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ECUMENICAL CATHOLIC LEARNING: SYNODALITY IN THE ANGLICAN- ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH DIALOGUE

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Abstract

There is an increasing awareness of the necessity of synodality in the ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church. While this awareness may be attributed to the programme and governance style of Pope Francis, there is also the question of whether synodality could be defined as a subject of ecumenical learning particularly within the context of the international Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue (ARCIC). To understudy this element of ecumenical learning *vis-à-vis* synodality, this article examines the idea of ecumenical learning within the context of ARCIC dialogue, analyzes the subject matter of synodality in ARCIC documents in comparison to the increasing awareness of synodality within the Roman Catholic Church, and finally argues for a sustained practice of synodality as a deepening of a pneumatological ecclesiology within the Church. Indeed, where an ecumenical learning is established, it creates the possibility of other forms and subjects of mutual learning thereby reaffirming the conviction that ecumenical dialogue is never a fruitless venture.

Keywords: Anglican Church; ARCIC; Dialogue; Ecumenical Learning; Pneumatology; Roman Catholic Church; Synodality

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Introduction

Synodality as an important dimension of the life and mission of the Church is receiving an increasing attention. Within the Roman Catholic Church, this attention is generated mainly by Pope Francis' approach to leadership. This is evident in his appeal for decentralization of authority within the Church, incorporation of the voices of episcopal conference that hitherto had been at the margins of papal teaching, promotion of open and honest conversation in the Church and insistence on the character of the Church as a listening Church. However, the purpose of this article is not to re-affirm the programme of Pope Francis with respect to synodality, but to show how the attention to synodality had evolved in the bilateral dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. In the context of this dialogue, synodality has emerged as an object of ecumenical learning that serves to intensify the praxis within the Roman Catholic Church through a self-critical evaluation in the light of how the Anglicans have practised synodality in the Communion. The idea is not to argue for a verbatim adaptation of the Anglican model and processes but to push for a greater re-reception of synodality in the Church. Such a re-reception is aided, within the context of ecumenical dialogue, by the framework of receptive ecumenism that promotes ecclesial learning.

1. Ecumenical Learning within the Context of ARCIC Dialogue

The idea of ecumenical learning has always been associated with ecumenical education or formation. On the one hand, ecumenical learning may be considered as a form of education since there is certainly some form of knowledge that is always appropriated. Yet it does not simply involve a *knowledge income* that may or may not lead to the transformation of ecclesial identity. On the other hand, the concept of ecumenical formation evokes some sort of process in which ecumenical learning takes place. Formation could as well imply the process of education that may not necessarily imply transformation. By implication while ecumenical formation is not identical with ecumenical learning, it could in some instance constitute a process of ecumenical learning. The 1993 study document, *Ecumenical Formation: Ecumenical Reflections and Suggestions*, by the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches argues that “[a]s a process of learning, ecumenical formation is concerned with

engaging the experience, knowledge, skills, talents and the religious memory of the Christian community for mutual enrichment and reconciliation.”¹ The document further recognizes that although “the language of formation and learning refers to some degree to a body of knowledge to be absorbed,” both processes “require a certain bold openness to living ecumenically as well.”²

In the above context, ‘living ecumenically’ partly constitutes the transformation that I earlier referred to. Ecumenical learning as a transformative process extends beyond *living ecumenically* to include living out fully one’s ecclesial identity. The argument remains valid in the case of synodality as long as synodality is not conceived as ecclesologically exterior to the self-understanding of the Roman Catholic Church. With ecumenical learning, synodality is rather to be rediscovered or perhaps intensified within Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Meanwhile, the transformative element of ecumenical learning or formation, as the case may be, could also have some extra-ecclesial implications. Konrad Raiser excellently argues this out in line with the works of two notable ecumenists, Willem Visser’t Hooft and Hendrik Kraemer.³

Gradually, there has been greater clarity in the understanding of ecumenical learning, and this would lead to the specific application of the concept in this article. The WCC president from the Caribbean/Latin America, Ofelia Ortega attempts a clear definition of the concept without directly intermixing it with other related notions. She describes ecumenical learning as “the sort of learning that enables people, who have remained rooted in the tradition of one church, to be open to the riches and perspectives of other churches, so that they can become increasingly involved in the quest for unity, openness and inter-church co-operation.”⁴ Ortega’s definition however conceives ecumenical learning as an inter-ecclesial affair

¹Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (JWG), “Ecumenical Formation: Ecumenical Reflections and Suggestions,” *The Ecumenical Review* 45, 4 (1993) 490-494; §11.

²JWG, “Ecumenical Formation,” §12.

³This extends ecumenical learning to the areas of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, all of which fall within the ambience of Christian mission. See, Konrad Raiser, “Fifty Years of Ecumenical Formation: Where Are We? Where Are We Going?” *The Ecumenical Review* 48, 4 (1996) 440-451, at 442-43.

⁴Ofelia Ortega, “Contextuality and Community: Challenges for Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation,” *International Review of Mission* 98, 1 (2009) 25-36, at 32.

and is implicitly grounded on the framework of ecumenical education/formation. More still, she offers a parallel sociological definition that invariably indicates an extra-ecclesial application of the concept.⁵

In this article, I intend to appropriate a definition of ecumenical learning that conceives it as primarily an intra-ecclesial affair; as an 'auto learning' process that happens within an ecclesial community that is in dialogue with another. In this learning process, absolute priority is given to the intra-ecclesial disposition, while any form of direct inter-ecclesial exchange is never required or demanded. An example of this ecumenical learning process is what Paul Murray refers to as 'Catholic Learning,' which is enabled by the dialogical method of receptive ecumenism.⁶

At a general level, Murray, the initiator of receptive ecumenism,⁷ underscores the notion of Catholic learning as a substantive identification of the specific act of *learning* to which Catholicism engages within an ecumenical context. Catholicism is thus put "in explicitly receptive, learning mode rather than [in] its perhaps more familiar, teaching, repeating, judging and defending modes."⁸ These contrasted modes are not however conceived by Murray as standing in polarity since learning could as well constitute "a form of teaching; teaching in the mode of witness."⁹ Murray considers receptive ecumenism and Catholic learning as mutually inclusive, whereby the former constitutes the condition

⁵In parallel, Ortega equally presents ecumenical learning as "the sort of learning that enables people of one country, with one language, belonging to one ethnic group, class or political or economic system, to become sensitive and respond to people from other countries, different ethnic groups and economic and political situations, so that they can be active participants in working for a more just world." Ortega, "Contextuality and Community," 32-33.

⁶Paul D. Murray, "Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7, 4 (2007) 279-301. This article was later published in Murray's edited work, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 5-25.

⁷See also, Paul D. Murray, "Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs," *Louvain Studies* 33, 1-2 (2008) 30-45; "ARCIC III: Recognizing the Need for an Ecumenical Gear-Change," *One in Christ* 45, 2 (2011) 200-211; "Introducing Receptive Ecumenism," *The Ecumenist: A Journal of Theology, Culture and Society* 51, 2 (2014) 1-8.

⁸Murray, "Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda," 292.

⁹Murray, "Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda," 292.

of possibility of the latter as far as fruitful ecumenism is concerned. Fundamental to such ecumenical project is the ‘self-critical question’ which each ecclesial community is to pose to itself, namely: “What can *we* learn, or *receive*, with integrity from *our* various others in order to facilitate our own growth together into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?”¹⁰ Drawing from this core of receptive ecumenism, ecumenical learning essentially becomes an inward gaze into one’s communal self-understanding.

[This is based on] the conviction that the life of faith, both personally and communally—or, better, ecclesially—is always, in essence, a matter of becoming more fully, more richly, what we already are, what we have been called to be and are destined to be and, in which we already share, albeit in part. It is a process of growth and change—a process of conversion—that is at root not a loss, nor a diminishment but a finding, a freeing, an intensification and an enrichment.¹¹

Indeed, “the capacity for receptive ecumenical learning *across* traditions” becomes “the necessary key for unlocking the potential for transformation *within* traditions.”¹² The *learning* is thus not limited to Catholicism but could as well apply to other ecclesial identities (Anglican, Orthodox, Methodist, Pentecostal). As a principle and as a methodological framework that drives ecumenical transformation, I shall now discuss briefly how ecumenical learning functions within the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue (ARCIC).

1.1. Ecumenical Learning in ARCIC: As a Dialogical Method

I shall limit my argument to two examples in ARCIC where methodological reconfiguration aims at promoting ecumenical learning of dialogue partners. The first is the ‘ecumenical reading’ of Scripture that challenges the churches to reconsider their hitherto “exclusivist confessional reading.”

[The idea is not] that any church has to give up its confessional reading, but that each church or ecclesial communion has to discern what is of remaining value in its confessional reading and how it can purify its reading in order to enlarge it by receiving what is valuable in the readings

¹⁰ Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda,” 280.

¹¹ Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda,” 282.

¹² Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda,” 283.

of other Christian churches and so to come to a truly 'catholic' and 'apostolic' reading of Scripture.¹³

ARCIC II deployed this 'ecumenical reading' particularly in the Agreed Statement, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (2005).¹⁴ The method considered "each passage about Mary in the context of the New Testament as a whole, against the background of the Old, and in the light of Tradition." Thus, "in the New Testament, the Old Testament is commonly interpreted typologically" and this means that "events and images are understood with specific reference to Christ" (*Mary*, §7). Despite the remaining questions on *Mary*, such as those concerning Mary's status of 'sinlessness,' her continual virginity, invocation of her name and the teaching about the end of her earthly life, the 'ecumenical reading' of Scripture, in this instance, already opens the potential of ecumenical learning between both ecclesial communions. It poses the question of how the understanding of the person and role of Mary have been received, deepened, clarified or intensified by the Agreed Statement on *Mary*.

Besides 'ecumenical reading,' ecumenical learning in ARCIC receives a greater methodological boost with the adoption of the framework of receptive ecumenism. Receptive ecumenism was officially adopted as the methodological framework in ARCIC III. I shall explore this further when discussing the subject matter of synodality. Already in the introduction to the first Agreed Statement of ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church – Local, Regional, Universal* (Erfurt 2017),¹⁵ the adoption of this method remains unambiguous:

ARCIC III is convinced that, just as a return to the sources of tradition in Scripture, liturgy and the Patristic and Scholastic periods (ressourcement) has been renewing both Anglican and Roman Catholic theology since the middle of the last century, so critical self-examination through the prism of ecumenical dialogue and receptive learning can deepen the renewal and participation of the Church in the Trinitarian communion of God (*Walking Together*, §19).

¹³Adelbert Denaux, "The Use of Scripture in the Agreed Statements of ARCIC," 249-256 in Adelbert Denaux, Nicholas Sagovsky and Charles Sherlock, ed., *Looking Towards a Church Fully Reconciled: The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission 1983-2005 (ARCIC II)*, London: SPCK, 2016, 256.

¹⁴ARCIC II, "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ (2005)," in Denaux, et al., *Looking Towards a Church Fully Reconciled*, 175-241.

¹⁵ARCIC, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church – Local, Regional, Universal: An Agreed Statement of the Third Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III)*, London: SPCK, 2018.

Following this strategy, ARCIC III radically departs from the methods in ARCIC I and ARCIC II,¹⁶ and highlights “explicit ecclesial self-critique” (*Walking Together*, §17) and sharing in the gift of the other.¹⁷ However, besides being a method, there are instances where ecumenical learning is put into the practice of ecumenism.

1.2. Ecumenical Learning in ARCIC: As a Dialogical Practice

In the context of ARCIC dialogue, ecumenical learning has emerged as a dialogical practice. This is evident in the establishment and activities of the *International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission* (IARCCUM). Established in 2001, IARCCUM’s primary text, which marked the 40th anniversary of the ARCIC dialogue, *Growing Together*,¹⁸ focuses excessively on the commonalities between both churches. Underlying this approach was a *communio* ecclesiology that sought to highlight the things that unite rather than divide.¹⁹ The document recognizes that “the degree of visible communion” between both ecclesial communities would depend on the degree of their “mutual recognition of the holy gifts and the essential constitutive elements of the Church in one another” (*Growing Together*, §20). Mutual recognition of gifts does not translate to mutual learning. Recognition could imply a common gift sharing that acknowledges a common source (*Growing Together*, §§25-32):

¹⁶Raymond K. Williamson, “Receptive Ecumenism in the Context of Bilateral Dialogues,” 147-157 in Virginia Miller, David Moxon and Stephen Pickard, ed., *Learning into the Spirit: Ecumenical Perspectives on Discernment and Decision-making in the Church* [Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue], Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 150.

¹⁷Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on The Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, *Evangelium Gaudium* (24 November 2013), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#Ecumenical_dialogue (accessed 17 February 2020), §246. Pope Francis emphasizes the idea of gift exchange as a form of mutual learning, in line with Pope John Paul II’s appeal in *Ut Unum Sint*, §28. Meanwhile, the Canadian theologian, Margaret O’Gara argues for the idea of ecumenical ‘gift exchange’ that is predicated on intra-ecclesial conversion. Cf. Margaret O’Gara, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 3.

¹⁸IARCCUM, *Growing Together in Unity and Mission: Building on 40 Years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue. An Agreed Statement of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission*, London: SPCK, 2007.

¹⁹This is mostly evident in the first part of *Growing Together*, with the subtitle “The Achievements of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Theological Dialogue.” The *communio* ecclesiology features prominently in ARCIC II’s *The Church as Communion* (1990) and *Life in Christ, Morals, Communion and the Church* (1993). However, it has always been there since ARCIC I. cf. ARCIC I, *The Final Report*, “Introduction,” §5.

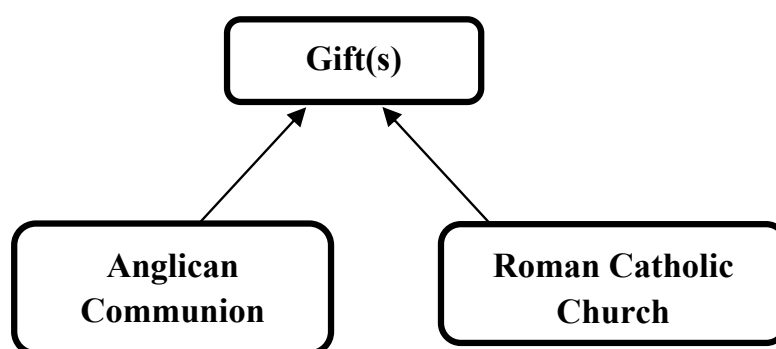


Figure 1: Common gift sharing

Mutual recognition does not go beyond cordiality, respect and tolerance to the more fundamental goals of unity and transformation. Yet, it can serve as a precondition to mutual learning that leads to a self-critical transformation.

In order to move from a common gift sharing to mutual learning there is need to make an intermediate transition to mutual gift exchange. Gift exchange in this sense is different from the symbolic gift exchange that often happens within the circles of ecumenical diplomacy,²⁰ rather it involves the reception of aspects of one's ecclesial identity that are either present or better developed in the other. In other words, the active agency belongs to the receiving dialogue partner.

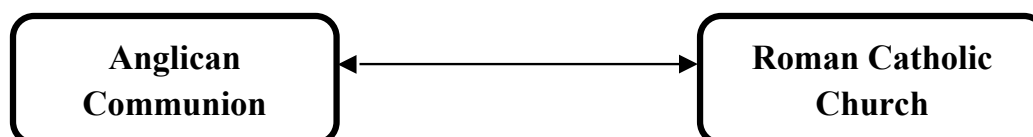


Figure 2: Mutual gift exchange

Despite this limitation in the IARCCUM text, one observes that the idea of mutual gift exchange, and so, of mutual learning is not completely lost on the Commission, particularly on the questions concerning primacy and synodality. The possibility of mutual learning is opened on both sides, with Anglicans leaning towards primacy and Roman Catholics challenging themselves with a deeper practice of synodality.

The question of whether the Anglican Communion is open to instruments of oversight which would allow decisions to be reached which in certain circumstances would bind the members of every province is an important and topical one. In turn, it has been asked whether in the Catholic Church

²⁰An example is Paul VI's gift of his episcopal ring to Archbishop Michael Ramsey in 1966.

enough provision has 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 (*Growing Together*, §74).

Certainly, the openness to receive or to learn is the starting point of ecumenical learning. Interestingly, the second part of the IARCCUM text, “Towards Unity and Common Mission,” in keeping with the key objective of IARCCUM, constructs practical ways of maintaining this openness as well as promoting the ecumenical learning itself. Although the agenda of mutual learning is not clearly spelt out, the four cardinal points of the second part of the IARCCUM text, namely: a) “visible expression of our shared faith” (§§100-103), b) “joint study of our faith” (§§104-107), c) “co-operation in ministry” (§§108-117), and d) “shared witness in the world” (§§118-125), invariably promote both the praxis of common gift sharing and mutual gift exchange. Within this scheme synodality is greatly advanced.

The questions remain: Above and beyond the IARCCUM project, how has the topic of synodality developed as an object of ecumenical mutual learning within the ARCIC dialogue? If the ARCIC III project makes explicit what hitherto has been inexplicit through its framework of receptive ecumenism, to what extent has the Roman Catholic Church *learned* in the ecumenical dialogue on synodality?

2. Synodality in ARCIC Documents and the Call to Catholic Learning

To examine synodality as an example of ecumenical learning in the ARCIC dialogue, I shall focus on ARCIC III’s *Walking Together*. Yet, given the continuity in ARCIC Agreed Statements, I shall first trace the pristine deliberations on synodality in ARCIC documents, particularly in ARCIC II’s *The Gift of Authority* (1999).²¹ Already, ARCIC I recognizes that “the Roman Catholic Church has much to learn from the Anglican synodical tradition of involving the laity in the life and mission of the Church.”²² There is no denial of the practice of the synodal tradition within the Roman Catholic Church, which stretches back to the Ecumenical Councils. Collegial

²¹ARCIC II, “The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III (1999), in Denaux, et al., *Looking Towards a Church Fully Reconciled*, 123-174.

²²This is stated in the preface to ARCIC I’s *The Authority of the Church I* (1976) that was drafted by the co-chairmen of the commission, Henry McAdoo (Anglican bishop of Ossory) and Alan Clark (Roman Catholic bishop of Elmham).

synodality as an exercise of authority in the Church where the bishops, representing the various local churches, act in union (collegially) with the Bishop of Rome (as the Primate) is well developed in the Roman Catholic Church. This is further deepened by the institution of the Synod of Bishops by Paul VI.²³ ARCIC II's *The Gift* re-affirms this practice. At this level, Anglicans and Roman Catholics show a common understanding of collegial synodality (§38). However, *The Gift* insists that the exercise of synodality in which lay people participate actively in the life and mission of the church is underdeveloped in the Roman Catholic Church. This is exactly the point of the *Catholic learning*. Unlike in the Catholic Church, Anglican synodality has continued to develop since the period of the English Reformation. New forms of synods have emerged with an increasing role of the lay people in decision-making (§39). At the global level, the 'instruments of communion,' made up of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Anglican Consultative Council, the Lambeth Conference and the Primate's Meeting serve the purposes of 'mutual accountability,' while at the various local levels (provincial, national and diocesan), the three houses of bishops, clergy and laity "share in the responsibility of unity, faith, and order inherent in the episcopal office" (*Walking Together*, §73). In line with this, therefore, collegial synodality in the Roman Catholic Church ought to be complemented by "a growth in synodality at the local level" as a way of "promoting the active participation of lay persons in the life and mission of the local church" (*The Gift*, §40). Underlying this argument is the reasoning that synodality is always at the service of ecclesial communion. Indeed, as *The Gift* rightly puts it, the term synodality (*syn-hodos*, 'common road,' 'coming together') fundamentally "indicates the manner in which believers and churches are held in communion" in responding to the call "to walk together in Christ" (§34).

Walking together in Christ implies that Christians exercise a collective discernment in the church. The contribution of the believers ought to be taken seriously in the living out of the Gospel in the life and mission of the church. Commenting on the subject matter of synodality in *The Gift*, the Durham University theologian, Peter Phillips insists that the Roman Catholic understanding of synodality

²³Paul VI, Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio*, Establishing the Synod of Bishops for the Universal Church, *Apostolica Sollicitudo* (15 September 1965), http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19650915_apostolica-sollicitudo.html (accessed 18 February 2020).

at the time is at variance with the meaning in ARCIC's text.²⁴ He considers the practice of collegial synodality as ineffectual as long as bishops' conferences lack any teaching authority in the church.²⁵ With the pontificate of Francis, it is likely that Phillips would reverse some of his strong opinions concerning the subject of synodality in the Roman Catholic Church. I shall return later to Pope Francis's take on the practice of synodality in the Church after a brief examination of how the topic of synodality continues to develop within the ARCIC Agreed Statements.

This brings us back to ARCIC III's *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be Church – Local, Regional, Universal*. Already the title 'Walking Together on the Way' speaks volume of its synodal character, while the subtitle 'Learning to Be Church' indicates ARCIC III's method of ecumenical learning. One must however be mindful that the mandate of ARCIC III links the above ecclesiological issue to the discernment of right ethical teaching.²⁶ Discernment and teaching, whether of ethical or doctrinal matters, are inherently part of the outcome of synodality. Upon setting before itself the double task of self-critique and renewal, the document articulates its agenda within the framework of ecumenical learning:

We suggest that the current twofold task, as we seek to walk the way towards full communion, is (i) to look humbly at what is not working effectively *within one's own tradition*, and (ii) to ask whether this might be helped receptive learning from the understanding, structures, practices, and judgements of the other. The opportunity is to teach by showing what it means to learn and to bear witness by showing what it means to receive in our need – recognizing that at times the members of one tradition may judge that the practices and structures of the other will not, in a given instance, be helpful (*Walking Together on the Way*, §78).

Under the three considerations of the local, regional and universal ecclesial structures, I shall sift out from the text some instances of Catholic learning on synodality. At the local level, it is observed that the Catholic Church is highly clericalized and that the participation of the lay people in decision-making at the parish and diocesan levels are merely consultative and non-deliberative (§94). Often the emphasis on unity in the Roman Catholic Church can "result in the

²⁴Peter Phillips, "Synodality and *The Gift of Authority*," *Theology* 103, 815 (2000) 323-330, at 324.

²⁵Phillips, "Synodality and *The Gift of Authority*," 325.

²⁶Adelbert Denaux, "The Church Local, Regional and Universal: A Delicate Balance. A Recent Ecclesiological Statement of ARCIC III, 111-129 in Miller, et al., ed., *Learning into the Spirit*, 115.

suppression of difference, the inhibiting of candid conversation, and the avoidance of contentious issues in open fora,” and as such, even the theologically established *sensus fidei* of the faithful is yet to be fully integrated in the *lived* experience of Catholics (§96). The document argues that an opportunity for Catholic learning emerges when considering “the mandatory roles accorded to the laity in Anglican parochial and diocesan structures” (§99) and the disposition to “open and sometimes painful debate” (§101) in the church. In line with these, the quality of synodality in the Roman Catholic Church could be enriched at the local level.

At the regional level, ARCIC III recognizes how Pope Francis incorporates the documents of various episcopal conferences in his teachings (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Laudato Si'*, *Querida Amazonia*, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, *Christus Vivit*, and *Amoris Laetitia*), which is a clear sign of increasing synodal consciousness and a remarkable departure from the past. *Walking Together* makes the case that regional collegial synodality can also benefit from “wider geographical associations, or federations” (§113).²⁷ However, it rightly observes that the teaching authority of episcopal conferences remains unclarified. The tension between the centralized structure of governance and the contextualized experiences of the Church at the regional levels contributes to the lack of clarity. Meanwhile, *ad intra*, the synodal nature of episcopal conferences is impeded by the non-active participation of priests and lay persons (§118). These areas of concern provide opportunities for a Catholic theological and juridical learning on synodality, taking cues from the Anglican tradition.

At the worldwide/universal level, the tension between centralization and decentralization dominates the question of Catholic learning on synodality. Roman Catholic centralization, which is at the service of ecclesial unity, rests upon an ecclesiology that has a double interpretation. The ecclesiology of the relationship between the universal Church and the particular churches may be understood either as a communion of churches or in terms of the ontological priority of the universal over the particular.²⁸ Synodality

²⁷Associations in this category would include the *Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa* (RECOWA), the *Latin American Episcopal Council* (CELAM), the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC), the *Southern Africa Catholic Bishops' Conference* (SACBC), and the *Council of European Bishops' Conferences* (CCEE).

²⁸Cf. The famous debate between Walter Kasper and Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), where the former maintains the position of the communion of churches, while the later defends the ontological priority of the universal church. Cf. Kristof Struys, “Particular Churches – Universal Church: Theological Backgrounds to the Position of

at the universal level is more guaranteed in the communion model. At this level, the problem of the teaching authority of the episcopal conferences re-emerges. Even when the primacy of the Bishop of Rome is exercised on behalf of the college of bishops and with the assistance of the Roman Curia, its synodal character may be vitiated. This happens where “consultation and exchange are not maintained,” or when “the collegiality of the bishops is insufficiently expressed,” or even where “properly local and regional authority is not respected” (§143). More still, the absence of the contribution of priests and laity also affects synodality at this level. A more inclusive discernment space is needed even if it requires that Catholics live with some degree of provisionality (§148). The inner-workings of the Anglican ‘instruments of communion’ at the universal level²⁹ may assist the Roman Catholic Church to deepen “mutual accountability, [...] a necessary transparency and interrelationship of the college of bishops and the Bishop of Rome as head of the college” (§145). In the light of this, synodality as an open process of communal discernment bears fruit within the formal teaching of the Church.

Indeed, the ARCIC dialogue have contributed significantly in promoting Catholic ecumenical learning particularly in the area of synodality. The increasing demand for open and frank conversation by Pope Francis, despite its controversial and often polarizing effects, challenges the Roman Catholic Church to developing a more inclusive communal process of discernment. Far from being a democratic process of decision-making in the Church, synodality is a spiritual exercise of the community of believers.

3. Synodality as a Deepening of a Pneumatological Ecclesiology within the Church

ARCIC III’s conversation on synodality is quite weak on pneumatology, and this is as a result of its excessive focus on the nature and processes of the various local, trans-local and universal structures of governance in the church. Perhaps, the Commission understood its mandate as precluding such a theological assessment on synodality. Another possible reason could be found in the continuity of ARCIC documents, whereby ARCIC II’s *Church as Communion* had already addressed the pneumatological dimension of a *communio* ecclesiology (§§8, 13-15, 17-19, 25-27, 29-32, 42-43). Any

Walter Kasper in the Debate with Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI,” *Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor Filosofie en Theologie* 69 (2008) 147-171.

²⁹These would include the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), and the Primates’ Meeting.

theological assessment of synodality surely follows the same trajectory. On a positive note, the ARCIC conversation has led to a Catholic learning that has generated a re-reception of the practice of synodality in the Roman Catholic Church, together with the theology that undergirds it. This is even the case as the practice is yet to be fully intensified in the structures of Church's life. In 2018, the *International Theological Commission* published *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, an outcome of a theological study on synodality that began in 2014.

Theologically, synodality is grounded in a Trinitarian ecclesiology of communion with its manifest "anthropological, Christological, pneumatological and Eucharistic dimensions."³⁰ In practical terms, the theology of synodality rests on Vatican II's theology of the 'People of God' and their participation in the Church—through the threefold offices (*Lumen Gentium*, chapter two). The participation, sharing, reciprocity and co-responsibility of the People of God are guaranteed by the doctrine of *sensus fidei*,³¹ which essentially does not threaten the hierarchy of the Church but may perhaps re-conceive it in what Pope Francis referred to as an "inverted pyramid."³² Given the *sensus fidei*, participation of the People of God remains deeply pneumatological since it "is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit."³³ Authentic synodality means therefore "to move forward, in harmony [*walk together*] under the impulse of the Spirit."³⁴ In this sense, the Spirit's action at Pentecost is sustained in the communal life of the church (cf. Acts 2, *Ad Gentes* §4).

³⁰International Theological Commission (ITC), *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2 March 2018), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html (accessed 21 February 2020), §48.

³¹ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, §64. For detailed study on *Sensus fidei* (the sense of faith) see, Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2009.

³²Francis, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html, (accessed 21 February 2020).

³³ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, §67. Re-echoed in the above statement are the teachings of Vatican II. See, *Lumen Gentium* §13, *Unitatis Redintegratio* §2, *Gaudium et Spes* §32.

³⁴Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), "Church's Synodal Functions," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 January 1996, 9-11, at 9.

Addressing the members of the International Theological Commission on 29 November 2019, Pope Francis underscores that the ‘soul’ of synodality is the Holy Spirit. According to him, “without the Holy Spirit there is no synodality.”³⁵ He considers the task of the theologians as that of ‘listening to what the Spirit is saying to the Church.’ Meanwhile, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the synod of bishops in 2015, the pope, while referencing *Evangelii Gaudium* (§171), had reminded his audience that,

A synodal Church 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 he “says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7).

In listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit, synodality constitutes an intra-ecclesial learning that transforms the Church from within. The motivation for transformation is no longer an external impulse that emerges from ecumenical conversations, rather it is an internal spiritual mechanism that leads to interior conversion or renewal. By designating the Holy Spirit as the ‘soul’ of synodality, Pope Francis equally indicates the indispensable, enduring, and continuous nature of synodality in the Church. Synodality assures the unity, communion, mission and the work of discernment in the Church. Without synodality, the Church dies. Thus, the better the praxis or spirituality of synodality, the healthier the life and mission of the Church.

Conclusion

The ‘signs of the times’ in the Church today includes an intensification of the praxis of synodality as a way of ensuring inclusivity in the Church today. Such inclusivity is not only defined by the diversity of the People of God, but the disposition to create platforms of increasing participation in the life and mission of the Church. Interestingly, the ARCIC dialogue has over the years promoted such an inclusivity by presenting the practice of synodality as an instance of ecumenical learning by the Roman Catholic Church. In promoting the agenda of Vatican II, Pope Francis has further intensified the practice of synodality. As a caveat, however, he

³⁵Francis, Address to Members of the International Theological Commission (29 November 2019), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191129_commissione-teologica.html (accessed 21 February 2020).

reminds us that synodality is not reducible to the democratic inclusiveness and processes of decision-making, but ultimately rests on a pneumatological ecclesiology in which the Holy Spirit remains the central determinant of both the initiation and sustainability of synodality in the Church. Understanding the concept of synodality as 'walking together' is therefore not restricted to the pilgrimage of the People of God with one another, but involves a realization that this pilgrimage is done with, and is sustained by the power of, the Holy Spirit. In this sense, synodality belongs to the ecclesiology of Vatican II, even when it is not explicitly indicated, as long as it rests on the Trinitarian ecclesiology of communion that is at the centre of Roman Catholic ecclesial self-understanding.