways of presenting the text have the benefit of highlighting in a nuanced way the range of commonalities and differences, thus preparing the reader for the receptive learning from the other that might be possible between the two traditions.

## The Content

After a glossary and then a Preface by the two Co-Chairs of ARCIC III, the main part of the document consists of six sections and a conclusion.

That the document begins with a glossary (‘Usage of Terms’) turns out to be useful. The reader is given prior information as to the special theological terms that will be used, as well as alerted to the differences and nuances in some of the language used by each tradition. The two Co-Chairs of the dialogue—one Anglican, one Roman Catholic—then provide a Preface. Importantly, they note the spirit of fraternal care that has pervaded the seven years of dialogue and has produced *WTW*. This spirit is captured in the document’s title: ‘The sense is of our two traditions each walking the pilgrim way in each other’s company: “pilgrim companions”, making their own journey of conversion into greater life but supported by the other as they do so.’

The first numbered section is an Introduction, which introduces the main theme of local, regional, and worldwide/universal levels of communion. After reminding the reader of the previous phases of ARCIC’s work, this section situates *WTW* along the trajectory of previous Agreed Statements. A brief survey of the distinctive histories of the two traditions highlights the way in which regional levels of teaching and governance became important in the Anglican tradition, while a universalist approach came to dominate in the Roman Catholic tradition. Importantly too, the Introduction discusses positive and negative ‘signs of the times’ (although the actual phrase is not used) which challenge both traditions in their mission in a contemporary globalized and secular world. The hope is expressed that facing these common challenges together, and recognizing the different gifts that each tradition brings to that task, may provide opportunities for learning for both sides. The ultimate goal is a more effective proclamation of the Gospel of salvation, through a more effective realization of local, regional, and universal levels of ecclesial life.

Section II focuses on 'The Church Local and Universal in the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Periods'. This is a critical section, given the authoritative role that Scripture and the writings of the Patristic period have for both traditions. Some accents can be selected. The section shows how the New Testament witnesses to the felt need of local churches to refer to and draw upon the resources of other local churches. The Holy Spirit is mentioned twenty-one times throughout the section, especially in discussion of the Lucan writings. Significantly, the document notes in paragraph 34 how the letters of the New Testament speak of 'apostolicity' in pragmatic terms: 'In these epistles the apostles are often seen delegating their authority to local leaders (Acts 11.30; 14.23; 15.2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16.4; 20.17; 21.18; 1 Tim 5.17, 19; Tit 1.5; Jas 5.14; 1 Pet 5.1).' Examination of the book of Revelation brings to the fore an important point on the matter of diversity: each of the seven churches of Asia Minor is presented as a particular means through which the one Christ is revealed in the Spirit: 'To each is shown a distinctive facet of Christ's glory (2.1; 2.8; 2.12; 2.18; 3.1; 3.7; 3.14). To each is given a distinctive message as to how better to reflect the light of that glory. Moreover, the need for repentance in these distinctive local churches is frequently repeated (2.5; 2.16; 2.22; 3.3; 3.19). In each case, they are encouraged to "listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (3.22)' (§37). The section goes on to note important historical developments in the teaching and governance of the early Church as it expanded and responded to new exigencies: the emergence of a 'rule of faith'; of creeds; of bishops, presbyters, and deacons; of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome; of regional and ecumenical councils.

Section III moves from the previous section's examination of the foundational Christian tradition to presenting elements of a systematic overview of the theme under review. Titled 'Ecclesial Communion in Christ: The Need for Effective Instruments of Communion', it sets out to outline the 'shared ecclesiology' (§62) of both traditions by presenting 'the fundamentals of a theology of ecclesial communion' (§20). This rich summary of key points draws upon not only previous Agreed Statements, especially *Church as Communion* and *The Gift of Authority*, but also wider ecumenical dialogue statements, such as the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order paper *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

From the outset, the very notion of communion is shown to exclude any unbalanced view that would promote the isolated importance of one of the 'two poles, local and trans-local' (§48). Both excessive demands for autonomy by the local and excessive demands for centralization by the trans-local endanger genuine communion.

Appropriately, the section presents the shared Anglican and Roman Catholic belief that baptism and eucharist are the sacramental means of initiation into ecclesial communion in Christ through the Spirit. In other words, ecclesial communion is founded on baptismal and eucharistic communion. Baptism, as incorporation into Christ, enables all the baptized to participate in the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. This participation by all the faithful means there must be interrelationship between all levels of the Church, local, and trans-local. Furthermore, through baptism the Holy Spirit bestows on all the baptized and on the Church as a whole 'an instinct for the faith' (*sensus fidei fidelium*), which guarantees that the Church will never fail in its believing. Just like the participation by all in the threefold office, this participation by all in the *sensus fidelium* through the Holy Spirit means there must be interrelationship between all levels of the Church, local and trans-local. Just as *Lumen Gentium* (§13) emphasized the catholicity of the Church as a unity-in-diversity, so too *WTW* sees 'instruments of communion' at all levels of the Church as vital for maintaining both legitimate unity and legitimate diversity throughout the worldwide Church,

by promoting local and regional inculturation of the faith. 'The task of instruments of communion is to serve the unity and the diversity – the catholicity – of the Church' (§57).

From baptism, the section moves to explore the eucharistic dimension of ecclesial communion: 'Anglicans and Catholics hold that the communion entered into in baptism reaches its sacramental fullness in the celebration of the eucharist' (§58). The eucharist makes Christ sacramentally present throughout the world, at all levels. By its very nature, eucharistic participation is 'necessarily collective and ecclesial' (§59). For both Anglicans and Roman Catholics this ecclesial communion is symbolized most clearly when a local community gathers in eucharist around its bishop.

The section concludes by noting certain differences between the two traditions which will feature in the later discussion: the distinctive understandings of the roles played by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Rome; the levels at which ecumenical agreements are approved or binding decisions can be made; the very question of 'priority' of local over trans-local levels, and vice versa.

Sections IV, V, and VI then treat the three levels separately: the local, the regional, and the worldwide/universal. Here we come to the core of *WTW*'s contribution: on each of these levels, there are common understandings that should augur well for sensitivity in appreciating any difference; there is by each of the two traditions an honest and humble acknowledgement of tensions and difficulties that it is currently experiencing in its own life; and, most importantly, there is a recognition that the Holy Spirit may have developed in the other tradition (before or since the English Reformation) 'instruments of communion' that the other might well learn from when addressing their own tensions and difficulties.

Importantly, Section IV begins with the 'local': 'Instruments of Communion at the Local Levels of Anglican and Catholic Life'. These various local levels, from the parish to the diocese, constitute 'the reality of the Church as it is most widely experienced' (§80). Here both traditions make use of the ancient rubric of the *tria munera* of Christ for understanding life and ministry at these various local levels, as well as making use of similar local structures and ministries, such as parish, diocese, bishop, presbyter, and deacon. The bishop here is especially valued by both as an important authoritative instrument of communion.

However, despite these commonalities, each tradition experiences in its own way certain tensions and difficulties. Common to both at the local level is the danger of 'parochialism', a myopic view that isolates the local in importance to the detriment of any wider connection with other ecclesial communities. The Agreed Statement brings to the fore a significant lack in the Roman Catholic vision and practice: 'The canon law of the Latin Church currently describes the universal Church and the local churches and the relevant structures and procedures pertaining at these levels but gives relatively little attention to the regional level' (§108). Another of the tensions and difficulties Roman Catholics acknowledge is that, despite the Second Vatican Council's affirmation that the laity participate in the three offices of Christ, in reality, at the local levels, such participation has yet to reach full potential. While there has been, since the Council, 'a burgeoning of lay participation' (§83), lay people at best are allowed a merely *consultative* role in decision-making, with canon law not even requiring such consultation as mandatory. Anglican structures, on the other hand, provide for a *deliberative* role for lay people (they participate in decision-making). Even the selection of bishops involves lay participation. Anglicans too demand of the local bishop a dialogic approach to oversight; they speak of 'the "bishop-in-synod"' (§90). Within this pervasive dialogic ethos, a particular Anglican value highlighted by *WTW* is the welcome given to open

debate, which the document acknowledges is something that a Roman Catholic emphasis on unity and universal oversight can downplay, resulting in ‘the suppression of difference, the inhibiting of candid conversation, and the avoidance of contentious issues in open fora’ (§96). In all these areas, possibilities for receptive learning present themselves to the Roman Catholic Church.

Section V moves to intermediate levels of communion: ‘Instruments of Communion at the Regional Levels of Anglican and Roman Catholic Life’. Instances of Roman Catholic regional bodies and offices are: provinces, metropolitan archbishops, episcopal conferences, wider geographical federations of episcopal conferences, regional synods of bishops, and particular councils (provincial and plenary councils). The document notes the ancient precedent of instruments of communion at the regional level, involving participation at times beyond just clerics. Local churches in the early Church did not pretend to be self-sufficient; on various issues, they depended on the wisdom and support of surrounding churches. A central insight, therefore, of this section of *WTW* is that concerted effort at the regional levels is necessary and beneficial for local churches, and yet with implications for universal communion. Thus *WTW* rightly highlights the ecclesial value of distinctively regional issues: ‘Not every issue touches everyone in the world, and thus not every issue that affects more than one local church requires deliberation at the worldwide/universal level, which exists to treat issues that affect all’ (§107). However, regional decisions do have an impact on the bonds of communion beyond the region.

More than for the local or worldwide levels, *WTW* at this point notes an ‘asymmetry’ (§108) between the two traditions when comparing and contrasting them: ‘On account of the history and development of provincial churches, Anglicans invest greater ecclesiological significance in the regional level than the Roman Catholic Church currently does. The canon law of the Latin Church currently describes the universal Church and the local churches and the relevant structures and procedures pertaining at these levels but gives relatively little attention to the regional level’ (§108). Anglican worldwide expansion through the agency of British colonialism means that in a post-colonial world Anglicans are sensitive to the independence of new provinces, each with its own regional structure of doctrinal oversight and governance. For Roman Catholics, partly because of their suspicion of national churches in the early modern and modern periods, little authority has been afforded to regional structures, and the centralized authority of the Pope (and Roman Curia) predominated in the Catholic imagination until the Second Vatican Council. Exploration of this asymmetry leads ARCIC III to present in *WTW* some of its most helpful possibilities for Roman Catholic receptive learning. For example, affording greater authority to episcopal conferences as regional instruments of communion within the centralized ethos of the Roman Catholic Church is highlighted as a particular instance where Catholic receptive learning can take place, as is the lack of opportunities for open dialogue that involves priests, deacons, and lay people in any deliberative way.

Section VI discusses ‘Instruments of Communion at the Worldwide/Universal Level of Anglican and Roman Catholic Life’. Despite the conviction concerning the need for unity in the faith throughout the world, the difference in terminology regarding instruments of communion at this level reflects nuances in the approaches of the two traditions, each with strengths and weaknesses. For Anglicans, the word ‘worldwide’ refers to four instruments of communion: the Lambeth Conference, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates’ Meeting. For Roman Catholics, the word ‘universal’, when referring to instruments of communion, generally applies to the four major

instruments: an ecumenical council of all bishops, the Bishop of Rome, the Roman Curia, and the international synods of bishops. In reality, however, each of these instruments operates with certain tensions and difficulties, with demands for greater autonomy on matters directly related to local and regional issues.

The Conclusion, 'Growing Together into the Fullness of Christ', emphasizes that a common sense of urgency has driven the dialogue: since 'church structures support the mission of the Church' (§151), any opportunity to make those structures more effective should be welcomed. The humility to do so has characterized the receptive ecumenism which has guided the work of ARCIC III. Since the Holy Spirit has been at work in both traditions since their separation, for each tradition the instruments of communion developed by the other in its subsequent history may well be 'tokens of divine providence' (§152), which the Spirit is inviting it to embrace.

Across all three levels of communion—local, regional, and universal—*WTW* raises possibilities for Roman Catholic receptive learning from the Anglican tradition. Since some of these touch on more than one level, these learnings will now be evaluated together.

## The Resonances

*WTW* can be best evaluated by reading its 'proposals for mutual receptive learning' (§155) alongside the renewal and reform vision of the Second Vatican Council, and Pope Francis's current attempts to inculcate that vision more deeply into Catholic life. As noted earlier, the Second Vatican Council is the pre-eminent authority for Catholics in the recent magisterial teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Of it, Pope Francis has written: 'The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history' (*Misericordiae Vultus*, §4). Pope John Paul II had called the Council 'a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning' (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, §57). Accordingly, this commentary now assesses the major proposals of *WTW*, employing the 'compass' of the Second Vatican Council.

However, a nuanced understanding of the vision of Vatican II is required. Pope Paul VI noted in his address to the bishops on the last working day of the Council: 'quite a few questions raised during the course of the council itself still await appropriate answer'.<sup>2</sup> The Council did not attempt to provide systematic treatises on every issue it treated. As Walter Kasper has pointed out: 'The synthesis brought about by the last council was highly superficial, and in no way satisfactory. But then it is not the function of councils to draw up theological syntheses. A council presents the indispensable "frame of reference". The synthesis is then a matter for the theology that comes afterwards.'<sup>3</sup>

This is directly pertinent to the themes that *WTW* addresses: the local, regional, and universal levels of ecclesial communion. The Second Vatican Council does not present a comprehensive synthesis of all aspects of those issues, nor did it attempt to do so. Its communion ecclesiology was only inchoate. The Council certainly presents a fresh, new

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Paul VI, 'Closing Address: Fourth Session', in *Council Daybook: Vatican II, Session 4*, ed. Floyd Anderson (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1966), pp. 359–62, at p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Kasper, 'The Church as Communion: Reflections on the Guiding Ecclesiological Idea of the Second Vatican Council', in *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 148–65, at p. 158. A synthesis of the vision of the Second Vatican Council is to be found by attending to the complex debates throughout the Council regarding the drafting of its documents, as well as reading together, as a whole, the sixteen documents which it promulgated.

theology of the local church; it addresses previous imbalances regarding papal and episcopal roles across the universal Church; it (albeit briefly) addresses the importance of regional structures such as synods and episcopal conferences; above all, through a developing communion ecclesiology, it presents the Church as the People of God, the *universitas fidelium* (as a *communio fidelium*), dispersed in local churches throughout the world (as a *communio ecclesiarum*), to whom the hierarchy, with and under the Bishop of Rome, is called to serve (as a *communio hierarchica*).

Some issues remain in tension in the conciliar documents. For example, affirmation of the participation of all the faithful in the three offices of Christ is not given effective structural support. Regarding the prophetic office in particular, the whole People of God's *infallibility in believing* (because of the Holy Spirit's gift to all of a *sensus fidei*) and the bishops' and Pope's *infallibility in teaching* (because of their possession of a 'sure charism of truth', *Dei Verbum*, §8) are teachings left in tension by the Council, without the provision of any institutional structures throughout the world Church which could facilitate two-way dialogue between *the whole People* and the Pope and bishops. Certainly, while they provide many of the elements, the conciliar documents do not provide any systematic presentation of communion ecclesiology at the local, regional, and universal levels. The Council, for example, does not give much attention to the regional level in the teaching and governing aspects of church life. Rather, the two poles of local and universal can tend to dominate, depending on the topic at hand, with only suggestive openings indicated for a more comprehensive ecclesiology. Here, as on other topics, the Council provided only trajectories pointing towards a synthesis. Nevertheless, while there are these lacunae in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, they can be illuminated and a synthesis unveiled—when the Council's comprehensive vision is taken into account. And this is true with regard to an integrated theology of the Council's vision concerning ecclesial communion at the local, regional, and universal levels. Here Pope Francis is playing a direct role.

The Second Vatican Council clearly, for Pope Francis, is his 'compass'. In drawing the elements of its vision into a comprehensive synthesis for the twenty-first century, he wants to highlight in that vision the importance of the local and the regional, without downplaying the default emphasis on the universal in the Roman Catholic imagination. The Council divided its attention between renewing and reforming the inner life of the Church (*ad intra*) and re-invigorating the outward thrust of the Church (*ad extra*). There are several emphases in Pope Francis's synthesis of both those thrusts: a missionary Church; a poor Church for the poor; a Church without clericalism; an ecologically converted Church; and so on. Following the Second Vatican Council, the Pope wants to balance the *ad intra* and *ad extra* energies of the Church, seeing the latter however as the main game.

Certain highlights of the Pope Francis's integration of the Second Vatican Council's vision of the Church *ad intra* have remarkable parallels with the accents of *WTW*. The Co-Chairs' Preface for *WTW* already refers to 'Pope Francis's call for a fully synodal Church in accord with the vision of the Second Vatican Council', as laid out in the Pope's programmatic 'Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops' (17 October 2015).<sup>4</sup> Here the Pope refers to a synodality that reaches to the very basic levels

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015 (hereafter cited in footnotes as 'Address, 17 October 2015'), available 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).

of church life, in order to ‘listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches’ (Rev 2.7). He is using the term ‘synodality’ to bring to synthesis the Second Vatican Council’s vision of the Church *ad intra*. We could call it his ‘synodal communion ecclesiology’ (although he does not use that exact term).

The Second Vatican Council does not once use the Latin equivalent of ‘synodality’, nor that of ‘synodal’. But, as Pope Francis sees it, these terms capture precisely the comprehensive conciliar vision of the Church *ad intra*—from the Pope ‘to the last of the lay faithful’ (*Lumen Gentium*, §12, quoting St Augustine). ‘Synodality’ is his catch-all phrase for how he believes the Second Vatican Council is envisioning the Church *ad intra*—in its inner workings—without wanting to separate the Church’s inner life from the effectiveness of its outward (*ad extra*) mission in the world. For Pope Francis, ‘synodality’ is more than just an element of a papal primacy and an episcopal collegiality exercised more collaboratively; he speaks of ‘*episcopal collegiality* within an entirely synodal Church’. And to emphasize the difference, he immediately repeats his distinction between the ‘two different phrases: “episcopal collegiality” and an “entirely synodal Church”’.<sup>5</sup>

*WTW*’s three levels of communion—local, regional, universal—are explicit elements in the Pope’s vision. ‘Synodality is a constitutive element of the Church. In this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base.’ ‘A synodal Church’, he says, ‘is a Church which listens, which realizes that 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 to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (*Jn 14:17*), in order to know what [the Spirit] “says to the Churches” (*Rev 2:7*).’<sup>6</sup> He then talks of how this listening to the Spirit is a process that necessarily begins at the *local* level, and finds further ratification and synthesis at the *regional* level, and then reception by the whole Church (all the churches in communion) at the universal level, specifically through the instrument of the Synod of Bishops. Such a synodal Church, he says, requires effective institutional structures for listening to and determining the *sensus fidelium*. As the Pope notes, synodal structures already exist in canon law for listening to the faithful, from the parish, diocesan, national, regional, and international levels.<sup>7</sup> But these structures need to be further realized, not so much simply as papal and episcopal structures for governing and teaching the peripheries, but also as structures for enabling genuine participation by the peripheries in the governing and teaching of the whole Church.

‘The Synod process begins by listening to the people of God, which “shares also in Christ’s prophetic office”, according to a principle dear to the Church of the first millennium: “*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet* [what affects everyone must be deliberated by everyone]”’.<sup>8</sup> Like *WTW*, Pope Francis speaks of different ‘levels’ in this ecclesial listening. ‘The first level of the exercise of *synodality*’ is the listening that happens within *local* churches in ‘organs of communion’, such as the presbyteral council, the college of consultors, chapters of canons, the pastoral council, and the diocesan synod. That these ‘organs of communion’ are listening to the whole People of God at the local level, especially

<sup>5</sup> Address, 17 October 2015.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* The Pope is quoting here his own document *Evangelii Gaudium*, §171, along with *Jn 14:17*; *Rev 2:7*.

<sup>7</sup> Address, 17 October 2015. On these canonical structures specifically as instruments for listening to and discerning the *sensus fidelium*, see Anthony Ekpo, *The Breath of the Spirit in the Church: Sensus Fidelium and Canon Law* (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Address, 17 October 2015. The Pope is quoting *Lumen Gentium*, §12.

the laity, is implied. 'The second level' of listening happens at the level of ecclesiastical provinces and regions, particular councils, and conferences of bishops. Renewal of these 'intermediary instances of *collegiality*' is needed if they are to be genuine antennae of synodal listening. And 'the last level' is the level of the universal Church, where the Synod of Bishops is 'the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of the Church's life'. It is 'an expression of *episcopal collegiality* within an entirely synodal Church'. Importantly, this centripetal movement from local to international structures is not an attempt at greater centralization. 'The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion ... Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §32).

## The Challenges

The reception of the Second Vatican Council is far from complete. Many of its principles have yet to be incorporated fully into church life *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Several of the problematic areas in that reception process over the last fifty years have in fact been raised by *WTW*. Its proposals for a Catholic receptive learning from Anglicans may well provide help. Several of these proposals can be selected as particularly urgent and challenging. The challenges selected here are: (1) a greater recognition of the Holy Spirit working at all levels of the Church; (2) a greater recognition of diversity within a genuine catholicity; (3) a move towards less centralized structures of teaching and governance; (4) a greater deliberative authority afforded to regional structures such as episcopal conferences; (5) a greater participation of lay people; (6) the active promotion of genuine dialogue in the Church; (7) a greater appreciation of 'provisionality' and the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### 1. Greater Recognition of the Holy Spirit Working at All Levels of the Church

Appropriating *WTW*'s proposals, firstly, may help the Roman Catholic Church to better appreciate that the need to find better structural instruments of communion at all levels is, above all, for the sake of a better listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in its life. Throughout the four years of its meeting, the Second Vatican Council itself had an experience of receptive learning from the Catholic and Orthodox Eastern bishops and observers, who reminded the bishops that their evolving documents often were lacking appropriate emphasis on the Third Person of the Trinity in the life of the Church. The Council moved towards a greater appreciation of the role of the Holy Spirit. In the fifty years of the Council's reception, it is a sensibility that has yet to touch all aspects of Catholic life.

As an aside, while *WTW* presents a balanced Christology and pneumatology in its formulation of ecclesial communion, it too fails to give a consistent pneumatological emphasis. In its *ressourcement* of the tradition (see §§3 and 19), and in its systematic proposal of a communion ecclesiology, the document foregrounds the indispensable activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. In Section II's examination of the biblical and Patristic tradition, there are eighteen mentions of the presence, guidance, and power of the Holy Spirit in the early Christian communities (strangely, only one reference is made to the antiphonal evocation in the book of Revelation, 'Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches', which occurs seven times in the book). Then Section III, on communion ecclesiology, brings to the fore the origins of the Church in the Triune God, and the missions of the Word and the Spirit in the economy of salvation. The Spirit is here mentioned fourteen times. However, surprisingly, this pneumatological emphasis is diminished in the

next three (central) sections, on the local, regional, and universal levels, where there is hardly any mention of the Spirit. Section IV, on the local level, certainly has three instances. But in Section V, concerning the regional level, there is no mention at all of the Holy Spirit. And in Section VI on the universal level, there is only one mention of the Holy Spirit, and that relates to ‘recognizing the presence of the Spirit in other Christians, their churches, and their communities’ (§149). Thus, there is nothing on the Holy Spirit working through diverse cultural expressions of the faith throughout the worldwide communion of churches (something that the documents of the Second Vatican Council does in several ways). *WTW*’s Conclusion does go on to mention the Holy Spirit three times. Admittedly, these central sections concern institutional instruments of communion at these three levels, and the pneumatological presuppositions had already been laid out in Sections II and III. In particular, the ecclesial task of ‘listening to what the Spirit is saying to the churches’ had been emphasized in the previous section, and it may not have seemed necessary to keep repeating that this is one important aspect of what is going on at these three levels of communion. However, the diminished focus on the Holy Spirit working through regional and universal levels of communion seems to be a missed opportunity.

In the formal documents and daily homilies of Pope Francis, there is regular mention of the indispensable role the Holy Spirit plays in bringing to realization the power and presence of Christ. When giving prominence in Sections II and III to a pneumatological ecclesiology, *WTW* emphasizes the importance for both traditions of *sensus fidei* in the Spirit’s guidance of the Church in its ongoing reception of revelation. This too is a regular theme in Pope Francis’s vision; in particular, he has often cited the reference in *Lumen Gentium* (§12) to the *sensus fidei* of the whole Church (see *Evangelii Gaudium*, §119, and his 17 October 2015 address on synodality). Strangely, *WTW* does not explicitly emphasize that the gift of *sensus fidei* is a gift of the Holy Spirit to all the baptized and to the whole Church of Christ, although it is alluded to in reference to the Church’s indefectibility (§53). This is another missed opportunity for explicitly linking the means by which the Holy Spirit is at work at all levels of communion.

Notwithstanding these missed opportunities in *WTW*, the document importantly presents a challenge to the Roman Catholic Church to promote its instruments of communion as vehicles of the Holy Spirit speaking through all the faithful.

## *2. Greater Recognition of Diversity within a Genuine Catholicity*

Just as the Roman Catholic Church can learn ways of being more attentive to the Holy Spirit, so too can it learn from the Anglican tradition a richer realization of catholicity as a unity in diversity. Certainly, while *Lumen Gentium* (§13) presented an ideal picture of a Catholicism which appreciates the diversity between churches (e.g. between the Latin churches and the Eastern churches), the Latin Church itself can fail to permit such diversity within its own local churches. *WTW* gives multiple examples of how the Anglican tradition permits and celebrates such diversity.

## *3. A Move towards Less Centralized Structures of Teaching and Governance*

Similarly, and related to the issue of diversity, is the danger of over-centralization in the Roman Catholic Church. *WTW* notes that this can be related to a universalist ecclesiology which undervalues the local and the regional. As noted above, this is something that Pope Francis too has noted: ‘I am conscious of the need to promote a sound “decentralization”’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §16). While *WTW* speaks of the opposite danger of ‘parochialism’ (§93),

such parochialism has had little opportunity to assert itself in recent Roman Catholic history. As Pope Francis attempts to address over-centralization, the more devolved models of teaching and governance in the Anglican Communion can only but provide practical examples to test out. As *WTW* states it: there is a difference between ‘centralization’ and ‘being genuinely universal’ (§143).

#### 4. *Greater Deliberative Authority Afforded to Regional Structures such as Episcopal Conferences*

A matter related to the issue of over-centralization, also highlighted by *WTW*, is the lack of appropriate instruments of communion at the regional level in the Roman Catholic Church. That this is an area where learning from Anglicans can especially take place shows the need for a renewed Catholic theology and practice regarding the teaching and governance authority of episcopal conferences for limited matters of faith and discipline, albeit in communion with other churches, with the oversight of the Bishop of Rome. As *WTW* puts it: ‘the Roman Catholic Church might fruitfully learn from the Anglican practice of provincial diversity and the associated recognition that on some matters different parts of the Communion can appropriately make different discernments influenced by cultural and contextual appropriateness’ (§148).

This is something too that Pope Francis is urging. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (§32), he refers to Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, where the previous Pope expressed an ecumenical openness to finding a way of exercising papal primacy ‘in a new situation’. Pope Francis observes that further work needs to be done in this area, mentioning in particular episcopal conferences:

*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.*

The Pope refers in the above passage to the *motu proprio* of Pope John Paul II, *Apostolos Suos* (‘On the Theological and Juridical Nature of Episcopal Conferences’), implying that the perspectives presented in this *motu proprio* needed further reflection. *Apostolos Suos* had given episcopal conferences limited authority, with conditions such as unanimous approval and a *recognitio* by the Apostolic See. Since *Apostolos Suos*, there has been much theological and canonical debate on whether this *motu proprio* has been too restrictive in interpreting the intention of the Second Vatican Council on the matter. *WTW* rightly observes, therefore, in its treatment of Catholic experience at the regional level of ‘tensions and difficulties’ (the title of sub-section V.B): ‘The Roman Catholic Church struggles to articulate a formal theological basis for the nature and extent of the teaching authority of episcopal conferences in relation to the ordinary (non–defining) teaching magisterium of the Church’ (§116).

Many of these sensibilities of *WTW* parallel those of Pope Francis. In taking the whole of the Council’s vision of the Church *ad intra*, particularly with his notion of ‘synodality’, the Pope clearly wishes to strengthen particularly the regional level of episcopal conferences in terms of governance and teaching. As noted in *WTW*, the Pope’s habit of citing texts promulgated

by regional conferences of bishops (e.g. in *Laudato Si'* and *Amoris Laetitia*) is an implicit acknowledgement of their *de facto* authority (§111). For Pope Francis: 'It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound "decentralization"' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §16).

With his comprehensive notion of synodality, Pope Francis is re-imagining regional structures such as episcopal conferences in terms of an ecclesial 'listening' that begins at the local level, is discerned at the regional level, and is discerned and acted upon at the universal level. An example of his firm intent in this matter is his recent *motu proprio* called *Magnum Principium*, which returns oversight of liturgical translations to episcopal conferences, as envisaged by the Second Vatican Council's constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Such regional decisions by an episcopal conference will now require only a simple *confirmatio* by the appropriate authority in the Roman Curia, and not the more controlling *recognitio*, which would allow that authority to change the local translation. This is a significant step towards giving episcopal conferences more deliberative decision-making authority in matters relevant to specific regions.

#### 5. Greater Participation of Lay People

*WTW* notes the lack of Catholic structures for involving lay people, religious, and clergy in deliberative decision-making. The Second Vatican Council had affirmed the necessary participation of all the faithful (bishops, priests, deacons, religious, lay) in the mission of the Church. A corollary of that affirmation is the participation of all the faithful in the three offices of Christ (i.e. in the teaching, sanctifying, and governing areas of church life). However, the full implications of such teaching have yet to find structural support in the Roman Catholic Church, as *WTW* points out. Roman Catholic canon law currently provides no place for the mandatory participation of lay people in 'deliberative' decision-making at any of the three levels of communion. The Anglican tradition, on the other hand, gives more than lip-service to the role of laity in the areas of teaching and governance, providing for the mandatory involvement of the laity in deliberative decision-making at all levels of ecclesial life. Therefore, the proposals for Catholic receptive learning from Anglicans which *WTW* presents for the Church's consideration are yet one more opportunity for a more faithful reception of the vision of the Second Vatican Council regarding lay participation in all levels of church life, *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

#### 6. Active Promotion of Genuine Dialogue in the Church

Related to the matter of lay participation, *WTW* foregrounds the importance of dialogue in the Church. Deep theological value is afforded by the Second Vatican Council to the *sensus fidei* of all the baptized (*Lumen Gentium*, §12); through this sense of the faithful, the Spirit speaks. It is therefore a source to be listened to: 'Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches' (Rev 2.7, etc.) The word 'dialogue' was a leitmotif used during the Council debates and throughout the documents it promulgated. During the Council, Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* had promoted the Church as a community of dialogue. *Gaudium et Spes* (§92) went on to speak of four concentric circles of dialogue the Church should promote: within the Church, with other Christians, with other believers, and with non-believers and the world at large. Regarding dialogue within the Church, it states:

*[The mission of the Church] requires in the first place that we foster within the Church herself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, through the full recognition of lawful*

*diversity. Thus all those who compose the one People of God, both pastors and the general faithful, can engage in dialogue with ever abounding fruitfulness. For the bonds which unite the faithful are mightier than anything dividing them. Hence, let there be unity in what is necessary; freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case.*

While much progress has been made in the other three areas of dialogue, the matter of dialogue within the Church, in the way the Council is here envisioning, is far from being realized. Since the Council, the default position has prevailed, despite the Council's urgings; as *WTW* observes: '[The Catholic] instinct for unity can, however, result in the suppression of difference, the inhibiting of candid conversation, and the avoidance of contentious issues in open fora' (§96).

What has been generally looked upon with suspicion in the current ethos of the Roman Catholic Church is a major strength in the Anglican ethos: its genuine appreciation of 'open and sometimes painful debate' (§101) at all levels: local, regional, worldwide. As *WTW* points out, such open debate has nevertheless been promoted by Pope Francis himself, which augurs well for the official reception of *WTW*'s proposals by the Roman Catholic Church. In his greeting to the bishops at the start of the 2014 synod, Pope Francis spoke of a 'general and basic condition' for genuine synodality: the freedom to speak honestly. 'It is necessary to say with *parrhesia* [boldness] all that one feels.'<sup>9</sup> However, this must be accompanied, he said, by another condition: listening with humility and with an open heart to what others say with honesty, what he calls 'the gift of listening'.<sup>10</sup> 'Synodality is exercised with these two approaches.'

The creation of opportunities for open debate and the promotion of a willingness to listen to viewpoints contrary to one's own are therefore vital. In one of the more striking passages in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis appeals to the image of a polyhedron.<sup>11</sup> It appears in his discussion of one of his favourite axioms: 'the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §235). He makes a distinction between two possible models for understanding this relationship. The first is a *sphere*, 'which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §236). He rejects this model. His preferred model is the *polyhedron*, 'which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. Pastoral and political activity alike seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §236).

With regard to listening to the *sensus fidelium*, the Pope draws two conclusions from this model of the polyhedron: the importance of listening to *everyone* in the Church (all of the facets constitute the polyhedron); and the importance of *diversity* for the health of the Church (all sides are distinct). He goes on to say: 'even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked'

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<sup>9</sup> Greeting of Pope Francis to the Synod Fathers during the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 6 October 2014, available at: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141006\\_padri-sinodali.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141006_padri-sinodali.html).

<sup>10</sup> In Address, 17 October 2015, but quoting his address in St Peter's Square on 4 October 2014, the eve of the first synod, available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141004\\_incontro-per-la-famiglia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141004_incontro-per-la-famiglia.html).

<sup>11</sup> A polyhedron is a solid body with several flat sides or facets, much like a round diamond or a soccer ball.

(*Evangelii Gaudium*, §236). We are a long way here from the axiom often quoted at the Second Vatican Council by those who wanted to condemn atheists, other non-Christian believers, and other Christian believers: ‘error has no rights’. Here his concern is attention to ‘the whole’: ‘The Gospel has an intrinsic principle of totality’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §237). The ‘fullness and richness [of the Gospel] embrace scholars and workers, businessmen and artists, in a word, everyone’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §237). With regard to the second, diversity, here his concern is attention to ‘the parts’. If ‘the whole is greater than the part, [which] is also greater than the sum of its parts’, ‘there is no need, then, to be overly obsessed with limited and particular questions. We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all. But this has to be done without evasion or uprooting’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §235).

### 7. Greater Appreciation of ‘Provisionality’ and the Continuing Guidance of the Holy Spirit

Finally, *WTW*’s proposal of possible receptive learning from Anglicans’ promotion of ‘open and sometimes painful debate’ relates to another Anglican sensibility, a tolerance for ‘provisionality’ in matters of teaching and governance. That the Roman Catholic Church can learn to be humbler when it teaches the relevance of the Gospel for a particular time and place is one of the more challenging conclusions of ARCIC III’s deliberations. In paragraph 148, we find:

*The authority structures of the Anglican Communion make much more modest claims than do parallel Roman Catholic instruments. As a consequence, Anglicans live with judgements that are understood to be more provisional, requiring to be tested and discerned by the sensus fidelium.*

*Christians are confronted with new situations in evolving history. They have to discern whether new ways of life are in agreement with the Gospel. The sensus fidelium plays an indispensable role in this process of discernment. It takes time before the Church comes to a final judgement. The faithful at large, theologians, and bishops all have their respective roles to play. This requires that Catholics live with provisionality, and give latitude to those instruments which cannot give judgements of the highest authority. By learning to live with teaching that is improvable, space would be given to the testing and discernment of a proposed teaching.*

Echoes of this notion of provisionality can be heard in the teachings of Pope Francis. In his *Evangelii Gaudium* (§§222–25), he speaks of an important principle: ‘time is greater than space’. ‘This principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans. It invites us to accept the tension between fullness and limitation, and to give a priority to time’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §223). The Pope goes on to speak of ‘attention to the bigger picture, openness to suitable processes and concern for the long run. The Lord himself, during his earthly life, often warned his disciples that there were things they could not yet understand and that they would have to await the Holy Spirit’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §225).

Time can open up new perspectives on issues, or rather: over time, God can reveal to human beings new perspectives on the meaning of the Gospel. As Pope Francis himself stated, ‘It is not enough to find a new language in which to articulate our perennial faith; it is also urgent, in the light of the new challenges and prospects facing humanity, that the Church be able to express the “new things” of Christ’s Gospel, that, albeit present in the word of God, have not yet come to light. This is the treasury of “things old and new” of which Jesus spoke when he

invited his disciples to teach the newness that he had brought, without forsaking the old (cf. Mt 13:52).<sup>12</sup>

These seven possibilities for Catholic learning are provocative challenges emerging from an ecumenical dialogue that offers them out of fraternal care. They are now gifts to be received.

## Conclusion

By foregrounding the tensions and difficulties that Catholics experience regarding 'instruments of communion' at the local, regional, and universal levels, and by highlighting the gifts that Anglicans might just provide from its strengths in precisely those areas, *WTW* has demonstrated the value of receptive ecumenism. *WTW*, through putting this methodology into practice, has provided the space where each tradition can ask the question of itself: where at the local, regional, and universal levels of church life are we experiencing tensions and difficulties, and what can the other, in fraternal care, offer to help us? Whereas previous ecumenical methodologies may have found differences between the traditions as the problem to be solved, receptive ecumenism sees opportunity in these very differences. As *WTW* puts it: 'The aim here is not to eradicate these differences. The point rather is to ask how each might be a resource for the other so that what is experienced as grace and benefit in one might help address what is less developed in the other' (§46). Therefore, *WTW* has admirably demonstrated the advantages of the receptive ecumenism approach.

One final, albeit minor, point could be made. Surprisingly, *WTW* fails to draw on one source that supports why it should now receive a positive official response within the Roman Catholic Church. This source is Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. From a Roman Catholic perspective, this important papal document could well have provided solid backing for its receptive ecumenism methodology and its golden thread, communion ecclesiology. In support of the former, it might well have quoted Pope John Paul II's statement: 'A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me"' (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, §43). In support of the latter, John Paul II stated, in calling for a *development* of the Second Vatican Council's communion ecclesiology: 'the new century will have to see us more than ever intent on valuing *and developing* the forums and structures which, in accordance with the Second Vatican Council's major directives, serve to ensure and safeguard communion' (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, §44). Tellingly, in the next paragraph (§45), the Pope then goes on to speak of the need to safeguard and promote communion at all levels of the Church:

*Communion must be cultivated and extended day by day and at every level in the structures of each [local] Church's life. There, relations between Bishops, priests and deacons, between Pastors and the entire People of God, between clergy and Religious, between associations and ecclesial movements must all be clearly characterized by communion. To this end, the structures of participation envisaged by Canon Law, such as the Council of Priests and the Pastoral Council, must be ever more highly valued. These of course are not governed by the rules of parliamentary democracy, because they are consultative rather than deliberative;*

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<sup>12</sup> Address on the Anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 11 October 2017, available at: <http://www.pcpne.va/content/pcpne/en/news/2017-10-12-vaticanradio.html>.

*yet this does not mean that they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and faithful: on the one hand uniting them a priori in all that is essential, and on the other leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion. To this end, we need to make our own the ancient pastoral wisdom which, without prejudice to their authority, encouraged Pastors to listen more widely to the entire People of God.*

John Paul II then quotes two exemplars of the tradition regarding this principle of encouraging participation by all and listening to all. Firstly, St Benedict in his Rule wrote: 'By the Lord's inspiration, it is often a younger person who knows what is best.'<sup>13</sup> Secondly, St Paulinus of Nola 'urges': 'Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes.'<sup>14</sup>

In conclusion, there are many parallels between the receptive learning possibilities for the Roman Catholic Church proposed by *WTW* and Pope Francis's vision for renewal and reform according to the Second Vatican Council. In other words, the Anglican tradition has much to offer in making the Council a reality. Paradoxically, then, the Anglican tradition can assist the Roman Catholic Church to be more faithful to the vision of the Second Vatican Council.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Ideo autem omnes ad consilium vocari diximus, quia saepe iuniori Dominus revelat quod melius est.' *Regula*, III, 3.

<sup>14</sup> 'De omnium fidelium ore pendeamus, quia in omnem fidelem Spiritus Dei spirat.' *Epistola* 23, 36 to Sulpicius Severus, *CSEL* 29, 193.

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