Document 1
The Bishop of Rome
Pages:107-224

Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

THE BISHOP OF ROME

Primacy and Synodality in the Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*

A Study Document
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The genesis of this document can be traced to the invitation addressed by Saint John Paul II to other Christians to find, "together, of course", the forms in which the ministry of the Bishop of Rome "may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned" (*Ut unum sint* 95). Numerous responses to this invitation have been offered, as well as reflections and suggestions from various ecumenical theological dialogues.

Some responses were already summarized in 2001 by the then Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in an initial working paper entitled *The Petrine Ministry*. In 2020, this Dicastery saw in the 25th anniversary of the encyclical *Ut unum sint* an opportunity to resume and deepen the discussion, taking into account new theological dialogue documents and statements by successive Pontiffs. Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI recalled John Paul II's invitation in various contexts, expressing the need to deepen "the distinction between the nature and form of the exercise of primacy". Pope Francis underlined the urgency of responding to the invitation of *Ut unum sint*, observing that: "We have made little progress in this regard" (see here §§ 4-5). The convocation of a Synod on synodality from 2021-2024 confirmed the relevance of the Dicastery's project, as a contribution to the ecumenical dimension of the synodal process.

The status of the text, entitled *The Bishop of Rome. Primacy and Synodality in the Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to the Encyclical Ut unum sint*, is that of a "study document" that does not claim to exhaust the subject nor to summarize the Catholic magisterium on it. Its purpose is to offer an objective synthesis of recent ecumenical developments on the theme, thus reflecting the insights but also the limitations of the dialogue documents themselves. In addition, the study concludes with a brief proposal of the 2021 Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery, entitled "Towards an Exercise of Primacy in the 21st century", which identifies the most significant suggestions put forward by the various responses and dialogues for a renewed exercise of the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome.

The document is the result of truly ecumenical and synodal work. It summarizes some thirty responses to *Ut unum sint* and fifty

ecumenical dialogue documents on the subject. It involved not only the staff, but also the Members and Consultors of the Dicastery who discussed it at two Plenary assemblies. Many Catholic experts were consulted, as well as numerous scholars from various Christian traditions. Finally, the text was sent to various Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and to the General Secretariat of the Synod. In all, more than fifty contributions were considered. All, while suggesting improvements, were positive about the initiative, methodology, structure and main ideas of the study document. I would like to express my deep gratitude to all those who offered their valued contribution to this reflection, and in particular to the Dicastery's officials who promoted and coordinated the project in collaboration with the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the *Angelicum*.

We are now happy to publish this study document with the agreement of His Holiness Pope Francis. It is our hope that it will promote not only the reception of the dialogues on this important topic, but also stimulate further theological investigation and practical suggestions, "together, of course", for an exercise of the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome "recognized by all concerned" (*UUS* 95).

K. Card. Koch

Prefect
Kurt Cardinal Koch

INTRODUCTION

"TO FIND A WAY OF EXERCISING PRIMACY": PAPAL INTERVENTIONS

1. The understanding and exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome entered a new phase with the Second Vatican Council. The very act of calling a Council with Christian unity as one of its primary goals and with the participation of other Christians already indicated Saint John XXIII's approach to the role of the Bishop of Rome in the Church. Complementing the definitions of the First Vatican Council on papal primacy, the Constitution *Lumen gentium* strengthened the office of bishops who govern their particular churches as "vicars and ambassadors of Christ […] and not as vicars of the Roman Pontiffs" (*LG* 27) and emphasized the significance of episcopal collegiality (*LG* 23). The Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* marked the official entry of the Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement and opened the way to the establishment of theological dialogues, many of which would address the question of primacy.

2. During and after the Council, successive Popes have made significant contributions to this development. Convinced that "the Pope […] is undoubtedly the gravest obstacle on the path of ecumenism",[1] Saint Paul VI, by his gestures and statements, contributed in many ways to a new understanding of papal ministry. Already in his Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, he expressed the conviction that his pastoral office of unity "is not a supremacy of spiritual pride and a desire to dominate mankind, but a primacy of service, ministration, and love" (*ES* 114). Through a number of meetings, he developed fraternal relations with other Christian leaders, which helped to establish the Catholic Church within the fellowship of Christian communions. Aware that the ecumenical credibility of the Catholic Church depends on its internal capacity for renewal, Paul VI, implementing a proposal raised by the bishops at Vatican II, instituted in 1965 the Synod of Bishops to provide for a more collegial way of exercising primacy for the good of the entire Church (see Motu Proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo*, 1965) and made episcopal conferences mandatory (Motu proprio *Ecclesiæ sanctæ*, 1966, 41).

[1] Pope Paul VI, *Address to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity*, 28 April 1967.

3. Saint John Paul II not only reaffirmed this ecumenical path but also officially invited other Christians to reflect on the exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. In his milestone encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* (1995) he used the biblical notion of *'episkopein'* ("*keeping watch*") to describe this ministry (*UUS* 94), whose primacy is defined as a *ministry of unity* (*UUS* 89) and a *service of love* (*UUS* 95). Assuming his particular ecumenical responsibility, and "heeding the request made of [him]", Pope John Paul II recognized the need "to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation" (*UUS* 95). Convinced that a mutually acceptable *ministry of unity* cannot be defined unilaterally, he extended an open invitation to all pastors and theologians from the different ecclesial traditions, repeating a request already made in 1987 in Saint Peter's Basilica in the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I: "I insistently pray the Holy Spirit to shine his light upon us, enlightening all the Pastors and theologians of our Churches, that we may seek – together, of course – the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognised by all concerned" (*UUS* 95). Thanks to this distinction between the nature of primacy and the temporal forms in which it is exercised, it was hoped that through "a patient and fraternal dialogue", the "will of Christ for his Church" would be unveiled (*UUS* 96).

4. Pope Benedict XVI, in his first address, spoke of himself assuming "as his primary commitment that of working tirelessly towards the reconstitution of the full and visible unity of all Christ's followers".[2] He recalled and renewed John Paul II's invitation in different contexts, with the conviction that "the ideas put forward by Pope John Paul II in the Encyclical *Ut unum sint* (95) on the distinction between the nature and form of the exercise of primacy can yield further fruitful discussion points",[3] and encouraged theological dialogue on the relationship between primacy and synodality, especially with the Orthodox Church. His resignation from papal office in 2013, the first resignation of a Pope in modern times, recognizing "my incapacity to adequately fulfil the ministry entrusted

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[2] Pope Benedict XVI, *Missa Pro Ecclesia*, 20 April 2005.

[3] Pope Benedict XVI, *Address at a Meeting with Representatives of Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches*, Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany), 24 September 2011; see also *Address at the Patriarchal Church of Saint George in the Phanar* (Istanbul, Turkey), 30 November 2006; *Message to His Holiness Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople, Ecumenical Patriarch*, 25 November 2009.

to me",[4] contributed to a new perception and understanding of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome.

5. Pope Francis has reiterated several times the invitation of Pope John Paul II to find a new way of exercising primacy,[5] recognising that "We have made little progress in this regard" (*Evangelii gaudium* 32). Calling for a "pastoral conversion" of the papacy and the central structures of the Catholic Church, he acknowledges that "excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach", and especially laments the insufficient elaboration of the status of episcopal conferences (*EG* 32). For Pope Francis "today the Petrine ministry cannot be fully understood without this openness to dialogue with all believers in Christ".[6] Making synodality a key theme of his pontificate, Pope Francis stresses the importance of a synodality grounded on the *sensus fidei* of the People of God "infallible *in credendo*" (*EG* 119), which is essential for a renewed understanding and exercise of the Petrine ministry, as he stated in his address for the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops: "In a synodal Church, greater light can be shed on the exercise of the Petrine primacy". Indeed, "the Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time — as Successor of Peter — to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches".[7] The commitment of Pope Francis to build a synodal Church at all levels "has significant ecumenical implications", firstly because synodality is a gift we can learn from other Christians (see *EG* 246), and also because both synodality and ecumenism are processes of "walking together". Pope Francis sees the renewed practice of the Synod of Bishops, including a broader consultation of the whole People of God, as a "contribution to the reestablishment of unity among all Christians" and in itself a response to the "desire expressed years ago by John Paul II" in *Ut unum sint* (Apostolic constitution *Episcopalis communio* 2018, 10). The

[4] Pope Benedict XVI, *Declaratio*, 11 February 2013.

[5] Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* 32*; Address at the Ecumenical celebration in the Basilica of Holy Sepulchre (Jerusalem),* 25 May 2014; *Address marking the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

[6] Pope Francis, *Homily for the Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle*, 25 January 2014.

[7] Pope Francis*, Address marking the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

many references to episcopal conference teachings in his magisterial documents (*Evangelii gaudium*, *Amoris lætitia*, *Laudato si'*) also witnesses his synodal commitment. Lastly, in line with the pastoral practice of his recent predecessors, the emphasis of Pope Francis on his title of "Bishop of Rome" from the beginning of his pontificate, the other pontifical titles now being listed as "historical" (see *Annuario Pontificio* 2020), also contributes to a new image of the Petrine ministry.

ORIGIN, AIM AND STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

6. Pope John Paul II's invitation in *Ut unum sint* prompted many responses from Christian communions and ecumenical bodies, as well as from academic symposia and individual theologians of different traditions. Most of them drew on the results of the various dialogues discussing the issue of primacy, either before or after the publication of the encyclical.

7. The 2001 Plenary Session of the then Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity [PCPCU] discussed the current state of ecumenical reflection on the exercise of the Petrine ministry. On that occasion, a working paper was prepared, reporting the main elements of the current discussion, as they emerged from the official or non-official theological dialogues on Petrine ministry and from the various responses to Pope John Paul II's request. Some considerations and suggestions by the Plenary Session were added to the paper under the title "Suggestions of the Plenary concerning the study on Petrine Ministry".[8] The paper was published in the official bulletin of the Pontifical Council and sent to a large number of Church leaders and ecumenical partners, especially to those who had already sent a response to *Ut unum sint*, in order to share the reflection and to continue the dialogue.

8. The PCPCU, which became on 5 June 2022 the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, saw in the 25th anniversary of the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, as well as in the synodal process for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops entitled "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission" (2021-2024), an opportunity to resume the discussion on this topic. Indeed, since

[8] *Information Service* 109 (2002/I–II), p. 29–42. Much of the material in this text was brought together with the assistance of the Johann–Adam–Möhler–Institute.

2001, Popes have made further statements and further responses to the encyclical and new documents of theological dialogues have been published. All these documents have made a significant contribution to the reflection on the question of primacy in the Church and deserve to be taken up in an ongoing dialogue. Moreover, the pontificate of Pope Francis has opened new perspectives for a synodal exercise of primacy. A "harvesting of the fruits" of these developments and ecumenical reflections on the Bishop of Rome, primacy and synodality, seemed timely and could contribute to a renewed interest in Christian unity.

9. The Dicastery has therefore drafted a new study document on this subject, based on and augmenting the previous text significantly. Honouring the reflections on primacy and on the ministry of the Bishop of Rome made by other Christian communions, ecumenical bodies and theological dialogues (with Catholic participation), this paper aims to be an objective and descriptive synthesis of recent developments in the ecumenical discussion on this topic. It does not pretend to be a synthesis of the Catholic magisterium or the Catholic response to the ecumenical reflections, nor to be a *status quæstionis* of the whole theological debate, but to be a "harvesting of the fruits" of recent ecumenical dialogues. It reflects therefore the insights, but also the limitations of the dialogue documents themselves. As was the case with previous PCPCU working papers, it is offered primarily to scholars working in the field of ecumenical theology, members of the various theological dialogues, and dialogue partners of the Catholic Church. This synthesis is offered as a contribution to the discussion, in some sense as an *instrumentum laboris*, in the hope that it will promote further theological investigation and dialogue, and stimulate practical suggestions for an exercise of the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome "recognised by all concerned" (*UUS* 95).

10. An initial draft of this text was prepared in 2020 by the DPCU and sent to theologians from different Christian traditions asking for their expert comment. The study document was then submitted in June 2021 to all members and consultants of the DPCU for their consideration and was discussed at the Plenary assembly on 11 November 2021, held online, together with a proposal entitled "Towards an Exercise of Primacy in the 21st Century". An updated draft was then submitted to the competent Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and again discussed at an in-presence Plenary assembly of the DPCU on 3 May 2022. At each of these stages the study document was

further amended. The Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity expresses its deep gratitude to all those who offered their valued contribution to this reflection. After further updates the document was submitted to His Holiness Pope Francis, who approved its publication during an Audience granted to Cardinal Kurt Koch on 2 March 2024.

11. The following pages offer a schematic presentation of (1) the responses to *Ut unum sint* and documents of the theological dialogues devoted to the question of primacy; (2) the main theological questions traditionally challenging papal primacy, and some significant advances in contemporary ecumenical reflection;

(3) some perspectives for a ministry of unity in a reunited Church; and (4) practical suggestions or requests addressed to the Catholic Church. This synthesis is based both on the responses to *Ut unum sint* and on the results of the official and unofficial dialogues concerning the ministry of unity at the universal level. It uses the terminology adopted by these documents, with its advantages and limitations. A summary is also offered at the end of this study document.

1. ECUMENICAL REFLECTION ON THE MINISTRY OF THE BISHOP OF ROME

1.1. RESPONSES TO *UT UNUM SINT*

12. *Ut unum sint*'s invitation to theologians and Church leaders to reflect together on the ministry of the Bishop of Rome elicited a wide range of responses. Official ecclesial responses came from a broad spectrum of Christian communions of the West: Old Catholic Churches, Churches of the Anglican Communion, Lutheran Churches, Presbyterian Churches, Reformed Churches and Free Churches. In geographical terms, most answers came from North America and Europe, mainly from the British Isles, Germany and the USA. Most answers were prepared by local groups or institutions. Extensive responses came from the House of Bishops of the Church of England, from the Bishops' Conference of the Church of Sweden and from the Presbyterian Church in the USA. There were no official answers from the Orthodox or Oriental Orthodox Churches.

13. Some responses came from ecumenical commissions (e.g. the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA) and from local and national Councils of Churches (e.g. the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England, Church Leaders of West Yorkshire). A few academic institutions (e.g. *Konfessionskundliches Institut des Evangelischen Bundes*; *Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe «Ut Unum Sint » Schweiz*) sent reactions, as did some ecumenical communities (e.g. the Association of Interchurch Families; the Iona Community) and *ad hoc* theological groups (like the Farfa Sabina Group).

14. Several theological symposia and seminars, which included representatives of various Churches, were also organised in response to and inspired by the Pope's request. Two conferences took place in the Vatican: in 1996 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith organized a symposium on "The Primacy of the Successor of Peter", from which the Congregation published "Considerations" on this topic in 1998; and in 2003 the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity organized a symposium entitled "The Petrine Ministry: Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue". Many other symposia were organised at a local level, whose proceedings contain important ecumenical contributions on the question of primacy which have been taken up and developed in the ecumenical dialogues. Individual theologians of many traditions –

including some Orthodox – have also published a rich variety of articles and monographs in response to Pope John Paul II's request. However, given the impossibility of including all of them, and convinced that dialogue between Churches is the appropriate context for this reflection, this paper limits itself to the theological dialogues and the responses to *Ut unum sint*.

1.2. THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUES

15. Many theological dialogues have discussed the question of papal primacy, at times in a profound and comprehensive way. The following paragraphs will offer an overview of the theological dialogue documents totally or partially devoted to the question of primacy. Honouring the broad invitation issued by Pope John Paul II in *Ut unum sint* and confirmed by successive Popes, this paper, like the 2001 working paper, draws from a wide variety of documents, taking into account the reflections made by international and national official dialogues whose members are appointed by the Churches, and also by unofficial dialogue groups. While recognizing the different status of these dialogues, and particularly the greater weight of official international dialogues, this paper has followed the same criteria for the following reasons:

(1) the official dialogues, like the unofficial, reflect the position of the commissions themselves, and not necessarily the official position of the Churches involved, since the process of their reception is not yet finished (in this regard, the official responses and reactions to these texts also offer important insights); (2) national dialogues have often offered more extensive contributions to the debate: for example, while the Lutheran–Catholic international dialogue says very little on this topic, the US dialogue dedicated two entire documents to it (and the international dialogue praised and recommended its work, see below §22); (3) in a document that stresses the importance of synodality it would have been paradoxical to neglect the dialogue led by episcopal conferences; (4) unofficial dialogues have been at the forefront in opening new perspectives: an extensive hermeneutical investigation of Vatican I has been undertaken so far only by unofficial dialogues; (5) the reception of some documents of unofficial dialogues by the academic and ecumenical community, sometimes beyond that of official dialogue documents, attests to their value and authority; (6) the invitation issued by Pope John Paul II was very broad ("Church leaders and their theologians") and not directed only to official international dialogues.

Of course, the concerns, emphases and conclusions of these different dialogues vary according to the different ecclesiologies of the confessions involved, as is reflected in their choice of terminology, some preferring to speak of "universal primacy", others "papal ministry", "Petrine ministry", "Petrine function", or "Bishop of Rome", each of which has different nuances. For example, the expression "Petrine ministry" is generally not used in Orthodox–Catholic dialogue, while the notion of the Pentarchy, familiar in Orthodox thought, has less relevance to Western dialogue partners.

16. Since 2006 the work of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the **Orthodox Church** (as a whole) has focused on the question of the relationship between primacy and synodality. The fifth document of the commission (Ravenna, 2007), the initial draft of which was already prepared in 1990, is a systematic reflection on this topic, entitled *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority*, with a whole chapter on primacy and synodality at the universal level. The sixth document, entitled *Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church* (Chieti, 2016), is a common reading of the articulation of these two principles in the first millennium, including important considerations about the position and role of the Bishop of Rome during that period. The seventh document, entitled *Primacy and Synodality in the Second Millennium and Today* (Alexandria, 2023), extends this common reading to the period of alienation and separation between East and West, and to the recent rapprochement between our Churches.

17. Some national Orthodox–Catholic commissions have also dedicated important documents to the question of primacy. In 1986 the North American Orthodox–Catholic Theological Consultation published a document entitled *Apostolicity as God's Gift in the Life of the Church*, in which the question of primacy and 'petrinity' was first addressed. Its 1989 *Agreed Statement on Conciliarity and Primacy in the Church* was the first Orthodox–Catholic joint statement wholly dedicated to this subject. In 2010 it published a document entitled *Steps Towards a Reunited Church: A Sketch of an Orthodox–Catholic Vision for the Future*, paying special attention to the role of the Bishop of Rome in a reconciled Christianity. In 1991 the Joint Committee for Catholic–Orthodox Theological Dialogue in France published a joint study on *Roman Primacy in the Communion of Churches*. More recently, in 2018, the

Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox–Catholic Working Group, an unofficial international dialogue, published an extensive study entitled *Serving Communion. Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality*, addressing this topic from hermeneutical, historical and systematic perspectives.

18. The theological dialogue with the **Oriental Orthodox Churches** has also addressed the question of primacy. The first two documents of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, respectively on *Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church* (2009), and on *The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion Today* (2015) refer to the question of primacy at the universal level. Bilateral theological dialogues with Oriental Orthodox Churches have also issued significant statements concerning this topic, in particular with the Coptic Orthodox Church (*Principles for Guiding the Search for Unity between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 1979) and with the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church (*Joint Statement regarding Episcopacy and Petrine Ministry*, 2002).

19. Already in 1968, the *Malta Report* of the **Anglican**–Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission identified authority and Petrine primacy as one of three areas of study that would need to be addressed in ecumenical dialogue. The first Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I) took up this theme in its third agreed statement *Authority in the Church I* (1976), which set out a common understanding of the basis for authority in the Church and of its conciliar and primatial practice. In 1981, ARCIC published two further documents on authority. The first, entitled *Authority in the Church: Elucidation*, answered various criticisms of *Authority I*. The second, *Authority in the Church II*, addressed four theologically contested areas identified in *Authority I*, namely: the Petrine scriptural texts; *jus divinum*; jurisdiction; and infallibility. In its second phase (ARCIC II), the commission returned to the question of authority, publishing its agreed statement in the wake of *Ut unum sint*. *The Gift of Authority* (1999) examined the ministry of the Bishop of Rome in the context of the college of bishops and proposed that sufficient agreement had been reached to enable the Bishop of Rome's universal primacy to be offered and received even before the two communions are in full communion. Mandated to examine "the Church as communion, local and universal", ARCIC III has also addressed this theme. In its first agreed statement, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to be Church – Local, Regional, Universal* (2018), which first employs the method of

receptive ecumenism, each tradition asks where its own structures of communion, including primacy and synodality at the universal level, are failing or impaired and what can be learnt from the practice of its dialogue partner.

20. The national Anglican–Catholic dialogues (ARC) have also considered these themes. In response to a direct request from ARCIC, English ARC produced *Some Notes on Indefectibility and Infallibility* in 1974. ARC-USA issued its *Agreed Report on the Local/Universal Church* in 1999. The report identified five "divisive issues" amongst which were "Primacy and the Bishop of Rome" and "The Balance between the Local and the Universal Church". ARC Canada issued a short *Agreed Statement on Infallibility* in 1992.

21. The International **Lutheran**–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity has so far addressed this problem only rarely and always within other areas of research.[9] Even though a detailed study is still pending, the existing dialogue documents, nevertheless, offer a range of important foundational statements on papal primacy, identifying agreements and expressing reservations. A number of important paragraphs are to be found in *The Gospel and the Church* (Malta Report, 1972), that describe the controversy, affirm the need for, and the consequences of a consensus, as well as the conditions *sine qua non* under which the Petrine office could be accepted. Historically, this was the first official ecumenical dialogue document in which some aspects of the question of papal primacy were dealt with, hence its importance. In *The Ministry in the Church* (1981), the commission dedicated a whole chapter to "The Episcopal Ministry and Service for the Universal Unity of the Church" (67-73).

22. In 2006, the international dialogue praised and recommended the work already undertaken by different local Lutheran–Catholic dialogues on this theme. Indeed, primacy became an independent topic of study for the first time in the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States, with its two documents on papal primacy: *Differing Attitudes Towards Papal Primacy* (1973) and *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church* (1978) (which represents one of the most

[9] It is worth noting that there are two important doctrinal treatises in the Lutheran tradition concerning Papacy: The *Smalcald Articles* (The Fourth Article), 1537; and the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, 1537, *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Eds), Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2000.

advanced studies on the subject). The dialogue offers a biblical justification of Petrine ministry, an analysis of the papacy as established *de iure divino*, and explores the practical consequences of the differences between Catholics and Lutherans concerning, in particular, the question of primacy of jurisdiction. In 2004, the same commission published an Agreed Statement entitled *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation, Its Structures and Ministries* reflecting also on the universal ministry in the Church in light of a *koinonia* ecclesiology. In 2015 the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America published a declaration entitled *Declaration on the Way. Church, Ministry, and Eucharist*, identifying a consensus on some ecclesiological issues based on previous documents, in particular regarding the ministry of unity at the universal level.

23. Other official national dialogues have also treated the subject. In 1988, the Swedish Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue published a document entitled *The Office of Bishop*, including a section on "The Collegiality of Bishops Around the Office of Peter". In 2000, the Bilateral Working Group between the German Bishops' Conference and the Church Council of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany [*Bilaterale Arbeitsgruppe der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Kirchenleitung der Vereinigten Evangelisch– Lutherischen Kirche Deutschland*s] published the document *Communio sanctorum. The Church as the Communion of Saints*, reflecting on Petrine ministry on the basis of scriptural, historical and systematic insights. In 2007, the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia published a report entitled *The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church*, with some reflections on the role of the Bishop of Rome among his fellow bishops, and in 2016, it agreed a joint statement entirely dedicated to the subject, whose title, *The Petrine Ministry in a New Situation*, refers to the "new situation" mentioned by John Paul II in *Ut unum sint* (*UUS* 95). The Roman Catholic–Lutheran Dialogue Group for Sweden and Finland, in its 2009 document *Justification in the Life of the Church*, also dedicated a section to "The Ministry of Peter – A Service to Wholeness and Unity" (313–328). In 2017, the Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue Commission for Finland published a report entitled *Communion in Growth: Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry*, dedicating a chapter to "The Petrine Ministry" (348–355).

24. Unofficial commissions have also made significant contributions to the reflection. The *Groupe des Dombes*, which includes Catholics,

Lutherans and Reformed, published in 1985 a document on *The Ministry of Communion in the Universal Church*, highlighting the communal, collegial and personal dimensions of such a ministry, from historical, scriptural and theological points of view. In 2014, the same group published *One Teacher: Doctrinal Authority in the Church*, in which several chapters are dedicated to an interpretation of the dogma of infallibility. In 2009, in response to *Ut unum sint*'s invitation, the Farfa Sabina Group agreed a document entitled *Communion of Churches and Petrine Ministry: Lutheran–Catholic Convergences* (2009), revisiting, in particular, the context and theological content of the teaching of Vatican I within the framework of the *communio ecclesiarum*.

25. The **Reformed**–Catholic dialogue, although it has not yet directly tackled the issue of Petrine ministry, has dedicated some chapters to related issues such as collegiality (*The Presence of Christ in Church and World*, 1977, 102) and the concept of infallibility (*Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 1990, 39–42), proposing a more extensive study of this topic in the future (*id.*, 144).

26. In 1986, the **Methodist**–Roman Catholic International Commission (MERCIC) published *Towards a Statement on the Church*, in which it examined the Petrine scriptural texts, the development of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome in the early Church, the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome, and authoritative teaching. The commission returned to this theme in its document *God in Christ Reconciling* (2022), which asks whether the Petrine office can be seen as a reconciling ministry rather than an obstacle to reconciliation.

27. In 2009, the International Roman Catholic–**Old Catholic** Dialogue Commission published the document *The Church and Ecclesial Communion*, in which a chapter is dedicated to "The ministry of the pope for the unity of the church and its maintenance in the truth" and another to the "Old Catholic conceptions of the form of a possible ecclesial communion". In an Appendix, it offers excerpts from documents on Petrine ministry made by the Union of Utrecht with other ecumenical partners. In 2016 this document was extended with some additions ("*Ergänzungen*") and published in 2017. The Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht consider these documents as the first official Old Catholic response to *Ut unum sint*. The Joint Declaration on Unity (2006) between the US Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Polish National Catholic Church, an Old Catholic Church but no longer a member of the Union of Utrecht, for the first time admitted non-Catholic Western

Christians to Catholic Eucharistic communion, even without agreement on the question of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

28. Other bilateral dialogues with Western Christian communions, even though they do not address primacy directly, touch on the question in a variety of ways: referring to it indirectly while treating the relation between the Church local and universal (**Evangelicals**, *Church, Evangelization and the Bonds of koinonia*, 2002, 30–35; **Pentecostals**, *Perspectives on koinonia*, 1989, 82); offering an overview of the disagreements (**Baptists**, *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, 2010, 198; **Mennonites**, *Called Together to be Peacemakers*, 2003, 105, 109, 110), or indicating it as a topic for future work (**Disciples**, *The Church as Communion in Christ*, 1992, 53d).

29. The issue of primacy has also been addressed at the multilateral level. In 1993, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches proposed to "begin a new study of the question of a universal ministry of Christian unity" (*Faith and Order Paper* No. 166, 243). The draft, entitled *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005), was the first text of Faith and Order to openly recognize the need to address the question of papal primacy, acknowledging the Catholic conviction that this ministry ought to serve the unity of the whole Church. The 2013 convergence text entitled *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* addressed the question at the end of the chapter entitled "The Church: Growing in Communion" (*TCTCV* 54–57). The Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church published in 1990 a document, *The Church: Local and Universal*, reflecting, in particular, on the canonical structures of communion and the office of the papacy (42–47).

30. Some responses and commentaries from Churches or ecumenical bodies indicate the level of reception of these documents. For example, the official responses to ARCIC I from the Lambeth Conference (1988) and the Catholic Church (1991); the responses of the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation to the American document *Declaration on the Way* (2017) and to the Finnish report entitled *Communion in Growth: Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry* (2019); the response of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Ravenna Document, entitled *Position of the Moscow Patriarchate on the Problem of Primacy in the Universal Church* (2013); as well as the responses from the North American Orthodox–Catholic Theological Consultation to the Ravenna and Chieti documents (2009 and 2017);

ARC-USA response to *The Gift of Authority* (2003); ARC Canada's *Reply to the Vatican Response to the Final Report of ARCIC* (1993) and *A Response to The Gift of Authority* (2003), proposing a Joint Declaration, modelled on the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, establishing a basic consensus on authority and the ministry of the Bishop of Rome (4.1).

1.3. A RENEWED INTEREST AND A POSITIVE ECUMENICAL SPIRIT

31. One can conclude from this overview of the responses and dialogue agreements that the issue of papal primacy has been intensively discussed in almost all ecumenical contexts during the last decades: in all, about 30 responses and 50 dialogue documents were at least partially dedicated to the topic. The theological dialogues as well as the responses to the encyclical *Ut unum sint* (many of them implicitly or explicitly referring to the results of these theological dialogues), evidence a new and positive ecumenical spirit in discussing this question. In his encyclical, Pope John Paul II had already referred to this new climate, noting that "after centuries of bitter controversies, the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities are more and more taking a fresh look at this ministry of unity" (*UUS* 89 and footnote 149). Mentioning the 1993 recommendation of Faith and Order (see above §29), he stated "It is likewise significant and encouraging that this question [of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome] appears as an essential theme not only in the theological dialogues in which the Catholic Church is engaging with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, but also more generally in the ecumenical movement as a whole" (*UUS* 89). This perception of a new ecumenical spirit was recently shared also by the Faith and Order Commission: "In recent years, the ecumenical movement has helped to create a more conciliatory climate in which a ministry in service to the unity of the whole Church has been discussed" (FO 2013 TCTCV, 55).

1.4. A THEOLOGICAL READING OF OUR RELATIONS

32. Theological reflection on primacy cannot relate only to the dogmatic differences of the past, but should also reflect on the present life of our Churches – their internal developments, challenges and relationships. Regarding the internal life of the Catholic Church, the renewed practice of the Synod of Bishops or the emphasis of Pope Francis on the title of "Bishop of Rome", among other aspects of reform, are ecumenically significant. The relations between our Churches in all their dimensions are also a privileged *"locus theologicus"*. As John Paul II

stated in *Ut unum sint*, "acknowledging our brotherhood […] is something much more than an act of ecumenical courtesy; it constitutes a basic ecclesiological statement" (*UUS* 42). In this regard the "dialogue of love" and the "dialogue of life" should not be understood only as a preparation for the "dialogue of truth", but as a theology in action, capable of opening up new ecclesiological perspectives.[10] As Pope Francis affirmed, receiving the members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches:

"Theological ecumenism must therefore reflect not only on the dogmatic differences that emerged in the past, but also on the present experience of our faithful. In other words, the *dialogue of doctrine* must be theologically adapted to the *dialogue of life* that develops in the local, everyday relations between our Churches; these constitute a genuine *locus* or source of theology".[11] At a time when the relationships between Churches are intensifying, it seems more necessary than ever to re-read theologically this life of relationships, developing a "theology of the dialogue of love", and thus fulfilling the words attributed to Patriarch Athenagoras in 1964: "Church leaders act, theologians explain". Examples deserving of such theological reflection might include recent initiatives such as the meeting of heads of Churches in Bari in 2018, the joint visit to Lesbos of Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Ieronymos in 2016, the reference to Patriarch Bartholomew's teaching in the encyclical *Laudato sì*, the spiritual retreat for leaders of South Sudan hosted by Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin Welby in 2019, the Ecumenical Peace Pilgrimage to South Sudan of Pope Francis, Archbishop Justin Welby and Reverend Iain Greenshields in 2023, or the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil "Together. Gathering of the People of God" held in St. Peter's Square in 2023 on the eve of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

[10] As affirmed by Metropolitan Meliton (Chatzis) of Chalcedon: "Loving one another and dialoguing in charity, we do theology, or rather we build theologically", *Proche–Orient Chrétien* 18 (1968), p. 361.

[11] Pope Francis, *Address to the Members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches*, 23 June 2022.

2. FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

33. Theological contributions regarding the nature and exercise of papal primacy obviously vary according to the confessional backgrounds of their authors. Four fundamental theological questions, however, consistently re-emerge in various ways and degrees: the scriptural foundations of the Petrine ministry; *jus divinum*; the primacy of jurisdiction; and infallibility. These four questions were identified, in particular, in ARCIC 1976, 24; ARCIC 1981; MERCIC 1986, 39–75. Some new approaches and emphases can be identified in the way these questions are dealt with.

2.1. SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION

34. Both Orthodox and Protestant theology traditionally contested the Catholic interpretation of the "Petrine texts" in the New Testament, in particular the direct way in which the Catholic Church related the ministry of the Bishop of Rome to the person and the mission of Peter. They especially questioned the Catholic understanding of some biblical references, such as Matthew 16:17– 19 and John 21:15 f.

2.1.1. A RENEWED READING OF THE "PETRINE TEXTS"

35. Contemporary exegesis has opened new perspectives for an ecumenical reading of the "Petrine texts" (see L–C US 1973, 9–13; ARCIC 1981, 2–9; Dombes 1985, 96–107; L–C Aus 2016, 23-42).

The theological dialogues have challenged confessional readings of the New Testament.[12] The German Lutheran–Catholic dialogue maintains that in contemporary Lutheran theology, "the exegetical examination of the figure of Peter in the New Testament as well as of the role of the apostle Paul have allowed the significance of a personal responsibility for the communion and unity of the church to be seen anew" (L–C Germ 2000, 183). Indeed, dialogues have facilitated an exegetical rediscovery of the preeminence of Peter among the apostles during Jesus' ministry, as well as in the post- Easter church. Simon Peter had a special position among the twelve: he is consistently named first in lists and is called "first" (Mt 10:2); he is among the first called (Mt 5:18, Jn 1: 42); at times he is portrayed as spokesman for the other disciples (Mt 16: 16, Acts 2:14); he is named as the first of the apostolic witnesses to the risen Jesus

[12] A good example of such a confessional reading is found in the Lutheran *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, 1537, op. cit. p. 332–340, which became part of the confessional writings compiled in the *Book of Concord* (1580).

(1 Cor 15:5, Lk 24: 34); he is the recipient of the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 16:18); the confessor and preacher of the true faith (Mt 16:16; Acts 2) and the bearer of a unique ministry of unity (Jn 21, Lk 22:32). The Reformed–Catholic international dialogue was also able to recognize "in the New Testament that a witness is given to the special ministry given by Christ to the Twelve, and to Peter within that circle of Twelve" (R–C 1977, 95). On the basis of this rediscovery, other Christians have gained a new appreciation of the analogy that has been drawn between the role of Peter among the apostles and that of the Bishop of Rome among his fellow bishops (see *LG* 22). This analogy allowed ARCIC I to state: "It is possible to think that a primacy of the bishop of Rome is not contrary to the New Testament and is part of God's purpose regarding the Church's unity and catholicity, while admitting that the New Testament texts offer no sufficient basis for this" (ARCIC 1981, 6–7). In the same spirit, the German Lutheran–Catholic dialogue recognized that: "The statements in the New Testament about Peter show that the early church combined with the figure of Peter the functions of a teaching and pastoral ministry that relate to all congregations and that particularly facilitate their unity. Herein lies the present challenge to think together in our ecumenical dealings in a totally new way about a Petrine Ministry for the whole church" (L–C Germ 2000, 163).

36. Catholics have also been challenged to recognize and avoid an anachronistic projection of all doctrinal and institutional developments concerning papal ministry into the "Petrine texts", and to rediscover a diversity of images, interpretations and models in the New Testament. They have first of all recovered a more rounded picture of Peter. As John Paul II notes in *Ut unum sint* (90– 91), Peter was not only the "rock" named by Jesus (Mt 16:18; Jn 1:42; Mk 1:42); but also a missionary fisherman (Lk 5, Jn 21); a witness and martyr (1 Cor 15:5; cf. Jn 21:15–17; 1 Pt 5:1); a weak human being, a repentant sinner, rebuked by Christ and opposed by Paul (Mk 8:33; Mt 16:23; Mk 14:31, 66–72; Jn 21:15–17;

Gal 2:5). John Paul II concludes: "It is just as though, against the backdrop of Peter's human weakness, it were made fully evident that his particular ministry in the Church derives altogether from grace" (*UUS* 91).

37. Catholics have gained a new awareness of the different interpretations of the "Petrine texts", in particular of Matthew 16: 17–19. As the *Groupe des Dombes* has shown: "From the moment they appear in patristic literature at the beginning of the third century, the

interpretations of Matthew 16:17–19 are multiple: they apply the word addressed by Jesus to Peter either to every Christian because of his faith, or to all the apostles and to their successors the bishops, either finally to the person of the apostle Peter, either because he himself is made the foundation of the Church, or because his confession of faith is the foundation of the Church. But it is never forgotten that the first stone on which the Church is built is Christ himself" (Dombes 1985, 96). An ecumenical reading of Matthew 16:17–19 does not oppose these interpretations but brings out three complementary dimensions in the Church's confession of faith: a community dimension, a collegial dimension and a personal dimension (*id.*, 103).

38. Catholics have rediscovered a diversity of leadership in the New Testament, since "responsibility for pastoral leadership was not restricted to Peter" (ARCIC 1981, 4; see also ARCIC 2018, 34). For example, the expression 'binding and loosing' used in Matthew 16:19 for Peter, appears again in Matt 18:18 in the promise made by Christ to all the disciples. Similarly, the foundation upon which the Church is built is related to Peter in Matt 16:18, but also to the whole apostolic body in other texts (e.g. Eph 2:20). Even though Peter was the spokesman at Pentecost, the charge to proclaim the Gospel to all the world had previously been given by the risen Christ to the Eleven (Acts 1:2–8). Furthermore, Peter was not the only person who exercised a 'ministry of unity' in the early Church: Paul exercised an analogous function for the areas in which he extended his missionary activity, particularly among the Gentiles, expressed as a "concern for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28, see also Gal 2:7–8; 1 Cor 9:1); and James, the brother of the Lord, in his Catholic epistle addresses the Twelve Tribes in the Diaspora (Jm 1:1). Moreover, the New Testament refers to collaboration and shared decision- making among Peter, James, and John, who were designated by Paul as "pillars of the church" (Gal. 2:9), and to the other Apostles and community leaders (Gal. 2:7–9; 1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 15:2).

39. Finally, Catholics have also been confronted with other views on the question of the transmissibility of the Petrine ministry. Some theological dialogues recognized that "the New Testament contains no explicit record of a transmission of Peter's leadership; nor is the transmission of apostolic authority in general very clear" *(*ARCIC 1981, 6*)*. If in the first chapters of the Acts, the Church of Jerusalem appears as the mother Church, "the New Testament does not say anywhere that another Church has taken over from that of Jerusalem: the primacy of the Church of Peter and Paul, that is to say of Rome, is a fact subsequent

to the New Testament" (Dombes 1985, 117, see also ARCIC 2018 35 and 42).

2.1.2. "EPISCOPE" OR "MINISTRY OF OVERSIGHT" AT THE UNIVERSAL LEVEL

40. While acknowledging the special place of Peter among the apostles some dialogues have preferred to frame their reflections about authority on the broader biblical concept of *episcope*. This approach emphasises that which is held in common by all who exercise the ministry of *episcope* before recognising the emergence of a primatial episcopal ministry, and a distinctive exercise of this ministry at the universal level (see ARCIC 1981 5, 19). ARCIC I recognised that the "pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episcope* serving the *koinonia* of the churches needs to be realised at the universal level" (ARCIC 1976, 23). "The exigencies of church life call for a specific exercise of *episcope* at the service of the whole Church. In the pattern found in the New Testament one of the twelve is chosen by Jesus Christ to strengthen the others so that they will remain faithful to their mission and in harmony with each other" (ARCIC 1999, 46). The same notion was used in the Reformed–Catholic international dialogue: "We agree on the need for *episkopé* in the Church, on the local level (for pastoral care in each congregation), on the regional level (for the link of congregations among themselves), and on the universal level (for the guidance of the supranational communion of churches)", while recognizing that "there is disagreement between us about who is regarded as *episkopos* at these different levels and what is the function or role of the *episkopos*" (R–C 1990, 142).

2.1.3. AUTHORITY AS *DIAKONIA*

41. Based on contemporary exegesis, theological dialogues emphasize that authority and service are closely interrelated. As ARCIC states, "In accordance with the teaching of Jesus that truly to lead is to serve and not to dominate others (Luke 22:24ff), Peter's role in strengthening the brethren (Luke 22:32) is a leadership of service" (ARCIC 1981, 6). The Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue also insists that "the exercise of authority accomplished in the Church, in the name of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, must be, in all its forms and at all levels, a service (*diakonia*) of love, as was that of Christ" (O–C 2007, 14). Undoubtedly, "Jesus Christ associates this being 'first' with service (*diakonia*): 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all' (Mk 9:35)" (O–C 2016, 4; see also *UUS* 88).

42. Authority is therefore inextricably linked with the mystery of the cross and the *kenosis* of Christ. As the Saint Irenaeus Group states, authority in the Church must be understood "as service to God's people based on the power of the Cross", since "any use of power in the Church is meaningful only if exercised according to the model of the crucified Christ, as a service and not as a way of dominating over others (cf. Mk 10:42-45 par; Jn 13:1-17)", a service including "the duty of accountability to the community at the different levels". In this sense, the exercise of authority must be modelled on the kenotic example of Christ, "as a service that includes the willingness to practice self-renunciation ('*kenosis*', cf. Phil 2:5-11; Mt 23:8-12)" (St Irenaeus 2018, 13).

2.1.4. THE "PETRINE FUNCTION"

43. Taking into account the difficulty in finding an immediate foundation for the ministry of the Bishop of Rome in the New Testament, the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the USA introduced a general concept of "*Petrine function*", which is not necessarily tied to a particular see or person. It is defined as "a particular form of Ministry exercised by a person, officeholder, or local church with reference to the church as a whole. This Petrine function of the Ministry serves to promote or preserve the oneness of the church by symbolising unity, and by facilitating communication, mutual assistance or correction, and collaboration in the church's mission" (L–C US 1973, 4). With regard to the images associated with Peter in the New Testament, this dialogue also stated that: "When a 'trajectory' of these images is traced, we find indications of a development from earlier to later images. This development of images does not constitute primacy in its later technical sense, but one can see the possibility of an orientation in that direction, when shaped by favouring factors in the subsequent church" (L–C US 1973, 13).

2.1.5. "PETRINE TEXTS" IN THE PATRISTIC TRADITION

44. Some theological dialogues evidenced that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome "cannot be established from the Scriptures in isolation from the living tradition", which, very early on, recognized the Roman See to have a special position and role (see MERCIC 1986, 55). The Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in the USA stressed that this position and role depended on the convergence of "two parallel lines": "In the period following the New Testament era, two parallel lines of development tended to enhance the role of the bishop of Rome among the churches of the time. One was the continuing development of the several

images of Peter emerging from the apostolic communities, the other resulted from the importance of Rome as a political, cultural, and religious center" (L–C US 1973, 15). As the capital city of the Empire, Rome's strategic importance for the worldwide mission of Christianity was recognized already in New Testament times (cf. Acts 19:21; 25:25). The Christian community of Rome therefore quickly became important, as evidenced by the fact that Paul looked for the support of the Roman Church in his preaching of the Gospel (see MERCIC 1986, 52). Rome's prominence as the place where Peter and Paul had their tombs, established the see of Rome as an apostolic Church of unique importance. As ARCIC states: "The church at Rome, the city in which Peter and Paul taught and were martyred, came to be recognized as possessing a unique responsibility among the churches: its bishop was seen to perform a special service in relation to the unity of the churches, and in relation to fidelity to the apostolic inheritance, thus exercising among his fellow bishops functions analogous to those ascribed to Peter, whose successor the bishop of Rome was claimed to be" (ARCIC 1981, 6).

45. In the Latin Church the martyrdom and burial of Peter in Rome was the basis of the application of the "Petrine texts" to the Bishop of Rome from the beginning of the third century (see Tertullian, *De Pudicitia* 21, *Præscriptionibus adversus Hæreticos* 22.4). According to the *Groupe des Dombes*: "The reference to scriptural texts highlighting the role of Peter appears in the early Church as a secondary phenomenon compared to a primary practice" (Dombes 1985, 22). With Leo I (440–461), the correlation between the bishop of the Roman church and the image of Peter, which had already been implied by some of his predecessors, became fully explicit. According to Leo, Peter continues his task of enunciating the faith through the Bishop of Rome, and the predominance of Rome over other churches derives from Peter's presence in his successors, the bishops of the Roman See (see Leo, *Epistle 98*). Some see this conviction supported by the bishops at the Council of Chalcedon in their approval of Leo's Tome to Flavian: "This is the faith of the fathers; this is the faith of the apostles; this is the faith of us all; Peter has spoken through Leo" (cited in MERCIC 1986, 53). Others observe that Leo's Tome was accepted because it was seen to be consistent with the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria, that is with the apostolic and patristic tradition: "The Council was also careful to underline Leo's agreement with Cyril: 'Piously and truly did Leo teach, so taught Cyril'" (St Irenaeus 2018, 7.6). Nevertheless, from this time the decisive factor for the Catholic Church in understanding the special

position and role of the Roman See was the relation of the Bishop of Rome to Peter: "Leo's 'Petrine–Roman' ecclesiology will play a determinant role in the subsequent orientation of 'Catholic' doctrine" (Dombes 1985, 26). The Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue describes this theological development: "In the West, the primacy of the see of Rome was understood, particularly from the fourth century onwards, with reference to Peter's role among the Apostles. The primacy of the bishop of Rome among the bishops was gradually interpreted as a prerogative that was his because he was successor of Peter, the first of the apostles. This understanding was not adopted in the East, which had a different interpretation of the Scriptures and the Fathers on this point" (O–C 2016, 16). The German Lutheran–Catholic dialogue succinctly captures the Western development: "In place of a local principle (*sedes apostolica*), a personal principle appears (*successor Petri*)" (L–C Germ 2000, 168).

46. Indeed, while recognising Rome's first place in the *taxis*, the Orthodox usually give less doctrinal weight to its Petrine connections. This position is reflected in the North American Orthodox–Catholic dialogue's statement: "Rome was affirmed as the first see without reference to the Petrine tradition" (O–C US 2017). Orthodox usually emphasise the political basis of Rome's primacy, arguing from canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon, which recognized that "the fathers rightly [...] accorded prerogatives [*presbeia*] to the see of older Rome since that is an imperial city" (see O–C 2016, footnote 11). Indeed, the objection made by some of them is not so much to the primacy of the Bishop of Rome nor the primacy of Peter in the New Testament, but the conflation of the two in Catholic teaching.

47. Special mention should be made of the reading of "Petrine texts" in the Syriac tradition, in many ways consonant with the Latin understanding, since Peter founded Churches in both Antioch and Rome, and thus the bishops of both churches are regarded as his successors. In its *Joint Statement Regarding Episcopacy and Petrine Ministry* (2002), the commission for dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church stated, "According to Scripture and Tradition Jesus entrusted Peter with a special ministry. Giving him the name Kepha (Rock), Jesus made him the head, the representative, and the spokesman of the twelve apostles. Peter and his successors are endowed with the ministry of unity on the universal level. In the Catholic Church this ministry is exercised by the Bishop of Rome and in the Syrian Orthodox Church by the Patriarch of Antioch. According to

the Syrian Orthodox Church the Patriarch of Antioch, as successor of Peter, is the visible symbol of unity and represents the universal Syrian Orthodox Church" (4).

2.2. *DE IURE DIVINO*

48. Vatican I taught that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome was instituted *de iure divino* (*by divine right*) and therefore belongs to the essential and irrevocable structure of the Church ("*ex ipsius Christi Domini institutione seu iure divino*", *Pastor æternus* II). Other Churches traditionally contested or rejected this *de iure divino* institution. The Eastern Churches, while recognizing a primacy of honour that belongs to the Bishop of Rome, considered that this primacy was a matter of historical development. For example, referring to the 14th century theologian Nilus Cabasilas, the Moscow Patriarchate stated in 2013: "Primacy in honour accorded to the bishops of Rome is instituted not by God but men" (*Position of the Moscow Patriarchate on the problem of primacy in the Universal Church*, 4). Similarly, those Protestant theologians who did not categorically reject papal primacy nonetheless considered its institution as simply '*de iure humano*' (*by human right*) since it is not rooted in the scriptures. For example, Philip Melanchthon argued that, if the pope "would allow the gospel", the papacy's "superiority over the bishops" could be granted *iure humano* (see L–C US 2004, 74; L–C Aus 2016, 71). Contemporary ecumenical reflection has brought about some new possibilities for overcoming this traditional opposition.

2.2.1. HERMENEUTICAL CLARIFICATIONS

49. Some theological dialogues have reflected on the meaning of the term "divine right" (*ius divinum*). Catholic participants in the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the USA stated, "In earlier centuries it was rather commonly thought that this term involved, first, institution by a formal act of Jesus himself, and second, a clear attestation of that act by the New Testament or by some tradition believed to go back to apostolic times". They were therefore able to acknowledge: "Since 'divine right' has become burdened with those implications, the term itself does not adequately communicate what we believe concerning the divine institution of the papacy" (L–C US, 1973). In a later document, the same commission maintains that "the categories of divine and human law need to be re-examined and placed in the context of ministry as service to the koinonia of salvation" (L–C US 2004, 74). As ARCIC I has stated, *ius divinum* "need not be taken to imply that the universal primacy as a permanent institution was directly founded by Jesus during his life on

earth. Neither does the term mean that the universal primate is a 'source of the Church' as if Christ's salvation had to be channelled through him. Rather, he is to be the sign of the visible *koinonia* God wills for the Church and an instrument through which unity in diversity is realized. It is to a universal primate thus envisaged within the collegiality of the bishops and the *koinonia* of the whole Church that the qualification *iure divino* can be applied" (ARCIC 1981, 11). While the 1991 official Catholic response to ARCIC I expressed reservations regarding this understanding, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith used a similar formulation in 1998, by saying that "the episcopacy and the primacy, reciprocally related and inseparable, are of divine institution" (*The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church*, 6).

50. Similarly, the Old Catholic–Catholic dialogue affirms: "If by 'Petrine office' one means a ministry, exercised in a universal perspective by the pope, in service of the unity, mission and synodality of the local churches led and represented by their bishops, then Old Catholic theology, too, might factually assent to what is meant by the (to them alien) term 'divine right' in the sense suggested above (see also A–RC/Authority II, 10–15)" (OC–C 2009, 47).

51. Drawing on the distinction between the *esse* and *bene esse* of the Church, the international Lutheran–Catholic dialogue stated in 1972: "The question […] which remains controversial between Catholics and Lutherans is whether the primacy of the pope is necessary for the church, or whether it represents only a fundamentally possible function" (L–C 1972, 67). The Farfa Sabina Group expressed a similar idea while distinguishing the issues needed for the very being and for the unity of the Church: "Here another differentiation could turn out to be crucial: namely, the difference between what is necessary *for the very being of the church* and what is necessary *for the unity of the church*. Admittedly, such a differentiation between the *being* and *unity* of the church also raises difficulties, since unity belongs to the essential attributes of the Church: it belongs to its very being. Yet the new openness to a form of primacy that is evinced in ecumenism today almost obliges us to make such a differentiation" (Farfa 2009, 124).

2.2.2. BOTH DE IURE DIVINO AND DE IURE HUMANO?

52. Hermeneutical clarifications helped to put into new perspective the distinction between '*de iure divino*' and '*de iure humano*'. The international Lutheran–Catholic dialogue, in the "Malta Report", pointed out that the two notions have been too sharply separated:

"Greater awareness of the historicity of the church in conjunction with a new understanding of its ecclesiological nature, requires that in our day the concepts of the *ius divinum* and *ius humanum* be thought through anew.... *Ius divinum* can never be adequately distinguished from *ius humanum*. We have *ius divinum* always only as mediated through particular historical forms" (L–C 1972, 31). According to the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the USA, papal primacy is both '*de iure divino*' and '*de iure humano*': it is both part of God's will for the Church and mediated by human history. Because of this, papal primacy is both theologically relevant and open to adaptation. In the reflections of the Lutheran participants, it is stated: "We have found in our discussion however, through a series of careful historical investigations, that the traditional distinction between *de iure humano* and *de iure divino* fails to provide usable categories for contemporary discussion of the papacy. On the one hand, Lutherans do not want to treat the exercise of the universal Ministry as though it were merely optional. It is God's will that the church has the institutional means needed for the promotion of unity in the gospel. On the other hand, Roman Catholics, in the wake of Vatican II are aware that there are many ways of exercising papal primacy" (L–C US 1973, 35).

53. In a similar way, Orthodox–Catholic dialogue reconsidered the theological weight of factors sometimes regarded as merely institutional or juridical in the life of the Church. As the Chieti document states: "God reveals himself in history. It is particularly important to undertake together a theological reading of the history of the Church's liturgy, spirituality, institutions and canons, which always have a theological dimension" (O–C, 2016, 6). Indeed, since the Church is both divine and human, its institutions and canons have not only an organisational or disciplinary value, but are the expression of the life of the Church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Among these institutions, both primacy and synodality belong to its very nature, as the St Irenaeus Orthodox–Catholic Joint Working Group affirmed: "Primacy and synodality are not optional forms of church administration, but belong to the very nature of the church because both of them are meant to strengthen and deepen communion at all levels" (St Irenaeus 2018, 16; significantly, Vatican II teaches that collegiality is rooted in "Christ's institution and command," see below § 66).

54. ARCIC also tried to establish a doctrinal convergence by interpreting the traditional notion *de iure divino* as "a gift of divine providence" or as "an effect of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the

Church": "Nonetheless, from time to time Anglican theologians have affirmed that, in changed circumstances, it might be possible for the churches of the Anglican Communion to recognise the development of the Roman primacy as a gift of divine providence – in other words, as an effect of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Given the above interpretation of the language of divine right in the First Vatican Council, it is reasonable to ask whether a gap really exists between the assertion of a primacy by divine right *(iure divino)* and the acknowledgement of its emergence by divine providence *(divina providentia)"* (ARCIC 1981, 13). In the context of a *communio* ecclesiology, ARCIC concludes: "In the past, Roman Catholic teaching that the bishop of Rome is universal primate by divine right or law has been regarded by Anglicans as unacceptable. However, we believe that the primacy of the bishop of Rome can be affirmed as part of God's design for the universal koinonia in terms which are compatible with both our traditions" (ARCIC 1981, 15; the Lambeth Conference in 1988 approved this understanding, see Resolution 8, point 3).

2.2.3. "*NECESSITAS ECCLESIÆ*": THEOLOGICAL ESSENCE AND HISTORICAL CONTINGENCY

55. Thanks in part to ecumenical reflection, the distinction between '*de iure divino*' and '*de iure humano*' has been largely superseded by a distinction between the theological essence and the historical contingency of primacy. Considering how profoundly papal primacy was determined by historical challenges, imperatives, mandates and threats of all kinds (e.g., ecclesial, political, cultural), a clearer distinction can and should be made between the doctrinal essence of papal primacy and its contingent historical styling or shaping. Pope John Paul II expressed this distinction in *Ut unum sint* when he accepted the request "to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation" (*UUS* 95). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in its "Considerations" formulated in response to this invitation, explained the distinction in this way: "The concrete contents of its exercise distinguish the Petrine ministry insofar as they faithfully express the application of its ultimate purpose (the unity of the Church) to the circumstances of time and place. The greater or lesser extent of these concrete contents will depend in every age on the *necessitas Ecclesiæ*" (*The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church*, 12).

56. If Christian unity is one of the primary 'necessities of the Church', how then can papal primacy be exercised to comply with this necessity? What pertains to the order of *de iure divino* and what can be considered contingent? "The ministry of unity also is defined as 'Petrine Ministry'. This ministry as an enduring element in the church of Christ has found respect and living expression since the earliest times. Nonetheless, in the course of history, controversies arose over particular structures and forms of this expression" (L–C Germ 2000, 153). Indeed, many ecumenical problems, fears, or dissatisfactions are primarily linked to contingent and therefore changeable features of papal primacy. Some features of papal primacy, which originally responded to a genuine need in a specific period of Church history, continued to subsist, even after the reason for their origin had disappeared. "One must further pose the question of whether and to what degree the Roman Catholic Church fundamentally sees a possibility of a form of communion of the non–Catholic churches with the pope, in which the essence of the Petrine Ministry of unity is preserved, but in canonical forms other than those that have been presented as normative since the Middle Ages, and especially in the modern period" (L–C Germ 2000, 200). The same is true for the extension of papal primacy over various areas of Church life; historical circumstances, which once justified a more or less far-reaching extension of primacy in ecclesial matters, might have changed. It is therefore "important to distinguish between the essence of a ministry of primacy and any particular ways in which it has been or is currently being exercised" (FO 2013 *TCTCV*, 56). Finally, historical investigation is an essential means in the "healing of memories". Rather than its theological essence, many "wounds" might be primarily related to contingent ways of exercising primacy, and also with personal failures. In short: ecumenical documents ask for greater attention to and assessment of the historical conditions that affected the exercise of primacy in various regions and periods. Indeed, "though in different ways and to a different extent, the churches in both East and West were often confronted with the temptation of conflating church leadership with secular power and its institutions" (St Irenaeus 2018, 5.4).

2.3. VATICAN I'S DEFINITIONS ON PRIMACY OF JURISDICTION AND PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

57. Since the Middle Ages, Catholic theologians claimed that the ministry of the pope is a ministry *de iure divino*. Closely linked to this understanding of papal ministry are the doctrines of universal jurisdiction and of the infallibility of the Pope. These doctrines can be

traced in Catholic Church teaching long before Vatican I. For example, as the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the USA stated: "The Council of Florence in its Decree of Union for the Greek and Latin Churches (1439) set forth the doctrine of papal primacy in terms that approximate those of Vatican I" (L–C US 1973, 19). The doctrine of universal jurisdiction, as developed in the post– Tridentine period, can be seen as one of the ecclesiological prerequisites of the phenomenon of "uniatism" (see below §131). Similarly, the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854 already implies the exercise of papal infallibility. However, the doctrines of the primacy of jurisdiction and of the infallibility of the pope were not yet defined as dogmas.

58. In *Pastor æternus*, the First Vatican Council (1870) created a new situation, proclaiming these doctrines as dogmas. These dogmatic definitions have proved to be a significant obstacle for other Christians with regard to the papacy. "While for Catholics, maintaining communion in faith and sacraments with the bishop of Rome is considered a necessary criterion for being considered Church in the full sense, for Orthodox, as well as for Protestants, it is precisely the pope's historic claims to authority in teaching and Church life that are most at variance with the image of the Church presented to us in the New Testament and in early Christian writings" (O–C US 2010, 2).

59. In line with the call of some theologians for a *relecture* or a re-reception of the First Vatican Council,[13] some local and unofficial theological dialogues, such as the *Groupe des Dombes* (1985, 82–84; 2014, 196–206), the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the United States (2004, 209–217), the Farfa Sabina Group (2009, 62–124), the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in Australia (2016, 130–134) or the St Irenaeus Group (2018,

[13] See, for example, Joseph Ratzinger: "Just as within Holy Scripture there is the phenomenon of relecture […], so likewise the individual dogmas and pronouncements of the Councils are not to be understood as isolated, but rather in the process of dogmatic–historical relecture within this unity of the history of faith. […] That this insight is of fundamental significance for the interpretation of Vatican I, is obvious", (Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie*, 2nd ed. [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970], 140–141); see also Walter Kasper: "According to the Catholic view, such a re–reception does not put into question the validity of the definitions of the Council, but concerns its interpretations. For reception does not mean an automatic merely passive acceptance, but a lively and creative process of appropriation," "Petrine Ministry and Synodality", *The Jurist* 66, 1 (2006), 302. See also Yves Congar, *Diversités et communion. Dossier historique et conclusion théologique*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1982, p. 244–257.

10.1–10.13) have undertaken a re-reading of the First Vatican Council, which has opened up new avenues for a more complete understanding of the council. This hermeneutical approach emphasizes the importance of interpreting the dogmatic statements of Vatican I not in isolation, but in the light of the gospel, of the whole tradition and in its historical context.[14] Although the doctrines of universal jurisdiction and of the infallibility of the Pope are two distinct issues, they will nevertheless be addressed together in this subsection since they were defined by the same council.

2.3.1. A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO VATICAN I

a. The historical context of the Council

60. Vatican I should be understood within the framework of its historical context. The Farfa Sabina Group (2009, 106), the *Groupe des Dombes* (2014, 198), the St Irenaeus Group (2018, 10.1–10.6), and the international Orthodox-Catholic dialogue (O-C 2023, 3.5) have all reflected on the fact that in the 19th century the Catholic Church was responding to various challenges. Ecclesiologically, Gallicanism revived the concept of conciliarism by placing an emphasis on the autonomy of national Churches. Politically, the Church was challenged by regalism (an increased state control of the Church) and by the growing influence of an anticlerical liberalism. Intellectually, rationalism and modern scientific developments raised questions about the traditional formulations of the faith. In reaction to these challenges and as a counter to them the ultramontane movement promoted the leadership of the pope and the creation of a more centralized church modelled on contemporary political regimes of sovereignty. In this context, "a majority of the bishops saw in a reinforced papacy a protection for the freedom of the church and more generally a force for unity in the face of the modern world" (Farfa 2009, 106).

61. A further complicating factor is the interruption of the Council as a result of the outbreak of the Franco–Prussian War in 1870, which contributed to an imbalance in its ecclesiology: the Council was not able to go beyond an initial ecclesiological document on the papacy, and did not therefore treat the mystery of the Church as a whole (see O-C 2023, 3.5). The issue of the bishops in the Church, their tasks and rights, was not debated in detail and formulated as ecclesial doctrine until Vatican

[14] See Walter Kasper, "Catholic Hermeneutics of the Dogmas of the First Vatican Council", *The Petrine Ministry. Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue*, Walter Kasper (ed.), New York, The Newman Press, 2006.

II. For this reason, the Farfa Sabina Group states: "The hermeneutical rule that the results of Vatican I must be read in the light of the statements of Vatican II is in line with these historical facts. In this way the content of what was accomplished in 1870 is preserved while at the same time seen in a more complex context" (Farfa 2009, 116).

b. Distinction between intention and expression

62. Another important hermeneutical principle is to interpret the First Vatican Council in the light of its intentions. As the Saint Irenaeus Group states: "A hermeneutics of dogma draws attention to the fact that one must distinguish between the formula of a dogma ('what is said') and the statement intended ('what is meant')" (St Irenaeus 2018, 3). The council wished its decisions to be understood "according to the ancient and constant belief of the universal Church" (*Pastor æternus* [*PA*] *Introduction*, DH 3052), as it is "contained in the proceedings of the ecumenical Councils and in the sacred Canons" (*PA* III, DH 3059), especially those "in which the Western and Eastern Churches were united in faith and love" (*PA* IV, DH 3065). The Farfa Sabina Group calls therefore for a distinction between the *enuntiabile*, conditioned by a specific context and language, and the rest of the dogmatic definitions of Vatican I: "The definition itself and what it defines is the *enuntiabile*, but the act of faith is addressed not to it, but to what is intended by it, i.e. its meaning, at the *res* that is intended by it" (Farfa 2009, 178). "If such a distinction is drawn, then the meaning of the infallibility dogma and the primacy of jurisdiction could be objectively established as follows: (1) helping to ensure the unity of the Church in fundamental questions of Christian faith in cases where it is threatened; (2) ensuring the freedom of the proclamation of the Gospel and the free nomination to ecclesial offices in all social systems" (*id*., 179).

63. On the basis of this distinction, the Farfa Sabina Group was able to conclude: "The results of newer historical investigations allow one now in fact to distinguish the actually intended meaning of Vatican I from the way it was expressed under the circumstances prevailing at that time. It was this garb, however, this way of formulating the doctrine, that favored the prevailing maximalist interpretation of both dogmas in the past. That Council had no intention of either denying or rejecting the tradition of the first millennium, to wit: the church as network of mutually communicating churches. Although it may certainly be premature to state that the divergences concerning the papal ministry have been overcome, the new view of Vatican I allows Lutherans and

others to arrive at a new assessment of the conciliar definitions" (*id*., 259).

c. Distinction between the text and its interpretation

64. In addition, the subsequent interpretation of the resolutions by the Catholic Church's magisterium is of the greatest significance for an adequate understanding of the Council's teaching. Indeed, "historical investigation leads one to observe that many of the ways in which Vatican I was received, especially maximalist ones, were not faithful to the definitions of the council […] Only if one is conscious of these differences between the original intention and the ensuing reception is it possible to overcome the subsequent apologetic attitudes" (St Irenaeus 2018, 10.10).

65. Historically, the "Response of the German bishops to Bismarck's Circular Dispatch" of 1875 is of crucial importance, because it was received by Pius IX, the pope who convened the Council, as its authentic interpretation. According to this Response, the jurisdictional primacy of the pope does not reduce the ordinary authority of the bishops, because the episcopate is based "on the same divine institution" as the papal office. Regarding infallibility, the Response points out that it covers "exactly the same domain as the infallible magisterium of the Church in general and is bound to the content of Holy Scripture and tradition and to the doctrinal decisions already adopted by the magisterium" (see Farfa 2009, 104; St Irenaeus 2018, 10.8; O-C 2023, 3.6).

66. But above all, Vatican I can only be correctly received in light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II treated questions which had remained open at Vatican I, specifically how the episcopate is understood and how it is related to papal ministry. A number of reservations, which had been expressed at Vatican I by the minority, were taken into consideration and integrated into the statements on papal primacy. Regarding infallibility, the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*, affirms that the "living teaching office of the Church […] is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on" (*DV* 10), and the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, maintains that it is "the entire body of the faithful [that] cannot err in matters of belief" (*LG* 12). In its teaching on the sacramentality of episcopacy (*LG* 21), Vatican II re-established the connection between sacramental and juridical powers given through

ordination:[15] "This means that a bishop possesses authority by virtue of his ordination that is not juridically delegated by the bishop of Rome. The exercise of this authority, however, is ultimately controlled by the supreme authority of the Church." (L– C US 2004, 218). The fact that both powers of order and jurisdiction are derived from ordination is a reflection of the fact that Christ is the source of power and the model for the exercise of authority in the Church. Indeed, "the bishop receives both the sacramental and the pastoral powers directly from Christ through ordination and episcopal consecration" (Farfa 2009, 111).

On this basis, the Constitution *Lumen gentium* emphasized the significance of episcopal collegiality, rooted in "Christ's institution and command to be solicitous for the whole Church" (*LG* 23, see also *LG* 22 and 25). In so doing, "the theology of Vatican II developed the teaching of Vatican I, giving a more balanced account of the relations of the pope to the bishops and of the bishops to the people of God. The bishop of Rome is head of the college of bishops, who share his responsibility for the universal church. His authority is pastoral in its purpose even when juridical in form. It should always be understood in its collegial context" (L– C US 1973, 20). The conciliar concept of collegiality has been further developed within the broader principle of synodality, especially in the teaching of Pope Francis: the Synod of Bishops, always acting "*cum Petro et sub Petro*" in the *hierarchica communio* (see *LG* 21–22), is, at the level of the universal Church, "an expression of *episcopal collegiality* within an entirely synodal Church".[16]

2.3.2. A HERMENEUTIC OF DOGMAS

a. Primacy of jurisdiction

67. To adequately interpret the definitions of the First Vatican Council, various dialogues studied the history of the text of *Pastor æternus*, especially the background that conditioned the choice of terms used (in particular the explanations of Bishop Zinelli, speaking on behalf of the Deputation of the Faith). The dialogues were able to clarify that, according to the proceedings of the Council, the dogma of universal jurisdiction includes a number of limitations.[17] The Constitution itself

[15] See in particular the *Nota explicativa prævia* published as an appendix to *Lumen gentium*.

[16] Pope Francis, *Address marking the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

[17] As the Farfa Sabina Group clarified: (1) the same fullness of power pertains to the bishops assembled in a council together with the pope; (2) papal jurisdiction is limited by natural and divine law (i.e. Revelation) as well as normally by canon and

stresses that the "ordinary and immediate" jurisdiction of every bishop within his particular Church should be "affirmed, strengthened and vindicated" by the exercise of the Bishop of Rome's ministry (*Pastor æternus* III, DH 3064). A clarification of the meaning of these terms has helped to better understand the intention of the Council. As ARCIC explains: "Difficulties have arisen from the attribution of universal, ordinary and immediate jurisdiction to the bishop of Rome by the First Vatican Council. Misunderstanding of these technical terms has aggravated the difficulties. The jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome as universal primate is called ordinary and immediate (i.e. not mediated) because it is inherent in his office; it is called universal simply because it must enable him to serve the unity and harmony of the *koinonia* as a whole and in each of its parts" (ARCIC 1981, 18; see also MERCIC 1986, 61). "Having examined what was in fact voted on at the council", the Farfa Sabina Group is able to declare that "it becomes obvious, to sum up, that Vatican I did not make the pope an absolute monarch of the church" (Farfa 2009, 105).

68. In spite of these clarifications, theological dialogues express the need for an integration of the teaching of Vatican I on jurisdiction in a *communio* ecclesiology. As the German Lutheran– Catholic dialogue states: "For a Lutheran understanding, the principle of a 'primacy of jurisdiction' is unacceptable, unless its form is constitutionally embedded in the *communio* structure of the church" (L–C Germ 2000, 198). Indeed, "the claim that the Bishop of Rome has by divine institution ordinary, immediate and universal jurisdiction over the whole Church is seen by some as a threat to the integrity of the episcopal college and to the apostolic authority of the bishops, those brothers Peter was commanded to strengthen" (*Response of the House of Bishops of the Church of England*, 47). Similarly, the international Orthodox-Catholic dialogue notes that "Such an ecclesiology is for the Orthodox a serious departure from the canonical tradition of the Fathers and the ecumenical councils, because it obscures the catholicity of each local Church" (O-C 2023, 3.10).

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customary law; (3) while papal authority is "ordinary" (i.e. not delegated) and "immediate" (i.e. exercised without recourse to an intermediary), the pope does not normally interfere in the day to day life of the local church, but only by exception and in cases of emergency; (4) papal jurisdiction is always bound to promote the edification of the Church and never to imperil its divine law and order (see Farfa 2009, 102).

b. Infallibility

69. By studying the historical context of Vatican I, its proceedings (with particular attention to the *relatio* of Bishop Gasser, the chairman of the responsible commission), and its reception, some theological dialogues have been able to clarify the meaning of certain terms relating to the dogma of infallibility and to agree on aspects of its teaching (see L–C US 1978, Farfa 2009, Dombes 2014).

○ Clarifications of the expressions and intentions

70. Theological dialogues have been able to clarify the wording of the dogma. The Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the United States (1978), the *Groupe des Dombes* (2014) and the Farfa Sabina Group, in particular, offer "some important corrections that do away with many a prejudice and customary misunderstanding" and clarify what infallibility is not (Farfa 2009, 263): (1) infallibility is *not a personal quality*: "Vatican Council I did not state without qualification that the pope is infallible. Rather, it taught that when performing certain very narrowly specified acts, he is gifted with the same infallibility which Christ bestowed on his Church (*DS* 3074)" (L–C US 1978, 14; also MERCIC 1986, 71) – in other words it "defined not the personal infallibility of the pope, but his ability under certain conditions to proclaim infallibly the faith of the Church" (O-C 2023, 3.7); (2) infallibility is *not independent* of the Church and the statement that papal definitions are irreversible "of themselves and not by the consent of the Church (*ex sese, non autem ex consensu ecclesiæ*)" was added "for the purpose of excluding the tendency of some Gallicans and conciliarists, who regarded approval by the bishops as necessary in order to give infallibility to any papal definition. The term consensus at Vatican I is to be understood in the juridical sense of official approval and not in the more general sense of agreement or acceptance by the Church as a whole" (L–C US 1978, 17; also O-C 2023, 3.7); (3) infallibility is *not absolute* in that it is limited not only by its subject and by its act, but also by its object, since the pope cannot pronounce a new teaching, but only give a more developed formulation of a doctrine already rooted in the faith of the Church (*depositum fidei*) (*PA* IV). In the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the United States, Lutheran members recognize that "infallibility language is not intended to add anything to the authority of the Gospel, but rather to let that authority be recognized without ambiguity." (L–C US 1978, "Lutheran Reflections" 12). Similarly, ARCIC affirms, "infallibility means only the preservation of the judgement from error for the maintenance of the Church in the truth, not positive

inspiration or revelation. Moreover, the infallibility ascribed to the bishop of Rome is a gift to be, in certain circumstances and under precise conditions, an organ of the infallibility of the Church" (ARCIC 1981, footnote 7).

71. Beyond the clarification on the wording of the dogma itself, the dialogues were also able to find some convergence on its significance, recognizing especially the need for a personal teaching authority, since the unity of the Church is a unity in truth. In the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the United States Lutheran members said they were stimulated "to consider how vital it is for the churches to speak, when occasion demands, with one voice in the world and how a universal teaching office such as that of the pope could exercise a Ministry of unity which is liberating and empowering rather than restrictive or repressive" (L–C US 1978, 18). According to ARCIC, the person who exercises a universal ministry of unity also holds a particular teaching authority: "The Church's judgement is normally given through synodal decision, but at times a primate acting in communion with his fellow bishops may articulate the decision even apart from a synod. Although responsibility for preserving the Church from fundamental error belongs to the whole Church, it may be exercised on its behalf by universal primate […] In fact, there have been times in the history of the Church when both councils and universal primates have protected legitimate positions which have been under attack" (ARCIC 1981, 28). The Church then needs both a collegial and a personal teaching authority: "[…] the Church needs both a multiple, dispersed authority, with which all God's people are actively involved, and also a universal primate as servant and focus of visible unity in truth and love. This does not mean that all differences have been eliminated; but if any Petrine function and office are exercised in the living Church of which a universal primate is called to serve as a visible focus, then it inheres in his office that he should have both a defined teaching responsibility and appropriate gift of the Spirit to enable him to discharge it" (*id.*, 33). In its *Response* to *Ut unum sint*, the Church of England also recognizes that "Anglicans are thus by no means opposed to the principle and practice of a personal ministry at the world level in the service of unity. Indeed, increasingly their experience of the Anglican Communion is leading them to appreciate the proper need, alongside communal and collegial ministries, for a personal service of unity in the faith" (44). In the same line, the *Groupe des Dombes* states: "Every college should be presided over in order to take a doctrinal decision, conclude on a given problem,

and give expression to its unanimity. This deeply human given is attested to in the New Testament with the role of presidency assumed by the apostles, especially by Peter, whatever implications the Churches may have drawn from it. The authority of personal presidency normally represents, assumes and recapitulates in it the authority of the community and of the ministerial college" (Dombes 2014, 346).

○ Remaining reservations

72. In spite of these clarifications the dialogues still express concerns relating to the following principles:

(1) *The primacy of the Gospel*, a point particularly important for Lutherans. "The principle of infallibility is unacceptable for a Lutheran understanding unless *ex cathedra* decisions by the pope remain under the final proviso of the revelation given in Holy Scripture" (L–C Germ 2000, 198, see also L–C US 1978, 41, 52; L– C US 2004, 117). For their part, Catholics recognize that "there remains an important ecumenical task incumbent on Catholics: infallibility has to be further examined in the light of the primacy of the gospel and of Christ's saving act; but it is also important to show how infallibility can render a service to God's people by giving expression to that primacy" (L–C US 1978, 75).

(2) *Infallibility at the service of the indefectibility of the whole Church. Lumen gentium* described infallibility as a gift with which the whole Church is "endowed" (*LG* 25; see also *LG* 12, see above §66). Nevertheless, some dialogues have expressed reservations regarding the use of the term: "We agree that this is a term applicable unconditionally only to God, and that to use it of a human being, even in highly restricted circumstances, can produce many misunderstandings […] We also recognize that the ascription to the bishop of Rome of infallibility under certain conditions has tended to lend exaggerated importance to all his statements" (ARCIC 1981, 32; see also Farfa 2009, 263). In the same critical spirit: "Methodists have problems with this Roman Catholic understanding of infallibility, especially as it seems to imply a discernment of truth which exceeds the capacity of sinful human beings […] Methodists have further difficulty with the idea that the Bishop of Rome can act in this process on behalf of the whole Church" (MERCIC 1986, 72–73).

A broader concept often preferred by the dialogues is that of indefectibility, "which does not speak of the Church's lack of defects but confesses that, despite all its many weaknesses and failures, Christ is

faithful to his promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (ARCIC 1981, note 3). Some of them note within the history of the Catholic Church a "movement from the *indefectibility* (or inerrancy) of the Church to the *infallibility* of the magisterium of the Church" (Dombes 2014, 192) and emphasise that infallibility should be understood as being "at the service of the Church's indefectibility" (ARCIC II 1999, 42). Indeed, "the divine promise to abide in the truth is primarily to be understood as connected with the *indefectibilitas ecclesiæ*" (Farfa 2009, 272), whose "maintenance" is itself understood "as the sovereign work of God" (L–C US 1978, 3). Both indefectibility and infallibility are expressions of faith in the Holy Spirit, whom Christ promised would lead us to the whole truth (John 16:13).

(3) *The exercise of episcopal collegiality*. Vatican I's definition does not exclude the necessity of the consultation of the college of bishops, and alludes to the various ways of discerning the faith of the whole church (ecumenical councils, consulting the opinion of the scattered Churches, special synods, and "other means made available by divine Providence", see *Pastor æternus* IV). Indeed, it should be noted that a vast consultation of Catholic bishops, asking them about the faith and devotion of the clergy and the whole People of God, was made in preparation for the proclamation of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) by the encyclical *Ubi primum* (1849) and of the Assumption (1950) by the encyclical *Deiparæ Virginis Mariæ* (1946, quoted in the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1950, 11–12). However, Vatican I "remained silent about the need to involve or consult the church in the establishment of the truth" in its concern to avoid Gallicanism (Farfa 2009, 80) and did not codify the process of consultation to ascertain the faith of the church.

Vatican II completed Vatican I through its teaching on episcopal collegiality (*LG* 22–23, 25) (see above §66): "Vatican II integrated and completed the teaching of Vatican I that the pope had supreme and full authority over the Church and that in certain circumstances he could infallibly proclaim the faith of the Church by saying that the body of bishops ('college of bishops') in union with its head, the pope, also exercises both of these prerogatives (*Lumen Gentium*, 22, 25, respectively)" (O-C 2023, 4.7); it "took up the definitions of Vatican I on papal primacy and supplemented them by emphasizing the role of bishops" (St Irenaeus 2018, 11.12). However, "from the Orthodox viewpoint, it did not go far enough in reconsidering Vatican I's dogmas of the infallibility and primacy of the pope" (*id.*, 11.14). How far Vatican

II's teaching on this matter has changed the Catholic Church's practice has been questioned by ARCIC, which asked: "Has the teaching of the Second Vatican Council regarding the collegiality of bishops been implemented sufficiently?" (ARCIC 1999, 57).

(4) *The necessity of reception*. Beyond episcopal collegiality, many ecumenical partners affirm the need for a renewed reflection on the relation between teaching authority and reception by the whole Church, recognizing the importance of the role of the '*sensus fidei*' of individual believers and of the whole body of the faithful – the '*sensus fidelium*'. ARCIC stated that "although it is not through reception by the people of God that a definition first acquires authority, the assent of the faithful is the ultimate indication that the Church's authoritative decision in a matter of faith has been truly preserved from error by the Holy Spirit" (ARCIC 1981, 25). Consequently, "In spite of our agreement over the need of a universal primacy in a united Church, Anglicans do not accept the guaranteed possession of such a gift of divine assistance in judgement necessarily attached to the office of the bishop of Rome by virtue of which his formal decisions can be known to be wholly assured before their reception by the faithful" (*id*., 31). In answer to *Ut unum sint*, the House of Bishops of the Church of England reiterated one of its previous statements: "It would be one thing for Anglicans to say 'yes' to the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome as the person who particularly signifies the unity and universality of the Church and to acknowledge his special responsibilities for maintaining unity in the truth and ordering things in love; it would be quite another thing to agree to infallibility without the understanding of reception as we have described it" (46).

The Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue also noted in its latest document that the "Orthodox Church also considered that infallibility belongs to the Church as a whole, as expressed by councils received by the entire people of God" (O-C 2023, 3.10). Its previous documents mentioned the question of reception as a requirement of synodality: "The ecumenicity of the decisions of a council is recognized through a process of reception of either long or short duration, according to which the people of God as a whole – by means of reflection, discernment, discussion and prayer – acknowledge in these decisions the one apostolic faith of the local Churches, which has always been the same and of which the bishops are the teachers (*didaskaloi*) and the guardians. This process of reception is differently interpreted in East and West according to their respective canonical traditions. Conciliarity or

synodality involves, therefore, much more than the assembled bishops. It involves also their Churches. The former are bearers of and give voice to the faith of the latter. The bishops' decisions have to be received in the life of the Churches, especially in their liturgical life. Each Ecumenical Council received as such, in the full and proper sense, is, accordingly, a manifestation of and service to the communion of the whole Church" (O–C 2007, 37–38; see also O- C 2016, 18; OO–C 2015, 20).

73. Notwithstanding these remaining reservations, some dialogues have registered promising progress when re-reading Vatican I. For example, Lutheran members of the Farfa Sabina Group were able to declare: "In this light papacy has lost its character as a necessarily invincible controversial issue between Lutherans and Catholics. If Vatican I is interpreted as shown above, Lutherans may be prepared to acknowledge papacy as a legitimate expression of the Petrine ministry of unity for the Roman Catholic Church. This does not mean that the present form of the papal office is regarded by the Lutheran Churches as appropriately embodying the universal ecclesial ministry of unity for the *communio ecclesiarum* of the future" (Farfa 2009, 266). Similarly, the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in Australia states that "Lutherans can recognize that the way the Catholic Church today teaches the doctrine of papal infallibility has much in common with the Lutheran understanding of the infallibility of the word of God and the indefectibility of the church catholic, which receives this word and hands it on in her proclamation and teaching" (L–C Aus 2016, 125).

3. PERSPECTIVES FOR A MINISTRY OF UNITY IN A REUNITED CHURCH

74. The approach to the fundamental theological questions just mentioned has opened new avenues to reflect on how a ministry of unity might be exercised in a reconciled Church. As the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has asked: "If, according to the will of Christ, current divisions are overcome, how might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?" (FO 2013 TCTCV, 57).

3.1. IS A PRIMACY FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH NECESSARY?

75. Before considering the characteristics of a possible primacy for the whole Church, a first question is whether the very existence of such a primacy is necessary. Many theological dialogues and responses to *Ut unum sint* acknowledged the requirement of a primacy for the entire Church. In addition to the scriptural arguments traditionally presented by the Catholic Church, they propose further justifications: the apostolic tradition argument, the ecclesiological argument, and a pragmatic argument.

3.1.1. THE ARGUMENT FROM APOSTOLIC TRADITION

76. From the Early Church, Christianity was organised on major apostolic sees occupying a specific order, the see of Rome being the first in the hierarchy. The dialogues between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church emphasize this argument. It is on such a basis that in 1989 the North American Orthodox– Catholic Theological Consultation acknowledged that: "The Orthodox do accept the notion of universal primacy, speaking of it as a 'primacy of honor' accorded to a *primus inter pares*" (O–C US 1989, 7)". The Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue was also able to state in the Ravenna Document that "the fact of primacy at the universal level is accepted by both East and West", while recognising that "there are differences of understanding with regard to the manner in which it is to be exercised, and also with regard to its scriptural and theological foundations" (O–C 2007, 43). The Chieti Document states: "Between the fourth and the seventh centuries, the order (*taxis*) of the five patriarchal sees came to be recognised, based on and sanctioned by the ecumenical councils, with the see of Rome occupying the first place, exercising a primacy

of honour (*presbeia tes times*), followed by the sees of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, in that specific order, according to the canonical tradition." (O–C 2016, 15). In its document, "Position of the Moscow Patriarchate on the Problem of Primacy in the Universal Church" (2013), which expressed disagreement with the last part of the Ravenna Document, the Holy Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate also recognised the existence of a "primacy of honour in the Universal Church" exercised in the first millennium by the Bishop of Rome (4) and then, in the Orthodox Church as a whole, by the Patriarch of Constantinople: "Primacy in the Universal Orthodox Church, which is the primacy of honour by its very nature, rather than that of power, is very important for the Orthodox witness in the modern world" (5). Yet, following canon 28 of Chalcedon (not received by Pope Leo), in Orthodox understanding the primacy of the sees of Rome and Constantinople is based on their imperial status rather than on their apostolic origins (see above §46).

77. ARCIC also drew on the apostolic tradition argument when reflecting on the universal primacy of the see of Rome: "The only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such *episcope* is the see of Rome, the city where Peter and Paul died. It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see" (ARCIC 1976, 23; see also ARCIC 2018, 42; FO 2013 *TCTCV*, 55, also used this argument).

78. Likewise, the Old Catholic–Orthodox dialogue in its 1983 agreed statement affirmed: "The Bishop of Rome enjoyed such an honorary position because the see of Rome took the first place in the order of episcopal sees: Rome was the capital of the empire and its Church preserved the apostolic tradition – still without any innovations; it brought the Gospel of salvation to peoples and nations who had not yet heard of Christ and it was rich in Church life and works of love. So the Bishop of Rome possesses the presidency of honour in the Church. But with regard to episcopal authority, he does not differ whatsoever from his brother bishops" (quoted in OC–C 2009, Appendix text 6).

79. While acknowledging the importance of particular sees based on the Apostolic tradition and the order recorded by the first Ecumenical councils (Nicaea I, canon 6; Constantinople I, canon 2), the Oriental Orthodox Churches, unlike the Eastern Orthodox, do not recognize a

specific hierarchy between them, since they "do not have a single centre of universal communion, but function on the basis of an independent and universal model, with common doctrinal faith" (OO–C 2009, 53), and their communion was established with "no clear central reference point" (OO–C 2015, 71; see below §§92–93).

80. For some Western communions, the argument of apostolic tradition does not carry significant weight and consequently they do not see why primacy should necessarily belong to particular sees. For example, the Baptist Union of Great Britain in its Response (1997) to *Ut unum sint* states: "If the Spirit should lead the churches towards a collegiality of spiritual leaders in which a primary leadership (understood in term of primary servanthood) would be helpful for the life of the Church, we do not see why this would have to be permanently attached to any single one of the great historic centres of Christian witness. Indeed, the need to learn from the ministry of churches that are poor, oppressed and marginalized in our world might argue otherwise". The same response yet acknowledges: "Such a world communion of Christian churches could, nevertheless, hardly come about without the influential leadership of the Bishop of Rome within the process, and to this extent we agree with the application to him of Jesus's words' to Peter: 'when you have turned, strengthen your brothers' ". Clearly, the importance given to the historical development of the Church as indicative of the divine will over it influences the acceptance or rejection of the argument from apostolic tradition.

3.1.2. THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL ARGUMENT: PRIMACY AND SYNODALITY AT EACH LEVEL OF THE CHURCH

81. A number of dialogues have found justification for the exercise of a universal primacy based on the recognition that there is a mutual interdependency of primacy and synodality at each level of the life of the Church: local, regional, and universal. The Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States clearly formulated the question: "If the interdependence of assembly and ordained ministry is typical of the structure of the church at the local, regional, and national level, then why should such an interdependence not also be found at the universal level?" (L–C US 2004, 118). Similarly, ARCIC argues that, "if God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, this general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episkope* serving the

koinonia of the churches needs to be realised at the universal level" (ARCIC 1976, 23). The same question is raised by the *Groupe des Dombes*: "On a personal level, the experience of the ministry of the Word and of the sacraments in the local Church, and that of presiding over assemblies and councils anticipate that any visible expression of the universal Church calls for a ministry of communion. The Churches of the Reformation should ask themselves about the reasons that hinder them, at present, to conceive and recognize such ministry that would be exercised to the benefit of the communion of the whole Church" (Dombes 1985, 157). On the basis of the same argument, primacy at the universal level has been recognized as belonging to the essence of the Church by some dialogues. In fact, the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in Germany was able to state: "A universal church ministry for the unity and the truth of the church corresponds to the essence and mission of the church, which constitutes itself at the local, regional, and universal levels. Such a ministry has to be seen therefore in principle as objectively appropriate. It represents the entirety of Christianity and has a pastoral task toward all particular churches" (L–C Germ 2000, 196).

82. In parallel to the apostolic argument, the Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue also bases its reflections on this ecclesiological argument. The primatial and synodal dimensions of the Church at the local and regional levels, it argues, should also exist at the universal level: "Primacy at all levels is a practice firmly grounded in the canonical tradition of the Church" (O–C 2007, 43). The Response of the Moscow Patriarchate to the Ravenna Document, however, underlines the distinctiveness of primacy at each level: "Due to the fact that the nature of primacy, which exists at various levels of church order (diocesan, local and universal) varies, the functions of the *primus* on various levels are not identical and cannot be transferred from one level to another". (3). The St Irenaeus Group also noted: "There is an analogy but no identity in the relationship between primacy and synodality at the different levels of the church: local, regional, and universal. Because the nature of primacy and synodality differs at each level, the dynamics between primacy and synodality also vary accordingly" (St Irenaeus 2018, 16.4). Similarly, the Oriental Orthodox–Catholic dialogue affirms: "Synodality/ conciliarity and primacies are expressed in different ways on the different levels in the life of the Church. These ways and levels have been articulated

differently in the Catholic and in the Oriental Orthodox traditions, both in the past and in the present" (OO–C 2009, 46).

83. The Orthodox–Catholic dialogue underlines the importance of apostolic succession in understanding primacy and synodality. The North American Orthodox–Catholic Theological Consultation addressed for the first time the question of primacy in its 1986 document entitled *Apostolicity as God's Gift in the Life of the Church*, which underlined the different Orthodox and Catholic approaches to the relationship between apostolicity and 'petrinity': "In the Eastern churches there has frequently been an emphasis on the fullness of each church's apostolicity and, indeed, 'petrinity', and there has been criticism of the Roman Church for tending to localize these qualities in a single see." The same commission however notes that "the image of Peter within the apostolic college is reflected in the life of each local church; it is also reflected in the visible communion of all the local churches. There is no intrinsic opposition between these two approaches" (O–C US 1986, 12). Similarly, the Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue introduced the issue of primacy in the context of its reflection on apostolic succession, noting that apostolicity "means something more than a mere transmission of powers", since "it is succession in a Church which witnesses to the apostolic faith, in communion with the other Churches, witnesses of the same apostolic faith" (O–C 1988, 46). The commission also observes that "it is in this perspective of communion among local Churches that the question could be addressed of primacy in the Church in general and, in particular, the primacy of the bishop of Rome" (*id*., 55). In the same way, the Oriental Orthodox—Catholic international dialogue explicitly links synodality/collegiality and primacies with apostolic succession: "Because bishops are successors of the 'apostles', inheriting the apostleship of 'the Twelve', episcopal ministry in the Church is collegial by its nature." (OO–C 2009, 37). The question of apostolic succession was also addressed in some dialogues with the Western Christian communions, reaching different degrees of agreement, but raising some other fundamental issues, such as the sacramental understanding of the Church and its ministries.[18]

[18] On the various agreements on apostolic succession and issues to be resolved, see: Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits. Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue,* 2009, London–New York, Continuum International Publishing Group,nn. 43–44.

3.1.3. A PRAGMATIC ARGUMENT: THE NEED FOR A MINISTRY OF UNITY AT THE UNIVERSAL LEVEL

84. Another argument, of a more pragmatic nature, is based on the growing sense of the necessity of a ministry of unity at the universal level. This sense is founded on both internal and missionary considerations.

In an increasingly globalised world, many Christian communities having long privileged the local dimension, have a growing sense of the need for a visible expression of communion at the worldwide level. The majority of global communions, federations and alliances, as well as ecumenical bodies, have been established in the last century to maintain and strengthen the bonds of unity at the regional and worldwide levels. This need for global instruments of communion was felt also in order to resolve disagreements between local Churches regarding new and potentially dividing issues in a globalized world. For example, ARCIC describes a series of questions creating "a new situation because of the apparent inability of the instruments of communion at the worldwide level both to resolve the presenting issues themselves and to find agreed- upon processes […] to contain conflict so that it does not lead to further impairment of communion" (ARCIC 2018, 77).

85. This situation has produced a new openness to a ministry of unity at the universal level. As the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States stated as early as 1973: "Lutherans increasingly recognize the need for a Ministry serving the unity of the church universal. They acknowledge that, for the exercise of this Ministry, institutions which are rooted in history should be seriously considered" (L–C US 1973, 28). ARCIC also recognized very early the need of an "*episcope* of a universal primate": "According to Christian doctrine the unity in truth of the Christian community demands visible expression. We agree that such visible expression is the will of God and that the maintenance of visible unity at the universal level includes the *episcope* of a universal primate" (ARCIC 1981 *Eluc*., 8). The same commission recognised in 1982 that "primacy, as a focus within the *koinonia*, is an assurance that what [all those exercising *episcope*] teach and do is in accord with the faith of the apostles" (ARCIC 1982, *Introduction* 6). In the same spirit, the Church of England's response to *Ut unum sint* stated that "increasingly their [Anglicans'] experience of the Anglican Communion is leading them to appreciate the proper

need, alongside communal and collegial ministries, for a personal service of unity in the faith" (44). In the document *Walking Together on the Way*, following the method of receptive ecumenism, Anglican members of ARCIC ask how their communion can learn from some aspects of the Catholic exercise of worldwide primacy, in particular with respect to the role of the See of Canterbury and the ministry of its Archbishop within the Anglican Communion (ARCIC 2018, 145).

86. In parallel to these internal developments, awareness of the need for a ministry of unity is also based on missionary considerations. In its 2018 document, while not referring specifically to universal primacy, ARCIC nevertheless emphasized the importance of effective universal instruments of communion in order for the Church to fulfil its mission, because without these, "there may well be insufficient critical distance from the prevailing local culture" (ARCIC 2018, 154).

87. As a result of these internal and external considerations, some dialogues envisage the possibility of receiving the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. Already in 1972, the International Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity recognized that from a Lutheran point of view, "the office of the papacy as a visible sign of the unity of the churches was therefore not excluded insofar as it is subordinated to the primacy of the gospel by theological reinterpretation and practical restructuring" (L–C 1972, 66). The same commission quoted these lines in 1981, also recognizing that "in various dialogues, the *possibility* begins to emerge that the Petrine office of the Bishop of Rome also need not be excluded by Lutherans as a visible sign of the unity of the church as a whole" (L–C 1981, 73). The *Declaration on the Way* of the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, considering a "special timeliness in our cultural moment", states that "in a time of growing global awareness and instant communication across many lines of division, the bishop of Rome bears witness to the Christian message in the wider world through evangelization, interfaith relations, and promotion of social justice and care for creation" (L–C US 2015, IV B 6). ARCIC acknowledged that "the exigencies of church life call for a specific exercise of *episcope* at the service of the whole Church" (ARCIC 1999, 46) and went on to suggest that Anglicans might accept the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, albeit exercised in a collegial and synodal manner, and upholding legitimate diversity, "even before our churches are in full communion" (*id*., 60). Indeed, "some difficulties

will not be wholly resolved until a practical initiative has been taken and our two Churches have lived together more visibly in the one *koinonia*" (ARCIC 1981, 33).

3.2. THE CRITERIA OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

88. In *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II repeatedly confirms (*UUS* 5, 56, 61) that the Catholic Church, desiring "nothing less than full communion between East and West […] finds inspiration for this in the experience of the first millennium". *Unitatis redintegratio* also upholds the model of "that unity which the holy scriptures and the ancient tradition of the church proclaim" (*UR* 3). Principles and models of communion honoured in the first millennium can remain paradigmatic for a future restoration of full communion. The subject has been examined particularly in dialogue with the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches (for the latter until the middle of the fifth century), with broader implications for ecumenical dialogue as a whole.

3.2.1. "THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM IS DECISIVE"

89. The documents of Orthodox–Catholic dialogues paid considerable attention to the model of the first millennium, before the split between East and West. The Chieti Document on *Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium* states: "The history of the Church in the first millennium is decisive. Despite certain temporary ruptures, Christians from East and West lived in communion during that time, and, within that context, the essential structures of the Church were constituted" (O–C 2016, 7). It concludes: "This common heritage of theological principles, canonical provisions and liturgical practices from the first millennium constitutes a necessary reference point and a powerful source of inspiration for both Catholics and Orthodox as they seek to heal the wound of their division at the beginning of the third millennium" (*id*., 21).

90. The Oriental Orthodox–Catholic dialogue, in its document entitled *The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion Today*, also analyses how forms of communion of the first five centuries can be an inspiration for today: "It is certainly impossible to disregard the many developments that took place during the following fifteen centuries, but the time until the mid-fifth century remains a unique source of

reference, inspiration and hope. The fact that our churches were able to live in communion throughout these centuries, despite the differences in approaches and interpretations, should challenge us in our present search for a visible unity in diversity, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (OO–C 2015, 2).

91. The first millennium is a criterion not only in the dialogue with the Eastern Churches, but also with the Western Communions. The Response to *Ut unum sint* of the House of Bishops of the Church of England states: "Part of the remedy undoubtedly lies in a common exploration of the way in which the Church of the first millennium maintained her unity" (48, see also ARCIC 2018, 123). The Response recalls the words of the then Cardinal Ratzinger: "As far as the doctrine of the primacy is concerned, Rome must not require more of the East than was formulated and lived during the first millennium",[19] concluding, "such an approach offers considerable hope, and could make possible a fresh consideration of many matters in which churches have developed in separation from one another" (54). The Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in Germany also calls for "the possibility of an orientation to the exercise of primacy in the first Christian millennium without reference to later developments" (L–C Germ 2000, 200; see also L–C Aus 2016, 135-136).

The following paragraphs seek to describe some elements of the first millennium which may serve as an inspiration for the exercise of primacy in the 21st century.

3.2.2. EXPRESSIONS OF COMMUNION WERE NOT PRIMARILY JURIDICAL

92. The highest expression of communion between the Churches has always been the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. In the first millennium, the reading of the names of the other Patriarchs in the liturgical *diptychs* in a specific order (see O–C 2007, 40; 2016, 17) illustrated the fact that ecclesial communion is always a Eucharistic communion. This was expressed by the Oriental Orthodox– Catholic international dialogue: "The communion with Christ begins with baptism and is nourished and expressed in the celebration of the

[19] Joseph Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie*, München, 1982, p. 209; translated and quoted in Francis Sullivan, Magisterium, Dublin, 1983, p. 117.

Eucharist, which is the supreme manifestation and means of ecclesial communion" (OO–C 2015, 7). Similarly, Catholic and Anglican bishops declared at the inaugural IARCCUM meeting: "Our vision of full and visible unity is of a eucharistic communion of churches" (IARCCUM, 2000, 13).

93. Besides this sacramental understanding, some theological dialogues identify other expressions of communion in the first millennium, noting that they were not primarily juridical. The Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue in its document on *Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium*, while noting the right of appeal to major sees, points out that "the bishop of Rome did not exercise canonical authority over the churches of the East" (O–C 2016, 19). For its part, the Oriental Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue, after an investigation of the expressions of communion in the Early Church (such as the exchange of letters and visits, synods and councils, prayer and liturgical practices, veneration of common martyrs and saints, monasticism, and pilgrimages to the shrines of the various churches), highlights in its conclusion the informal nature of these expressions of communion: "For the most part, in this period these expressions of communion were informal, that is, not carried out within clear structures. They also tended to take place primarily on the regional level; there was no clear central reference point. On the one hand, in Rome there was a growing awareness of a ministry of broader communion and unity, in particular from the end of the 3rd century on. On the other hand, there is no clear evidence that the Oriental Orthodox Churches ever accepted such a ministry" (OO–C 2015, 71; regarding the expressions of communion, see also ARCIC 1991, 45; 2018, 34). Interestingly, the same dialogue notes: "Many of the relationships that existed among the churches in the early centuries have continued to the present day in spite of the divisions, or have been recently revived" (OO–C 2015, 72).

3.2.3. A "PRIMACY OF HONOUR" OF THE BISHOP OF ROME

94. Even if there was "no clear central reference point", Rome was nevertheless recognised as the first see. Rome's standing is illustrated by the letter of Clement to the Corinthians, at the end of the first century, providing evidence of the concern of the Church of Rome for the wellbeing of another Church. In the second century, Ignatius of Antioch described the Church of Rome as the Church which "presides in love", and Irenaeus praised "the very great, the very ancient, and

universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul […] For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority" (Against Heresies, III, 3, 2) (see Dombes 1985, 20; St Irenaeus 2018, 7.2).

95. While these statements of Ignatius and Irenaeus relate primarily to the Church of Rome, the implications for the personal authority of its Bishop were increasingly recognised in the West (see above §45). However, the exercise of this authority was not uniform across the different regions: "The role of the bishop of Rome must be seen within the different spheres of influence in which he made effective decisions and articulated church tradition" (St Irenaeus 2018, 7.5). Moreover, "the bishop of Rome's significant role in the formation of doctrine in the writings of major hierarchs such as Leo I and Gregory the Great was not seen as competing with the authority of local and regional bishops or synods in the Western Church, but rather as reinforcing, promulgating, and regulating their work […]. Both of them saw the purpose of local and regional synods as consisting of passing authoritative judgment on both disciplinary and doctrinal issues; their own function was to be informed of these decisions, to confirm them, and to intervene only in cases where local authorities could not reach a clear solution" (*id*., 7.7).

96. In the East, "the role of the bishops of Rome was less clearly defined, but grew in importance during the great doctrinal controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries" (*id*., 7.6). Yet primacy was primarily conceived as a precedence: "From an early stage the East approached the question of ecclesial primacy through the prism of the relationship between the great sees. Rome was consistently granted precedence ahead of sees such as Alexandria and Antioch but was not primarily viewed in the East as possessing a special form of authority in all matters" (*id*., 7.8).

97. The Orthodox Churches never contested the primacy of honour of the Roman See. During his 1967 visit to Paul VI, Patriarch Athenagoras declared that Rome is the "See which is the first in honor and order in the living body of the Christian Churches scattered throughout the world".[20] Recent Orthodox–Catholic theological

[20] *Information Service* 3 (1967/III), p. 16. According to Joseph Ratzinger, with these words Patriarch Athenagoras was "expressing the essential content of the doctrine of primacy as it was known in the first millennium", *Principles of Catholic Theology.*

dialogue reaffirmed this recognition. The Ravenna Document was able to state: "Both sides agree that […] Rome, as the Church that 'presides in love' according to the phrase of St Ignatius of Antioch (*To the Romans*, Prologue), occupied the first place in the *taxis*, and that the bishop of Rome was therefore the *protos* among the patriarchs" (O–C 2007, 41, see also O–C 2016, 15). Yet these documents also recognised a disagreement in the understanding of the 'primacy of honour'. Orthodox and Catholics "disagree, however, on the interpretation of the historical evidence from this era regarding the prerogatives of the bishop of Rome as *protos*, a matter that was already understood in different ways in the first millennium" (O–C 2007, 41; 2016, 16).

98. The recognised primacy of the Church of Rome in the first millennium "implied an authority in the Church, not the government of the Church" (Dombes 1985, 23). Indeed, authority is not synonymous with government or jurisdiction (a concept developed in the second millennium). Nevertheless, some dialogues point out that in the first millennium this "primacy of honour" did not mean simply "honorific precedence" but "the authority to make real decisions" (O–C US 2010, 7 a). In 1991, the French Orthodox–Catholic dialogue made an appeal to overcome the opposition between 'primacy of honour' and 'primacy of jurisdiction', acknowledging that "honour implies real responsibility and authority: if the 'primate' is indeed *inter pares*, it is no less *primus*" (O–C Fr 1991, p. 118–119).

3.2.4. THE MODEL OF APOSTOLIC CANON 34

99. In recent years, joint Orthodox–Catholic commissions (O–C 1988, 53; O–C 2007, 24; O–C 2016, 10; O–C US 1989, 6b; O–C Fr 1991 pp. 118–119; St Irenaeus 2018, 7.4, OO–C 2009, 44) have reflected on Apostolic Canon 34, presenting it as a model for the interdependency between the primatial and synodal dimensions of the Church. This canon, belonging to the common canonical tradition of our Churches is part of a larger collection of rules from the Church of Antioch which dates from the 4th century. It offers a description of the correlation between the *protos* and the other bishops of each region:

> The bishops of the people of a province or region [*ethnos*] must recognize the one who is first [*protos*] amongst them and consider him to be their head [*kephale*], and not do anything important without his

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Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1987, p. 199 [original: *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie*, München, 1982].

> consent [*gnome*]; each bishop may only do what concerns his own diocese [*paroikia*] and its dependent territories. But the first [*protos*] cannot do anything without the consent of all. For in this way concord [*homonoia*] will prevail, and God will be praised through the Lord in the Holy Spirit.

100. On the basis of this canon, the Ravenna Document was able to describe the "mutual interdependence" of primacy and conciliarity (O–C 2007, 43; see below §§112–113). However, observing that Canon 34 describes the regional level, some dialogues have asked "to what extent can [its] formula […] serve as a model for the universal Church as well as for the local Churches?" (O–C US 2010 9b; see also St Irenaeus 2000, 16.4; *Position of the Moscow Patriarchate on the Problem of Primacy in the Universal Church* 2013, 3).

3.2.5. THE RIGHT OF APPEAL AS AN EXPRESSION OF COMMUNION (CANONS OF SARDICA)

101. Another institution of the first millennium linked with the exercise of primacy is the right of appeal to the major sees and especially to the Bishop of Rome. Recent Orthodox–Catholic dialogues were able to analyse this procedure (C–O Fr 1991; O–C 2016, 19; St Irenaeus 2018 7.3 and 17.9). The French Orthodox–Catholic dialogue underlined in 1991 the importance of the Council of Sardica (343), received by the Council *in Trullo* (692) and by the Photian Council of 879. The canons of Sardica determined that a bishop who had been condemned could appeal to the Bishop of Rome, and that the latter, if he deemed it appropriate, might order a retrial, to be conducted by the bishops of a neighbouring province to the appealing bishop's own province. It is worth mentioning that this procedure corresponds more to a Final Court of Appeal or to a Court of Cassation, since the retrial was conducted not by Rome but by local bishops. It should also be noted that Canon 3 of Sardica justifies the decision concerning the appeal procedure to the see of Rome on spiritual grounds: "*sanctissimi Petri memoriam honorare*". The document of the Orthodox–Catholic dialogue in France calls for "a common reception" of the Photian Council of 879, which could constitute "a starting point for resuming the dialogue on the meaning of primacy, founded on common ecclesiological bases" (O–C Fr 1991, p. 124).

102. Referring to Sardica, the Chieti Document recalls: "Over the centuries, a number of appeals were made to the bishop of Rome, also from the East, in disciplinary matters, such as the deposition of a

bishop", and that "appeals to the bishop of Rome from the East expressed the communion of the Church". Chieti also notes that appeals regarding disciplinary matters were also made in the East, and that "such appeals to major sees were always treated in a synodical way" (O–C 2016, 19).[21]

103. The 2018 St Irenaeus Document suggests that the procedure of Sardica could also be valid for the future: "Such an arrangement would fully respect the autocephaly of the Orthodox Churches while assuring at the same time an effective universal ministry of unity by the bishop of Rome" (St Irenaeus 2018, 17.9). In the same way, the 2010 prospective document of the North American Orthodox–Catholic Theological Consultation states: "In cases of conflict between bishops and their primates that cannot be resolved locally or regionally, the bishop of Rome would be expected to arrange for a juridical appeal process, perhaps to be implemented by local bishops, as provided for in canon 3 of the Synod of Sardica (343). In cases of dispute among primates, the bishop of Rome would be expected to mediate and to bring the crisis to brotherly resolution". The same dialogue sees this "right of appeal" extending also to doctrinal matters: "And in crises of doctrine that might occasionally concern the whole Christian family, bishops throughout the world would have the right to appeal to him also for doctrinal guidance, much as Theodoret of Cyrus did to Pope Leo I in 449, during the controversy over the person of Christ that preceded the Council of Chalcedon (Ep. 113)" (O–C US 2010, 7e; it should be noted however that Oriental Orthodox theologians would not cite this example as a precedent, since they have another interpretation of the controversy).

3.2.6. ECUMENICAL COUNCILS: THE *SYNERGEIA* OF THE BISHOP OF ROME

104. The expressions of communion *par excellence* of the first millennium at the universal level were the ecumenical councils. These councils were ecumenical "not just because they assembled together bishops from all regions and particularly those of the five major sees",

[21] In response to the Ravenna Document, the Moscow Patriarchate rejected the use of Canons 4 and 5 of Sardica "in polemical literature, to give a canonical justification to the juridical powers of the first chair of Rome". These canons, the text continues, "do not state that the rights of the chair of Rome to accept appeals are extended to the whole Universal Church" (*Position of the Moscow Patriarchate on the problem of primacy in the Universal Church*, 2013, footnote 6).

but "because their solemn doctrinal decisions and their common faith formulations, especially on crucial points, are binding for all the Churches and all the faithful, for all times and all places" (O–C 2007, 35).

105. The Ravenna Document recognises: "Although the bishop of Rome did not convene the ecumenical councils of the early centuries and never personally presided over them, he nevertheless was closely involved in the process of decision-making by the councils" (O–C 2007, 42). Similarly, the Chieti Document identifies the specific role of the Bishop of Rome, who, though he was not personally present at any of those councils, was represented by his legates or agreed the council's conclusions *post factum*. Chieti references the criteria for the reception of a council as ecumenical described by the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II, 787), namely, "the agreement (*symphonia*) of the heads of the churches, the cooperation (*synergeia*) of the bishop of Rome, and the agreement of the other patriarchs (*symphronountes*)" (O–C 2016, 18).

106. Questions remain concerning a common understanding of the *synergeia* of the Bishop of Rome, and why and to what extent it differs from the *symphonia* and the *symphronountes* of the other heads of Churches and patriarchs. Indeed, "no single model seems to have been universally accepted. Besides the fact that the seven ecumenical councils were all recognised by Rome and the Eastern patriarchates, the correlation between the primacy of the Roman bishop and the authority of an ecumenical council remained undefined" (St Irenaeus 2018, 7.11). However, all agree that "reception by the Church as a whole has always been the ultimate criterion for the ecumenicity of a council" (O–C 2016, 18, see above §72[4]). Imagining how the role of the Bishop of Rome might be realised in a reunited Church, the North American Orthodox–Catholic consultation suggests that "his universal role would also be expressed in convoking and presiding over regular synods of patriarchs of all the Churches, and over ecumenical councils, when they should occur" (O–C US 2010, 7 d). Similarly, the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in Australia, recognizing that "the bishop of Rome has a special role to foster the unity of the church as the People of God and the Body of Christ", affirms that "in a reconciled church […] the pope might do this by convening and presiding over synods, in order that the whole church may deliberate on the questions and challenges it faces and seek suitable pastoral responses. In this context it may be opportune from time to time to re-

affirm the church's doctrine or find new ways to express it in a new context" (L–C Aus 2016, 150, 152).

3.2.7. A DIVERSITY OF ECCLESIAL MODELS

107. Finally, the diversity of ecclesial models of the first millennium is often underlined. The North American Orthodox–Catholic dialogue, in its response to the Chieti Document, emphasises that "the early Church had a diversity of ecclesial organizational models, responding to local custom and need" (O–C US 2017). For example, the Churches of Alexandria and Rome had specific internal organizational principles different from other churches: "This is not necessarily a Church-dividing practice. A certain diversity is not only to be expected in Church life, but should be welcomed as healthy" (*id.*). As Vatican II affirms concerning the Eastern Churches: "Far from being an obstacle to the Church's unity, a certain diversity of customs and observances only adds to her splendour, and is of great help in carrying out her mission" (*UR* 16). In this context, and with reference to the subtitle of the Chieti Document (*Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church*), the North American Orthodox–Catholic dialogue asks: "Is it necessary, or even desirable, that we have absolutely identical understandings? Perhaps the ecumenical model of differentiated consensus is of service here" (*id.*). This was the methodology used by the Lutheran–Catholic international dialogue in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of the Justification*. ARC Canada proposed a Joint Declaration establishing a basic consensus on authority and the ministry of the Bishop of Rome modelled on the *JDDJ* and following its methodology (ARC Canada 2003, 4.1).

3.3. SOME PRINCIPLES FOR THE EXERCISE OF PRIMACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

108. If the history of the first millennium is "decisive", the first millennium should nevertheless not be idealized. The customary contrast between East–West Church relations in the first and second millennium is itself overly simplistic. For example, the St Irenaeus Group offers a more subtle historical survey in terms of five periods: 1st–8th centuries; 9th–15th centuries; 16th–18th centuries; 19th century; 20th and 21st centuries. Furthermore, it has often been observed that it is difficult to speak of an "undivided" Church in the first millennium, bearing in mind the numerous phases of divisions

between Rome and Constantinople (see St Irenaeus 2018, 5.3), but also the tragic schisms of the 5th century following the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. Indeed, "the past should be neither idealized nor downplayed, and a proper distinction must be made between the ideals expressed by the churches and the concrete human realities in which those ideals are lived out" (St Irenaeus 2018, 17.3).

109. Moreover, primacy at the universal level should also honour the developments of the second millennium in responding to the challenges of the 21st century: "Structures which evolved in and for the first millennium cannot simply be re-created in the different circumstances on the eve of the third millennium. While being faithful to the past, we must also be faithful to the present context and the demands of common life, witness and service today" (*Response of the Church of England to UUS*, 50). In a reunited Church, "the role of the bishop of Rome would have to be carefully defined, both in continuity with the ancient structural principles of Christianity and in response to the need for a unified Christian message in the world of today" (O–C US 2010, 7).

110. Responses to *Ut unum sint* and dialogue documents have identified some principles and frameworks for the exercise of primacy in the 21st century. For example, the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the United States agreed in 1973 on three "norms for a renewal" so that "the papacy may better serve the church as a whole": the principle of legitimate diversity; the principle of collegiality; and the principle of subsidiarity (L–C US 1973, 22–25). The North American Orthodox–Catholic consultation also identified some "features" for a future "shape of communion" between Orthodox and Catholics, especially concerning the role of the papacy (O–C US 2010, 6–7).

111. Two recurring frameworks emerge from the theological dialogues and responses to *Ut unum sint*, which can help to reflect on the exercise of primacy in 21st century: the communal, collegial and personal ordering of the Church; and the articulation between the local, regional and universal levels.

3.3.1. THE COMMUNAL, COLLEGIAL AND PERSONAL ORDERING OF THE CHURCH

a. Mutual interdependency between primacy and synodality

112. Most of the responses and dialogue documents clearly agree that primacy should be exercised in an authentic conciliar/synodal

Church.[22] As seen above, the Orthodox– Catholic dialogues in the past thirty years, inspired by Apostolic Canon 34, stressed the mutual interdependency of primacy and conciliarity, including at the universal level of the Church. This principle was first expressed by the North American Orthodox– Catholic Consultation, stating that "the two institutions, mutually dependent and mutually limiting, which have exercised the strongest influence on maintaining the ordered communion of the Churches since apostolic times, have been the gathering of bishops and other appointed local leaders in synods, and the primacy or recognized preeminence of one bishop among his episcopal colleagues" (O–C US 1989, 6). Similarly, the basic thesis of the Ravenna Document is that "primacy and conciliarity are mutually interdependent. That is why primacy at the different levels of the life of the Church, local, regional and universal, must always be considered in the context of conciliarity, and conciliarity likewise in the context of primacy" (O–C 2007, 43). In a similar way, yet using the synonymous concept of 'synodality', the St Irenaeus Group asserted: "Both theologically and canonically, it is [….] impossible either to address the issue of primacy without considering synodality, or to ignore primacy when dealing with synodality" (St Irenaeus 2018, 16). In this interdependency, "Church history reveals two ecclesiological trends: primarily, but not exclusively, synodal in the East, and primarily, but not exclusively, primatial in the West; yet these can coexist in a creative tension". Therefore, "any restoration of full communion between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches will require, on both sides, a strengthening of synodal structures and a renewed understanding of a universal primacy – both serving communion among the churches" (St Irenaeus 2018, 16. 7). The synodal exercise of primacy is required for a common understanding of the exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome: "In accord with the teaching of both Vatican councils, the bishop of Rome would be understood by all as having authority only within a synodal/collegial context: as member as well as head of the college of bishops, as senior patriarch among the primates of the Churches, and as servant of universal communion" (O–C US 2010, 7b).

[22] Dialogue documents generally use "conciliarity" and "synodality" interchangeably (see for example O–C 2016, 3; O–C 2007, 5–11; OO–C 2009, 43–46), the most recent favouring "synodality." This Study document also favours the term "synodality", unless referring to documents using "conciliarity."

113. From very early in its work ARCIC has also repeatedly underlined the necessity of a proper balance between primacy and conciliarity at each level of the Church: "Although primacy and conciliarity are complementary elements of *episcope* it has often happened that one has been emphasized at the expense of the other, even to the point of serious imbalance. When churches have been separated from one another, this danger has been increased. The *koinonia* of the churches requires that a proper balance be preserved between the two with the responsible participation of the whole people of God" (ARCIC 1976, 22). The relationship between primacy and conciliarity is linked to the principles of unity and diversity in the Church: there is a need for "the right balance between a primacy serving the unity and a conciliarity maintaining the just diversity of the *koinonia* of all the churches" (ARCIC 1981 *Eluc.*, 8).

b. "All", "some" and "one"

114. In recent ecclesiological reflection a clearer distinction has been made between two aspects of synodality: episcopal collegiality and the participation of the whole People of God. With regard to the first, ARCIC writes: "The primacy accorded to a bishop implies that, after consulting his fellow bishops, he may speak in their name and express their mind" (ARCIC 1976, 20) and "a primate exercises his ministry not in isolation but in collegial association with his brother bishops" (*id.*, 21). The Response of the Bishops' Conference of the Church of Sweden to *Ut unum sint* also stresses the need for episcopal collegiality: "In order to make progress, the concept of collegiality must probably be further developed, both within the Roman–Catholic Church and ecumenically. This must be stressed against a, particularly in the past, strongly centralized papacy. Every bishop and the entire college of bishops have, in other words, responsibility for the entire Roman–Catholic Church – together with the Pope. All the bishops might gather for a council or a world-wide episcopal synod, but not without the pope" (*A Response to the Encyclical Letter Ut unum sint*, 12).

115. The term synodality can be used in a broader way to designate the active participation in ecclesial life of all faithful on the basis of their baptism. It is in this "more comprehensive sense referring to all the members of the Church" that the concept is used by the Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue: "We shall speak first of all of conciliarity as signifying that each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in

Eucharistic *koinonia* (*communio* in Latin)" (O–C 2007, 5). This understanding is based on ecclesiological reflections on the *sensus fidei* of all the baptized (*sensus fidelium*): "The whole community and each person in it bears the 'conscience of the Church' (*ekklesiastike syneidesis*), as Greek theology calls it, the *sensus fidelium* in Latin terminology". Consequently "all the faithful (and not just the bishops) are responsible for the faith professed at their Baptism" (*id*. 7). This broader understanding of synodality as the participation of the whole People of God has more recently been called the "communal" or "communitarian" aspect.

116. In line with this distinction between different aspects of synodality, some theological dialogues identify three complementary dimensions of the Church: the communal ("all"), the collegial ("some") and the personal ("one"). Already in 1927, the first World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne recognized that the 'episcopal', 'presbyteral' and 'congregational' systems "must have an appropriate place in the order of life of a reunited Church". Progressively, these three dimensions – using different terminology – were identified as essential aspects of synodality itself: "In the course of history the synodality of the Church has been served through conciliar, collegial and primatial authority" (ARCIC 1999, 45). Different Christian traditions can be perceived as favouring one dimension over the others: Catholics the personal dimension, Orthodox the collegial dimension and Reformed the communal dimension.

117. Referring to the Lausanne conference, in 1982 the Faith and Order Commission applied these three dimensions to ordained ministry: "The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way. It should be personal because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be collegial, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit" (FO 1982 *BEM*, Ministry, 26, Commentary). This line of

reasoning has been subsequently developed by different dialogues as the guiding principle of a ministry of unity: "The conversion of the Catholic Church would consist in maintaining a balanced relation between the communal, collegial and personal dimensions of that ministry; actually, that latter dimension could only be exercised if it were carried, so to say, by the other two" (Dombes 1985, 134, see also 9; see also L–C Germ 2000, 188).

118. These ecumenical considerations have been received in recent Catholic teaching. In its document on *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2018), the International Theological Commission recognizes in these three dimensions fundamental aspects of a theology of synodality: "This ecclesiological vision invites us to articulate synodal communion in terms of 'all', 'some' and 'one'. On different levels and in different forms, as local Churches, regional groupings of local Churches and the universal Church, synodality involves the exercise of the *sensus fidei* of the *universitas fidelium* (all), the ministry of leadership of the college of Bishops, each one with his presbyterium (some), and the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome (one). The dynamic of synodality thus joins the communitarian aspect which includes the whole People of God, the collegial dimension that is part of the exercise of episcopal ministry, and the primatial ministry of the Bishop of Rome" (ITC 2018, 64). Referring to this document, Pope Francis affirmed that "synodality in the broad sense can be seen as the articulation of three dimensions: 'all', 'some' and 'one'". In this vision, "the primatial ministry is an intrinsic element of the dynamic of synodality, as are also the communitarian aspect that includes the whole People of God and the collegial dimension that is part of the exercise of episcopal ministry".[23] In such a perspective, synodality should not be seen as a competing counterweight to primacy, nor as merely the collegial or communal aspects of the Church, but as a dynamic which includes within itself the personal, collegial and communal dimensions.

3.3.2. ARTICULATION BETWEEN THE LOCAL, REGIONAL AND UNIVERSAL LEVELS

119. Ecumenical reflection has contributed to a better appreciation that the ministry of the Bishop of Rome cannot be understood in

[23] Pope Francis, *Address to the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox–Catholic Working Group*, 7 October 2021.

isolation from a wider ecclesiological perspective. In considering primacy, many theological dialogues have noted that these three dimensions – communal, collegial, and personal – are operative within every level of the Church.

a. Simultaneity of the local Church and the universal Church

120. A crucial issue is the relationship between the local Church and the universal Church. If many Christian traditions stress the local realization of the Church, Catholic ecclesiology usually emphasizes the universal dimension, and thus the universal ministry of the Pope. *Lumen gentium* however affirms both that the "particular churches [are] fashioned after the model of the universal Church [*Ecclesiæ universalis*]", and that it is "in and from [*in quibus et ex quibus*]" the particular Churches that "the one and only Catholic Church" comes into being [*una et unica Ecclesia catholica exsistit*] (*LG* 23).

121. Ecumenical dialogues have helped to consider the simultaneity of these dimensions. The first document of the Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue stated: "Since Christ is one for the many, so in the Church which is his body, the one and the many, the universal and the local, are necessarily simultaneous" (O–C 1982, III, 2).

122. Similarly, the Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church, in its document *The Church: Local and Universal* (1990), affirms that an eschatological and pneumatological ecclesiology "does not assign a priority exclusively to either the local or the universal Church, but suggests a simultaneity of both" (JWG 1990, 22), since there is always an "interdependence of local and universal in the Communion of Churches" (*id.*, 35).

123. In the same vein, the Anglican–Catholic dialogue in the USA also agrees that "the church local and the church universal are co-constitutive and co-inherent […] The Church is, therefore, both local and universal. The church local is not merely a subdivision of the church universal, nor is the church universal merely an aggregate of the local churches. Each is fully interdependent with the other" (ARC-USA 1999). The question was raised again in the international dialogue: "For Catholics a further key question concerns the ecclesial reality of the universal Church, symbolized and structured in terms of the primacy of the See of Rome. Does the universal Church have temporal and ontological priority over the local churches and regional bodies, with the latter being derived from and dependent upon the

prior reality of the universal? Or should the universal and the local be viewed as mutually defining, coexistent, and necessarily co-inhering, so that the universal Church has responsibilities towards the local churches, and the local churches have responsibilities both towards one another and towards the universal Church?" (ARCIC 2018, 67, see also 48 and 154).

124. At the start of the international dialogue with the Lutherans, "it was recognized on the Lutheran side that no local church should exist in isolation since it is a manifestation of the universal church. In this sense the importance of a ministerial service of the communion of churches was acknowledged and at the same time reference was made to the problem raised for Lutherans by their lack of such an effective service of unity" (L–C 1972, 66).

125. The consultation with the World Evangelical Alliance, in the document *Church, Evangelization and the Bonds of Koinonia* (2002), has also recorded some measure of agreement on the interdependence between the local and the universal Church: "Evangelicals, like Catholics, recognize the value of worldwide fellowship, but because of different theological presuppositions and different interpretations of certain biblical passages, they have a different view of the relationship between the universal church and local churches. Evangelicals understand by 'universal church' all those everywhere and in all ages who believe and trust in Christ for salvation". While recognising that Christ "willed the founding of visible Churches […] primarily local", Evangelicals nonetheless affirm that "these congregations may seek federations and alliances as means to express the universal character of the church's nature and mission" (33).

126. These ecumenical reflections have helped to reach a deeper Catholic understanding of the "intrinsic correlation" between the local Church and the universal Church, as indicated by the International Theological Commission: "The Church, insofar as she is Catholic, makes the universal local and the local universal" (ITC 2018 59); thus the local Church and the universal Church are internal to one another. "The intrinsic correlation of these two poles can be expressed as the way the universal and the local are present in each other in the Church of Christ. In the Church as Catholic, variety is not mere co-existence but bonding in mutual correlation and dependence: an ecclesiological *perichoresis* in which trinitarian communion sees its ecclesial

reflection" (ITC 2018, 60; see also the concept of "mutual interiority" in *Communionis notio*, n. 9).

b. The regional level

127. Another issue mentioned in the dialogues is the importance of the regional (also called supra-local or trans-local) level in the Church. Vatican II recognized that this dimension is rooted in the divine will, affirming that "by divine Providence it has come about [*Divina autem Providentia factum est*] that various churches, established in various places by the apostles and their successors, have in the course of time coalesced into several groups" (*LG* 23). Many of the dialogues, observing that the regional level is the most relevant for the exercise of primacy in most Christian communions and also for their missional activity, stress the need for a balance between the exercise of primacy on a regional level and the exercise of primacy on the universal level. The question has experienced different developments and raised different issues in the East and in the West.

- **Eastern Churches: "Facultatem se secundum proprias disciplinas regendi"**

128. The significance of the regional level has been addressed in many dialogues with the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Orthodox–Catholic international dialogue stressed the ecclesiological importance of regional structures in both East and West, drawing a certain parallel between Patriarchates and Episcopal Conferences: "New patriarchates and autocephalous Churches have been founded in the Christian East, and in the Latin Church there has recently emerged a particular pattern of grouping of bishops, the Episcopal Conferences. These are not, from an ecclesiological standpoint, merely administrative subdivisions: they express the spirit of communion in the Church, while at the same time respecting the diversity of human cultures" (O–C 2007, 29). The North American Orthodox–Catholic dialogue raised the issue of the relationship between primacy and primacies when it stated: "In a reunited Church, this understanding of papal and episcopal authority, as complementary and mutually enhancing, would have to be expanded to include the much more complex patterns of local, primatial, and patriarchal leadership that have developed in the Eastern Churches since patristic times" (O–C US 2010, 7b). Thus, it suggested: "Ultimately, new structures of authority, in which the relationships of local and regional primates are concretely regulated, would need to

be instituted by common consultation, perhaps by an ecumenical council" (*id.*, 8 d). Regarding the Eastern Churches, the document further proposes that in a reconciled Church "[the bishop of Rome's] relationship to the Eastern Churches and their bishops […] would have to be substantially different from the relationship now accepted in the Latin Church" and added that "the present Eastern Catholic Churches would relate to the bishop of Rome in the same way as the present Orthodox Churches would" (*id.*, 7a).

129. Pope John Paul II and Pope Shenouda III were able to agree on such a perspective in the joint document they signed in 1979: "The unity we envisage in no way means absorption of one by the other or domination by one over the other. It is at the service of each to help each live better the proper gifts it has received from God's Spirit. The unity presupposes that our Churches continue to have the right and power to govern themselves according to their own traditions and disciplines" (*Principles for Guiding the Search for Unity between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 1979, Preamble, 4-5).[24]

130. The Eastern Catholic Churches represent a particular paradigm with regard to the regional level. As Churches *sui iuris* in full communion with the See of Rome, they maintain their eastern identity and their autonomy within synodical structures. The Orthodox Churches, fearing being absorbed and losing the power to govern themselves, consider the relation between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the See of Rome as a measure of the ecumenical credibility of the Catholic Church. They do not recognize the present relationship of the Eastern Catholic Churches with Rome as a model for future communion. It should however be remembered that the Second Vatican Council solemnly recognised the faculty of the Eastern Churches to 'govern themselves according to their own disciplines' [*Facultatem se secundum proprias disciplinas regendi*] (*UR* 16). The doctrinal presuppositions and practical consequences of this principle might become the object of a renewed ecumenical reflection.

131. The Orthodox–Catholic dialogue has made possible a new reading of the historical phenomenon of "uniatism" from an ecclesiological point of view, closely related to the question of primacy. In the 17th century, the ecclesiological basis of "uniatism", rooted in post-Tridentine ecclesiology, was the claim of direct

[24] *Information Service* 76 (1991/I), p. 30.

jurisdiction of the Roman See over all the local Churches. It implied that Churches not in communion with this See could be the object of missionary activity "to bring them back" into communion with the Catholic Church, while allowing them to preserve their own liturgy and discipline. The international Orthodox–Catholic dialogue, in its document agreed in Balamand, *Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion*, acknowledged that, "because of the way in which Catholics and Orthodox once again consider each other in their relationship to the mystery of the Church and discover each other once again as Sister Churches, this form of 'missionary apostolate' described above, and which has been called 'uniatism', can no longer be accepted either as a method to be followed nor as a model of the unity our Churches are seeking" (O–C, 1993, 12). The "ecumenical endeavour of the Sister Churches of East and West, grounded in dialogue and prayer, is the search for perfect and total communion which is neither absorption nor fusion but a meeting in truth and love" (*id*., 14). Yet in its latest document, the same commission recognised that "The motives for these unions have always been contested. Genuine desire for the unity of the Church cannot be excluded from consideration. Religious and political factors frequently intertwined. The unions often appear as attempts to flee from unfortunate local situations" (O-C 2023, 2.6).

○ Western Christian communions: the ecclesiological significance of the regional level

132. The value of the regional level in the Latin Church is also advocated in some Western theological dialogues, observing an "asymmetry" between its significance for the Catholic Church and for the other Western Christian communions (see ARCIC 2018, 108). The *Groupe des Dombes* expressed the "hope that the current continental assemblies of bishops will receive, with canonical recognition, a wide area of competence with regard to the organization of Churches, the appointment of bishops, the liturgy, catechesis, etc. This would constitute 'large continental churches', which would be renewed and adapted forms of the ancient patriarchates" (Dombes 1985, 144).[25]

[25] A similar perspective was formulated by Joseph Ratzinger while reflecting on the "patriarchal" function of the Bishop of Rome: "Unitary ecclesial law, unitary liturgy, unitary appointments to episcopal sees from the Roman centre, all these do not necessarily form part of the primacy as such, as can appear to be the case when both ministries [of Pope and Patriarch] become united. So, in the future, we shall have

133. In its Response to *Ut unum sint*, the Church of Sweden spoke of the "necessity" of a "continued decentralisation": "Increased local independence, but also greater mutual equality through, for example, autonomous or autocephalous patriarchates, will then become a necessity, even in other ecclesiastical traditions. One might imagine even Anglican and Lutheran regional areas of responsibility" (pp. 12–13).

134. The Old Catholic–Catholic dialogue also affirms the relevance of the "patriarchal constitution of the ancient Church" in which the Pope would exercise "the primacy as the first among the patriarchs" (OC–C 2009, 29). Old Catholics apply this model to themselves: "For the Union of Utrecht ecclesial communion with the Roman Catholic Church and with the bishop of Rome would mean that it continues to exist as a church with its own liturgical and canonical structure and the ecumenical obligations which it has entered into with other churches, but stands in communion with the pope as the sign of the universal communion of local churches" (*id.*, 83).

135. More recently, ARCIC, reflecting that "in some respects […] episcopal conferences represent a return to the ancient model of regional councils/synods" (ARCIC 2018, 110), considered the "tensions and difficulties in the practice of communion at the regional levels of Anglican and Roman Catholic life" (*id.*, 116-118). It referred to the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium*, stressing the importance of the episcopal conferences in order to balance an 'excessive centralization': "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' (*LG* 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. Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach" (*EG* 32 cited in ARCIC 2018 footnote 38). The same ARCIC document notes that some Anglicans perceive the development of the personal ordinariates under the provisions

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to distinguish more clearly the actual function of Peter's successor from the patriarchal function, and if need be, to create new Patriarchates detached from the Latin Church", Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, Düsseldorf, 1969, 142 (*ad hoc* transl.).

made by the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Cœtibus* (2009) as an example of such centralization (5).

c. Subsidiarity

○ An "ancient principle"

136. Linked with the question of the levels of the Church, subsidiarity is often mentioned in the ecumenical dialogues as an important principle for the exercise of primacy. The North American Orthodox–Catholic Theological Consultation described subsidiarity as "the ancient principle recognized as normative for well-organized human structures, 'higher' instances of episcopal authority would only be expected to act when 'lower' instances were unable to make and implement the decisions necessary for continuing union in faith". The document applies this principle in particular to the election of bishops and recognition of Church leaders at all levels: "This would mean, among other things, that in the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches, at least, bishops would be elected by local synods or by other traditional methods of selection. Those elected to major episcopal or primatial offices would present themselves to other Church leaders at their level, to their own patriarch, and to the bishop of Rome as first among the patriarchs, by the exchange and reception of letters of communion, according to ancient Christian custom. The bishop of Rome would also inform the Eastern patriarchs of his election" (O–C US 2010, 6g). Likewise, the ancient procedure of appeal described by the council of Sardica could be considered as a form of subsidiarity (see above §§101–103).

137. ARCIC also stressed the need of the exercise of the principle of subsidiarity, particularly in responding to regional cultural contexts: "The principle of subsidiarity points to the utility of instruments of communion between the local and the worldwide/universal levels of the Church. 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. Moreover, cultural differences from one region to another can make a uniform determination ill-advised" (ARCIC 2018, 107).

138. The Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue in the United States proposes the principle of subsidiarity as one of three "norms for a renewal" (see above §110) and as a guarantor of a legitimate diversity through the participation in decision making of the whole Church: "The principle of subsidiarity is no less important. Every section of the church, each mindful of its special heritage, should nurture the gifts it has received

from the Spirit by exercising its legitimate freedom. What can properly be decided and done in smaller units of ecclesial life ought not to be referred to church leaders who have wider responsibilities. Decisions should be made and activities carried out with a participation as broad as possible from the people of God. Initiatives should be encouraged in order to promote a wholesome diversity in theology, worship, witness, and service. All should be concerned that, as the community is built up and its unity strengthened, the rights of minorities and minority viewpoints are protected within the unity of faith" (L–C US 1973, 25).

139. Similarly, the international Catholic–Old Catholic dialogue refers to this principle in defining an acceptable relation between the Union of Utrecht and the Bishop of Rome: "It would be necessary to find and agree upon a model for the manner in which the bishop of Rome exercises his ministry in service of the universal unity of the church in view of the communion sought with the Union of Utrecht, a model which gives concrete expression to the view (as outlined above) of his primacy in the tension between reciprocal obligation for the communion and the principle of subsidiarity" (OC–C 2009, 86).

○ A "voluntary limitation in the exercise of power"

140. Linked with the principle of subsidiarity, the question of the relation between primacy, understood as a 'ministry of unity', and the exercise of authority is a complex one. This complexity is in part due to the terminology applied to primacy, since interrelated concepts such as, jurisdiction, canonical authority, power, government, administration are used with various levels of significance and resonance. Some dialogues and responses to *Ut unum sint* warn against any misuse of power in the exercise of authority. Reacting to the affirmation of John Paul II that his ministry of unity "would be illusory" without "the power and the authority" to accomplish it (*UUS* 94), the response from the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom (1996) calls for "a critical re-examination" of such an assumption and declares, "it is not our experience that matters of disagreement among Christians with informed consciences can be simply settled by the exercise of power and authority, nor is it consistent with our understanding of the nature of catholicity" (4).

141. In the same critical approach, the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the USA argues that the power of the Bishop of Rome should not be larger than required for the exercise of his function and the reaching of his objective, that is to be an effective 'minister of unity' at the

universal level. The dialogue suggests a voluntary limitation in the exercise of power: "It is an important political principle that authority in any society should use only the amount of power necessary to reach its assigned goal. This applies also to the papal office. A canonical distinction between the highest authority and the limited exercise of the corresponding power cannot be ruled out and needs to be emphasised. Such a limitation need not prejudice the universal jurisdiction attributed to the pope by Roman Catholic doctrine. Thus one may foresee that voluntary limitations by the pope of the exercise of his jurisdiction will accompany the growing validity of the organs of collegial government, so that checks and balances in the supreme power may be effectively recognized" (L–C US 1973, 27).

○ A "sufficient amount of authority"

142. In common with the reflection on the "primacy of honour" in the first millennium (see above §§94-98), some dialogues affirm that realistically the Bishop of Rome will need a sufficient amount of authority to meet the many challenges and complex obligations related to his 'ministry of unity'. Deprived of authority, his 'ministry of unity' risks becoming a helpless instrument and eventually an empty title. The *Groupe des Dombes* clearly states that "we do not want an impoverishment or a weakening of the personal ministry of communion of the universal Church. While respecting those who have exercised it, who are or will exercise it, we want an evangelical limpidity of it. This ministry must remain a force of initiative, of proposal and of support for all Churches confronted with the challenges of today's world or with the pressure of certain powers" (Dombes 1985, 151).

143. In the same way, an agreed statement of 1985 between Anglicans and Old Catholics, while acknowledging the value of subsidiarity, states: "We recognize that for the universal primate to be not merely a sign of unity but also able to maintain unity, truth and love he must have the obligation to convene meetings of bishops and councils at certain times and in certain circumstances, and the right to do so when he deems it necessary. He may be given a well-defined and limited right to receive appeals. It is probable that for the proper exercise of his duty he will need the support of a substantial office structure" (OC–C 2009, Appendix text 7).

4. SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS OR REQUESTS ADDRESSED TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

144. Throughout the ecumenical dialogues or responses to *Ut unum sint* concerning primacy, various recommendations are made to all the different Christian communions. With the conviction that the first ecumenical duty for Catholics is "to examine their own faithfulness to Christ's will for the Church and accordingly to undertake with vigour the task of renewal and reform" (*UR* 4), the following are some practical suggestions or requests addressed to the Catholic Church, so that papal primacy may gain a larger ecumenical receptivity.

4.1. A RENEWED INTERPRETATION OF VATICAN I

145. Some theological dialogues highlight the value of a 're-reception' of Church teachings expressed in terms closely linked to a specific context. This process is described by ARCIC as follows: "There may be a rediscovery of elements that were neglected and a fresh remembrance of the promises of God, leading to renewal of the Church's 'Amen.' There may also be a sifting of what has been received because some of the formulations of the Tradition are seen to be inadequate or even misleading in a new context. This whole process may be termed *re-reception*" (ARCIC 1999, 25; see also above §59).

146. This process of 're-reception' has been called for regarding the teaching of Vatican I. The Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue in the USA qualifies this process as a 're-interpretation' and speaks about "the possibility of eventually finding new expressions faithful to the original intention and adapted to a changed cultural context. This process of reinterpretation was already at work in the way in which the doctrine of papal infallibility was treated at Vatican II, bringing new aspects to the fore" (L–C US 1978, 19). A need is expressed to "place the doctrine of infallibility in the theological categories of promise, trust, and hope rather than in the juridical categories of law, obligation, and obedience" (*id.*, 5).

147. The *Groupe des Dombes*, "in a spirit of *metanoia*", expressed the "hope that the dogmatic expression of this ministry [of the bishop of Rome], which has been given since Vatican I and which deeply offends the Christian sensibilities of our separated brothers from the East and the West, gives rise to an official and updated commentary,

even to a change of vocabulary, which integrates it into an ecclesiology of communion" (Dombes 1985, 149). Later, it also called for a "rewording of the dogma of papal infallibility", suggesting that "this reformulation could be done within the framework of a future council, the delegates of the other Churches then playing the full role which belongs to them" (Dombes 2014, 476).

148. In a similar vein, Catholics and Lutherans in Germany expressed their hope for "an official interpretation" of Vatican I, in which "primacy of jurisdiction has its place only within the communion structure of the church" and "papal infallibility can be exercised solely in absolute loyalty to the apostolic faith (Holy Scripture)" (L–C Germ 2000, 198).

4.2. A DIFFERENTIATED EXERCISE OF THE PRIMACY OF THE BISHOP OF ROME

149. The Bishop of Rome simultaneously acts as bishop of a local diocese, as primate of the western or Latin Church and as a minister of unity at the universal level. Some ecumenical dialogues call for a clearer distinction between his different responsibilities, especially between his patriarchal ministry in the Church of the West and his primatial ministry of unity in the communion of Churches (see also above footnote 25). This call for a clearer differentiation of roles is in line with the distinct nature and relationship of primacy and synodality at each ecclesial level, noted by some dialogues (see above §82).

150. The French Orthodox–Catholic dialogue called in 1991 for a "differentiated exercise of the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome", "depending on whether it concerns the Western Churches or the Universal Church" (O–C Fr 1991, p. 119). Thinking about how primacy might be exercised in a reunited Church, the St Irenaeus Group states: "A better understanding of the Catholic concept of primacy at a universal level could be attained through a clearer distinction between the pope's unique position in the Catholic Church and his possible function as primate within the broader Christian community" (St Irenaeus 2018, 14.11). Similarly, the Orthodox-Catholic international dialogue observes that "There is also a willingness to distinguish what might be termed the patriarchal ministry of the pope within the Western or Latin Church from his primatial service with regard to the communion of all the Churches, offering new opportunities for the future" (O- C 2023, 5.2).

151. In the same spirit, some theological dialogues with Western Christian Communions refer to the need for a differentiated exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. For example, the Methodist–Catholic international dialogue states that "from history it can be shown that some of the current functions carried out by the bishop of Rome pertain to his diocesan see or to his office as Patriarch of the Latin Church and do not pertain to the essence of his universal ministry of unity" (MERCIC 1986, 59). The Response of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland to *Ut unum sint* (1997) affirms that there is "a distinction to be made between primacy and universal jurisdiction or between primacy and jurisdiction over the 'Patriarchate of the West' " (4).The *Groupe des Dombes* also addresses this argument, affirming: "The historical study has shown that because of the rupture between East and West, the Catholic Church has coincided with the ancient Western Patriarchate or Latin Church. For that reason, the Bishop of Rome has exercised in a practical confusion a double responsibility in that Church, namely that of the ministry of communion and of the Patriarch of the West, to the advantage of a growing centralization. In addition, the intense missionary effort of the Latin Church has extended the jurisdiction of the Western Patriarchate over almost the whole face of the earth, without weighing the consequences of it. This 'abnormal development' has compromised the image of the papacy 'by leading to it being confused with a monstrous swelling of what, in fact, it is not' [L. Bouyer, *L'Église de Dieu*, Paris, Cerf, 1970, p. 555]. As long as the difference between these two functions are not made visible in the living organization of the Church, the necessity of the ministry of communion exercised by the Bishop of Rome will not be receivable on the part of our Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant brethren. Only an internal decentralization of the Catholic Church could give them a concrete perspective of the kind of commitment they would take on by renewing the bond of full communion with the Catholic Church" (Dombes 1985, 142–143). The German Lutheran–Catholic dialogue, adding the issue of the Pope as "Head of State" and its political–diplomatic implications, goes further, calling for "a differentiation among the offices united in the person of the pope: bishop of Rome, pastor of the whole Church, head of the College of Bishops, patriarch of the West, primate of Italy, archbishop and metropolitan of the church province of Rome, sovereign of Vatican City" (L–C Germ 2000, 200).

152. In line with this proposal for a differentiated exercise of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, the *Groupe des Dombes* expressed the wish "that the exercise of the ministry of the bishop of Rome in his particular Church [the Diocese of Rome] be enhanced. A pope assuming more his episcopal responsibility where it is required and able to exercise it could undoubtedly contribute to a major change in the image of the papacy. He would then appear as the pastor, the servant and the guide of his brothers in a truly common and united ministry of *episcope*" (Dombes 1985, 150).

4.3. SYNODALITY *AD INTRA*

153. The theological dialogues put an emphasis on the reciprocal relation between the Catholic Church's synodal ordering *ad intra* and the credibility or appeal of her ecumenical commitment *ad extra*. Churches and Ecclesial communities in both the East and the West attentively consider the Catholic Church's modelling of communion and primacy *ad intra* as a blueprint or test-case of its intentions *ad extra* in the ecumenical field.

154. Dialogues have identified areas in which increased synodality is required within the Catholic Church. In the *Gift of Authority*, ARCIC lists a number of "issues facing Roman Catholics": "Is 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 *episcope* 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'?" (ARCIC 1999, 57).

155. In response to these questions the dialogues have made some suggestions at the regional and universal levels, by which Catholics could learn from the experience of their dialogue partners. Reflecting on the necessity to reinforce the practice of primacy and synodality at the regional level, some dialogues have made proposals regarding Catholic bishops' conferences. For example, ARCIC identifies a "potential for learning from Anglican polity and procedure in relation to the provincial level" and the need for Catholics "to develop principles concerning: – the authority of bishops' conferences; – the relationship between national/regional bishops' conferences and the Synod of Bishops; – the identification of the range and type of issues that can be properly dealt with at the local level without routine recourse to Rome; – appropriate means by which national/regional bishops' conferences might question initiatives and directives emanating from Rome" (ARCIC 2018, 121). At the universal level, some dialogues have identified the need for a better involvement of the whole People of God in the synodal processes. The recent changes made in the procedures of the Synod of Bishops, which favour a larger participation of all Catholics, have been observed with interest (see St Irenaeus 2018, 11.15; ARCIC 2018, 146). On the basis of the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in Australia and its reflection on Lutheran synodal practice, it has been suggested that, in addition to the Synod of Bishops, a new "General Pastoral Council" at the universal level of the Catholic Church, including lay faithful, could be created, following the model of parish and diocesan pastoral councils established after Vatican II (see L–C Aus 2007).

4.4. SYNODALITY *AD EXTRA*: "WALKING TOGETHER"

The concept of synodality can also be applied to the relations of the Catholic Church with other Christian communions, since the ecumenical path is likewise a process of "walking together". This synodality *ad extra* is promoted through regular consultations and common action and witness.

4.4.1. "CONCILIAR FELLOWSHIP" AND PRIMACY

156. The concept of "conciliar fellowship" already described as a possible model and method of unity in the 1970s by the World Council of Churches and adopted by various Christian world communions, still today offers possible ways forward. Certainly, conciliarity/synodality will constitute an aspect of the internal life of the reunited Church, and therefore refers to the goal of ecumenism

and not to its means. However, the expression "conciliar fellowship" intends not only the end, but also the means on the way to unity, within the framework of various common structures and initiatives of a conciliar/synodal type. The WCC Nairobi Assembly in 1975 thus suggested the establishment of "conciliar meetings" to promote unity among the various Christian communities. By implementing this vision of "conciliar fellowship", Churches would be able to make visible and deepen that communion they already share, through what may be called an 'external synodality'.

157. In this perspective, the *Groupe des Dombes* concluded its 1985 document with a final aspiration: "Must we await the hoped-for moment of full communion before desiring the convocation of an assembly where the qualified representatives of the Catholic Church and the churches belonging to the World Council of Churches could meet? Such a gathering would undoubtedly not be given the name of council. Nonetheless, according to the tradition of the universal church, which confirms that a conciliar assembly constitutes a 'privileged form of the ministry of communion', we believe that with the aid of the Holy Spirit, such an initiative will not only be beneficial for ecumenical progress, but would be in conformity with the will of Jesus Christ for the unity of his church" (Dombes 1985, 163). The Group adds: "Our study of the ministry of communion in the universal Church draws a spiritual and pastoral portrait of the Bishop of Rome such that, if he were to convoke such an assembly together with the World Council of Churches, he would be faithful to his ministry as a servant of unity. If such a call were to receive a hearing, we bless the Lord" (*id*., 165). In the same way, in their responses to *Ut unum sint*, the Swiss *Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe 'Ut unum sint'* called for an "ecumenical council for the 21st Century", and the Iona Community, inspired by Acts 15, suggested a second "Council of Jerusalem".

158. In the same spirit, many dialogues have proposed different initiatives to promote synodality between Churches, especially through collegiality at the level of bishops and primates. For example, ARCIC II proposes concrete steps to establish true cooperation in the exercise of the episcopate: regular meetings of bishops at local and regional levels, participation of bishops of one communion in international meetings of bishops of the other communion, joint testimonies in the public sphere on questions

which concern the common good, and even the Anglican bishops accompanying Catholic bishops in their *ad limina* visits to Rome (ARCIC 1999, 59). The *Principles to Guide the Search for Unity Between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church* (1979) proposed, without waiting for the restoration of full communion, a pragmatic model of reciprocal rediscovery of conciliarity by establishing regular consultations between primates (6). The North American Orthodox–Catholic Consultation proposes that "Delegations of Orthodox and Catholic bishops in a nation or region could begin to gather regularly for consultation on pastoral issues. Patriarchs and representatives of the autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox Churches could also meet with the Pope and leading Catholic bishops and curial officials on a regular basis for consultation and planning" (O–C US 2010, 8 a).

4.4.2. WORKING AND PRAYING TOGETHER

159. Beside regular meetings and consultations, synodality implies also common action and witness. As ARCIC II states: "Theological dialogue must continue at all levels in the churches, but is not of itself sufficient. For the sake of *koinonia* and a united Christian witness to the world, Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops should find ways of cooperating and developing relationships of mutual accountability in their exercise of oversight. At this new stage we have not only to do together whatever we can, but also to be together all that our existing *koinonia* allows" (ARCIC 1999, 58). These aspirations have been significantly advanced through the establishment of the International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM), which made a number of creative and practical suggestions for ways that Anglican and Catholic bishops might already practise a renewed collegiality (see *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*, 2007, 108–117).

160. Recent initiatives illustrate this way of promoting "external synodality", for example: the joint visit to Lesbos of Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Ieronymos in 2016 to witness to their common concern for the tragic situation of migrants; the joint Lutheran–Catholic prayer in Lund presided over by Pope Francis and Bishop Munib A. Younan, then President of the Lutheran World Federation, in the presence of many ecumenical partners, in 2017; the spiritual retreat for the political and religious leaders of South Sudan hosted in the Vatican by Pope Francis and

Archbishop Justin Welby in 2019; the Ecumenical Peace Pilgrimage to South Sudan of Pope Francis, Archbishop Justin Welby and Reverend Iain Greenshields in 2023; and the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil "Together Gathering of the People of God" held in St. Peter's Square in 2023 for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

SUMMARY

161. The understanding and exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome entered a new phase with the Second Vatican Council. Since then, the ecumenical dimension has been an essential aspect of this ministry, as illustrated by successive popes. John Paul II's invitation in *Ut unum sint* to find, with the help of the Pastors and theologians of all Churches, a way of exercising primacy "recognized by all concerned", marked an epochal moment in this ecumenical awareness. That invitation finds particular support in the context of the pontificate of Pope Francis, whose teaching and practice emphasise the synodal dimension of his ministry.

ECUMENICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE MINISTRY OF THE BISHOP OF ROME

162. The invitation in *Ut unum sint* elicited a wide range of responses and ecumenical reflections. The ecumenical theological dialogues, official and unofficial, national and international, initiated after Vatican II, have also proven to be, during the last decades, a privileged place for research into a ministry of unity at the universal level. Identifying the main themes and perspectives, they illustrate the interest in this topic and the developments in the discussion with the different Christian traditions. They also evidence a new and positive ecumenical spirit in discussing this question.

163. This new climate is indicative of the good relations established between Christian communions, and especially between their leaders. At a time when the relationships between Churches are intensifying, this "rediscovered brotherhood" (*UUS* 42) should also be re-read theologically, alongside the dogmatic differences of the past. This life of relationships includes a growing awareness of 'mutual accountability' between Christian communions.

164. It should be noted that the concerns, emphases and conclusions of the different dialogues vary according to the confessional traditions involved. Furthermore, not all the theological dialogues have treated the topic at the same level or in the same depth. If some have dedicated entire documents to the subject, others have only treated it in the context of broader documents, while others again are yet to address the matter. Without wanting to obscure these different approaches and accents, nevertheless the following fruits can be identified.

NEW APPROACHES TO TRADITIONALLY CONTESTED THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

165. One of the fruits of the theological dialogues is a renewed reading of the 'Petrine texts', which have historically been a major stumbling block between Christians. Dialogue partners have been challenged to avoid anachronistic projections of later doctrinal developments and to consider afresh the role of Peter among the apostles. On the basis of contemporary exegesis and patristic research, new insights and mutual enrichment has been achieved, challenging some traditional confessional interpretations. A diversity of images, interpretations and models in the New Testament have been rediscovered, while biblical notions such as *episkopè* (the ministry of oversight), *diakonia*, and the concept of 'Petrine function', have helped develop a more comprehensive understanding of the 'Petrine texts'.

166. Another controversial issue is the Catholic understanding of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome as established *de iure divino*, while most other Christians understand it as being instituted merely *de iure humano*. Hermeneutical clarifications have helped to put into new perspective this traditional dichotomy, by considering primacy as both *de iure divino* and *de iure humano*, that is, being part of God's will for the Church and mediated through human history.

Superseding the distinction between *de iure divino* and *de iure humano* the dialogues have emphasized instead the distinction between the theological essence and the historical contingency of primacy – as expressed in *Ut unum sint* (*UUS* 95). On this basis they call for a greater attention to and assessment of the historical context that conditioned the exercise of primacy in different regions and periods.

167. The dogmatic definitions of the First Vatican Council are a significant obstacle for other Christians. Some ecumenical dialogues have registered promising progress when undertaking a 're- reading' or 're-reception' of this Council, opening up new avenues for a more accurate understanding of its teaching. This hermeneutical approach emphasizes the importance of interpreting the dogmatic statements of Vatican I not in isolation, but in the light of their historical context, of their intention and of their reception – especially through the teaching of Vatican II.

168. Studying the history of the text of *Pastor æternus,* and especially the proceedings of the Council and the background that conditioned

the choice of terms used ('ordinary', 'direct', 'immediate'), some dialogues were able to clarify the dogmatic definition of universal jurisdiction, by identifying its extension and limits. Similarly, they were able to clarify the wording of the dogma of infallibility and even to agree on certain aspects of its purpose, recognizing the need, in some circumstances, for a personal exercise of the teaching ministry, given that Christian unity is a unity in truth and love. In spite of these clarifications the dialogues still express concerns regarding the relation of infallibility to the primacy of the Gospel, the indefectibility of the whole Church, the exercise of episcopal collegiality and the necessity of reception.

PERSPECTIVES FOR A MINISTRY OF UNITY IN A RECONCILED CHURCH

169. These new approaches to fundamental theological questions raised by primacy at the universal level have opened new perspectives for a ministry of unity in a reconciled Church. Many theological dialogues and responses to *Ut unum sint*, based mostly on arguments concerned with the *bene esse* rather than the *esse* of the Church, acknowledge the requirement for a primacy at the universal level. Referring to apostolic tradition, some dialogues argue that, from the early Church, Christianity was established on major apostolic sees occupying a specific order, the see of Rome being the first. Based on ecclesiological considerations, a number of dialogues have maintained that there is a mutual interdependency of primacy and synodality at each level of the life of the Church: local, regional, but also universal. Another argument, of a more pragmatic nature, is founded on the contemporary context of globalization and on missionary requirements.

170. Theological dialogues, particularly with the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, recognize that principles and models of communion honoured in the first millennium (or, for the latter, until the middle of the fifth century), remain paradigmatic. Indeed, during that period, Christians from East and West lived in communion despite certain temporary ruptures, and the essential structures of the Church were constituted and shared. Certain criteria of the first millennium were identified as points of reference and sources of inspiration for the acceptable exercise of a ministry of unity at the universal level, such as: the informal – and not primarily jurisdictional – character of the expressions of communion between the Churches;

the 'primacy of honour' of the Bishop of Rome; the interdependency between the primatial and synodal dimensions of the Church as illustrated by Apostolic Canon 34; the right of appeal as an expression of communion (Canons of Sardica); the paradigmatic character of the ecumenical councils; and the diversity of ecclesial models.

171. Although the first millennium is decisive, many dialogues recognize that it should not be idealized nor simply re-created, since the developments of the second millennium cannot be ignored and also because a primacy at the universal level should respond to contemporary challenges. Some principles for the exercise of primacy in the 21st century have been identified. A first general agreement is the mutual interdependency of primacy and synodality at each level of the Church, and the consequent requirement for a synodal exercise of primacy. A further agreement concerns the articulation between 'all', 'some' and 'one', three complementary dimensions of the Church, at each ecclesial level: the 'communal' dimension based on the *sensus fidei* of all the baptized; the 'collegial' dimension, expressed especially in episcopal collegiality; and the 'personal' dimension expressed in the primatial function. Different dialogues identify the synodal dynamic inherent in the articulation of these three dimensions.

172. Ecumenical reflection has also contributed to the recognition that the Petrine function must be understood within the context of a wider ecclesiological perspective. In considering primacy, many theological dialogues have noted that these three dimensions – communal, collegial, and personal – are operative within each of the three levels of the Church: local, regional and universal. In this respect, a crucial issue is the relationship between the local Church and the universal Church, which has important consequences for the exercise of primacy. Ecumenical dialogues helped bring about agreement on the simultaneity of these dimensions, insisting that it is not possible to separate the dialectical relationship between the local Church and the universal Church.

173. Another important consideration related to the different levels in the Church is the ecclesiological significance of the regional or supra-local dimension in the Church. Many dialogues stress the need for a balance between the exercise of primacy on a regional and universal level, noting that in most Christian communions the regional level is the most relevant for the exercise of primacy and also

for their missional activity. Some theological dialogues with the Western Christian communions, observing an 'asymmetry' between these communions and the Catholic Church, call for a strengthening of Catholic episcopal conferences, including at the continental level, and for a continuing 'decentralization' inspired by the model of the ancient patriarchal Churches.

174. The significance of the regional level is also advocated in the dialogues with the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, which emphasize the necessity of a balance between primacy and primacies. These dialogues insist that the "ecumenical endeavour of the Sister Churches of East and West, grounded in dialogue and prayer, is the search for perfect and total communion which is neither absorption nor fusion but a meeting in truth and love" (O– C 1993, 14). In a reconciled Christianity, such communion presupposes that the Bishop of Rome's "relationship to the Eastern Churches and their bishops […] would have to be substantially different from the relationship now accepted in the Latin Church" (O–C US 2010, 7a), and that the Churches will "continue to have the right and power to govern themselves according to their own traditions and disciplines" (Coptic–Catholic dialogue, 1979).

175. The Orthodox–Catholic dialogue also allowed a new critical reading of the phenomenon of 'uniatism', closely related to the question of primacy and to an ecclesiology claiming the direct jurisdiction of the Roman See over all the local Churches, which "can no longer be accepted either as a method to be followed nor as a model of the unity our Churches are seeking" (O–C, 1993, 12). The historical phenomenon of 'uniatism' should yet be distinguished from the current reality of the Eastern Catholic Churches, which represent a particular paradigm of 'unity in diversity' due to their *sui iuris* status in the Catholic Church maintaining their autonomy within synodical structures. Nevertheless, the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches do not recognise the present relationship with Rome of the Eastern Catholic Churches as a model for future communion.

176. Considerations regarding the different levels of the Church lead to reflection on the principle of subsidiarity. This principle means that no matter that can properly be dealt with at a lower level should be taken to a higher one. Subsidiarity is recognised as an important principle if the exercise of primacy is to guarantee the participation of the whole Church in the decision-making process. Some dialogues

apply this principle in defining an acceptable model of 'unity in diversity' with the Catholic Church. They argue that the power of the Bishop of Rome should not exceed that required for the exercise of his ministry of unity at the universal level, and suggest a voluntary limitation in the exercise of his power – while recognizing that he will need a sufficient amount of authority to meet the many challenges and complex obligations related to his ministry.

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

177. Throughout the ecumenical dialogues and responses to *Ut unum sint* concerning primacy, various practical suggestions or requests have been made to the different Christian communions, and especially to the Catholic Church. Since the first ecumenical duty of Catholics is "to examine their own faithfulness to Christ's will for the Church and accordingly to undertake with vigour the task of renewal and reform" (*UR* 4), they are invited to seriously consider the suggestions made to them so that a renewed understanding and exercise of papal primacy can contribute to the restoration of Christian unity.

178. A first proposal is a Catholic 're-reception', 're-interpretation', 'official interpretation', 'updated commentary' or even 'rewording' of the teachings of Vatican I. Indeed, some dialogues observe that these teachings were deeply conditioned by their historical context, and suggest that the Catholic Church should look for new expressions and vocabulary faithful to the original intention but integrated into a *communio* ecclesiology and adapted to the current cultural and ecumenical context.

179. A second suggestion made by some ecumenical dialogues is a clearer distinction between the different responsibilities of the Bishop of Rome, especially between his patriarchal ministry in the Church of the West and his primatial ministry of unity in the communion of Churches, both West and East, possibly extending this idea to consider how other Western Churches might relate to the Bishop of Rome as primate while having a certain autonomy themselves. There is also a need to distinguish the patriarchal and primatial roles of the Bishop of Rome from his political function as head of State. A greater accent on the exercise of the ministry of the Pope in his own particular Church, the diocese of Rome, would highlight the episcopal ministry he shares with his brother bishops, and renew the image of the papacy.

180. A third recommendation made by the theological dialogues concerns the development of synodality within the Catholic Church. Putting an emphasis on the reciprocal relation between the Catholic Church's synodal shaping *ad intra* and the credibility of her ecumenical commitment *ad extra*, they identified areas in which a growing synodality is required within the Catholic Church. They suggest in particular further reflection on the authority of national and regional Catholic bishops' conferences, their relationship with the Synod of Bishops and with the Roman Curia. At the universal level, they stress the need for a better involvement of the whole People of God in the synodal processes. In a spirit of the 'exchange of gifts', procedures and institutions already existing in other Christian communions could serve as a source of inspiration.

181. A last proposal is the promotion of 'conciliar fellowship' through regular meetings among Church leaders at a worldwide level in order to make visible and deepen the communion they already share. In the same spirit, many dialogues have proposed different initiatives to promote synodality between Churches, especially at the level of bishops and primates, through regular consultations and common action and witness.

TOWARDS AN EXERCISE OF PRIMACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY. A PROPOSAL FROM THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY BASED ON THE STUDY DOCUMENT "THE BISHOP OF ROME"

The Study Document "The Bishop of Rome. Primacy and Synodality in the Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to the Encyclical Ut unum sint" provided an opportunity for the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity to evaluate the development of ecumenical reflection on the topic.

On the basis of this Study Document a proposal entitled "Towards an exercise of primacy in the 21st century" was also approved by the Plenary Assembly of the DPCU. This proposal identifies the most significant contributions of the dialogues, suggests future steps to be taken by them and offers some principles and suggestions for a renewed exercise of the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome that can be "recognised by all concerned" (UUS 95).

SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE REFLECTION ON PRIMACY

1. Dialogue documents and the responses to *Ut unum sint* have made a significant contribution to reflection on the question of primacy. Ecumenical theological dialogues have proved to be the appropriate context for re-examining the form of the papacy and its exercise of authority in service to the *communio ecclesiarum*. At a time when the results of ecumenical engagement are often considered meagre or insignificant, the outcomes of theological dialogues – international and national, official and unofficial – demonstrate the value of their methodology, that is of a reflection made "together, of course", as called for by John Paul II in *Ut unum sint*. It is particularly remarkable that this reflection has increased in the last decades and has involved almost all Christian traditions entering into the discussion in a new and positive ecumenical spirit, with important contributions from local and unofficial groups, giving rise to a significant and growing theological convergence.

2. A reading of the dialogue documents attests that the question of primacy for the whole Church, and in particular the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, need not be seen only as a problem but also as *an opportunity for a common reflection on the nature of the Church* and its mission in the world. The treatment of this topic has enabled a deeper

analysis of some essential ecclesiological themes such as: the existence and interdependence of primacy and synodality at each level of the Church; the understanding of synodality as a fundamental quality of the whole Church, including the active participation of all the faithful; and the distinction between and interrelatedness of collegiality and synodality.

3. This common reflection has made a significant *contribution to Catholic theology*. As Pope Francis has stated: "The journey of ecumenism has allowed us to come to a deeper understanding of the ministry of the Successor of Peter, and we must be confident that it will continue to do so in the future".[1] Theological thinking regarding the simultaneity of the local Church and the universal Church (see Study Document §§120–126); the contemporary concept and understanding of 'synodality' (see ARCIC 1999, 34– 40); and the threefold dimension of the Church ('communal', 'collegial' and 'personal') (see Study Document §§114–118), have been developed or deepened in the context of ecumenical dialogue, enriching the use of these concepts in subsequent Catholic documents. This reception illustrates the 'exchange of gifts' mentioned in *Evangelii gaudium* citing the examples of collegiality and synodality: "If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! […] Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness" (*EG* 246). This 'exchange of gifts' can also apply to the exercise of primacy. Indeed, while Catholics believe that the unique role of the Bishop of Rome is a precious gift of God for the benefit of the whole Church, dialogues have demonstrated that there are valid principles in the exercise of primacy in other Christian communions which could be considered by Catholics.

FUTURE STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUES

4. The breadth and depth of ecumenical reflection on primacy in recent times is remarkable, and it seems to indicate that the time is ripe for further steps to be taken in the ecumenical dialogues. Certainly, a *better connection is needed between the dialogues* — local and international, official and unofficial, bilateral and multilateral, and especially between the Eastern and Western dialogues — in order to

[1] Pope Francis, *Homily for the Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle*, 25 January 2014.

avoid repetitions and to enrich one another. For example, the ecumenical methods of differentiated consensus (see Study Document §107) and receptive ecumenism, already adopted by some theological dialogues, could be helpful to agree on an acceptable exercise of a ministry of unity for the whole Church: if differences of theological languages can indeed "be considered often as mutually complementary rather than conflicting" (see *UR* 17), the same can be said concerning ecclesial practices.

5. Theological dialogues on the question of primacy have increasingly demonstrated that *primacy and synodality* are not two opposing ecclesial dimensions, but rather that they are two mutually constitutive and sustaining realities, and therefore *should be addressed together*. As Pope Francis has observed to an ecumenical group of theologians, "we have come to understand more fully that in the Church primacy and synodality are not two competing principles to be kept in balance, but two realities that establish and sustain one another in the service of communion. Just as primacy presupposes the exercise of synodality, so synodality entails the exercise of primacy."[2]

6. Since synodal communion, understood as the *articulation of the 'all', 'some' and 'one'*, includes the exercise of primacy, theological dialogue on primacy, from a methodological point of view, should start with a reflection on synodality. As Pope Francis stated in the same address, "synodality in the broad sense can be seen as the articulation of three dimensions: 'all', 'some' and 'one'". In this vision, "the primatial ministry is an intrinsic element of the dynamic of synodality, as are also the communitarian aspect that includes the whole People of God and the collegial dimension that is part of the exercise of episcopal ministry. Consequently, a fruitful approach to the primacy in theological and ecumenical dialogues must necessarily be grounded in a reflection on synodality: there is no other way." Along the same line, the Synthesis Report of the first session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops affirms: "The synodal dynamic also sheds new light on the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. Indeed, synodality articulates symphonically the communal ('all'), collegial ('some') and personal ('one') dimensions of the Church at the local, regional and universal levels. In such a vision, the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome is intrinsic to the synodal dynamic, as

[2] Pope Francis, *Address to the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox–Catholic Working Group*, 7 October 2021.

are the communal aspect that includes the whole People of God and the collegial dimension of the exercise of Episcopal ministry".[3]

7. Another step concerns the *clarification of the vocabulary* used by the dialogues. In fact, the documents do not always use terms such as 'synodality/conciliarity', 'collegiality', 'primacy', 'authority', 'power', 'administration', 'government', and 'jurisdiction' in an homogenous and consistent way.

8. It seems particularly necessary to clarify the *meaning of the expression 'universal Church'*. Indeed, since the 19th century, the catholicity of the Church has often been understood as its worldwide dimension, in a 'universalistic' way. Such an understanding does not take sufficient account of the distinction between the *Ecclesia universalis* (the 'universal Church' in the geographical sense) and the *Ecclesia universa* (the 'whole Church', the 'entire Church'), the latter being the more traditional expression in the Catholic magisterium. A merely geographical notion of the catholicity of the Church risks giving rise to a secular conception of a 'universal primacy' in a 'universal Church', and consequently to a secular understanding of the extension and constraints of such a primacy. Even the concepts of 'levels', 'subsidiarity', 'autonomy', and 'decentralization' remain in the same framework, having administrative rather than ecclesiological connotations. Roman primacy should be understood not so much as a universal power in a universal Church (*Ecclesia universalis*), but as an authority in service to the communion between the Churches (*communio Ecclesiarum*), that is to the whole Church (*Ecclesia universa*).

9. A further necessary step is to *promote reception* of the considerable results of these dialogues, not only by discussion among experts, but at all levels, so that the results may become a common heritage. The Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church in its document on reception described ecumenical reception as "the evangelical attitude necessary to allow [the results of dialogue] to be adopted in one's own ecclesial tradition".[4] John Paul II wrote in *Ut unum sint* that in order to receive

[3] *A Synodal Church in Mission*, Synthesis Report of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (4–29 October 2023), 13.a.

[4] *Ninth Report of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (2007–2012)*, Appendix A "Reception: A Key to Ecumenical Progress" §15.

the bilateral agreements "a serious examination needs to be made, which, by different ways and means and at various levels of responsibility, must involve the whole People of God" (*UUS* 80). This process of reception should involve the whole Church in the exercise of the *sensus fidei*: lay faithful, theologians, and pastors, with the involvement of theological faculties and local ecumenical commissions. It may include promoting easy access to the dialogue documents, especially through the internet, providing accurate translations (not only in Western languages), organizing joint academic events, encouraging responses and implementing locally some of their proposals.

10. The theological dialogue, or 'dialogue of truth', between Churches should not only reflect on their doctrinal differences of the past, but also *interpret theologically their current relationships*. Since Vatican II, the development of the 'dialogue of love' and the 'dialogue of life', through common prayer and witness, pastoral agreements, fraternal exchange of letters and gifts, reciprocal visits between Christian leaders at all levels, is ecumenically highly eloquent and has provided new theological perspectives for the question of primacy. Ever since the time of the early Church, such gestures were considered as authentic signs and means of communion. As Pope Francis states: "These gestures, grounded in recognition of the one Baptism, are not merely acts of courtesy or diplomacy, but have an ecclesial import and can be considered true *loci theologici*. […] In this regard, I am convinced that the 'dialogue of charity' should be understood not simply as a preparation for the 'dialogue of truth', but as itself a 'theology in action', capable of opening new horizons on the journey of our Churches. At a time when, thank God, relations between us are deepening, I believe that it is good to think back on the development of those relations in the light of a 'theology of dialogue in charity'".[5]

11. *Particular gestures and symbolic actions* on the part of the Bishop of Rome have been essential in building a climate of trust, reinforcing bonds of communion, overcoming historical prejudices and creating a new memory, and in developing a growing ecumenical appreciation of his 'ministry of unity'. It is important that such gestures and deeds

[5] Pope Francis, *Address to the Members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches,* 26 January 2024.

be continued with creativity and generosity, and be reflected upon theologically.

PRINCIPLES AND PROPOSALS FOR A RENEWED EXERCISE OF PRIMACY

12. Two recurring frameworks identified by the theological dialogues can provide a significant resource in reflecting on the exercise of primacy in the 21st century. The dialogues call for a symphonic articulation of (1) the 'communal', 'collegial' and 'personal' dimensions at (2) the local, regional, and universal levels of the Church.

13. Considering the different levels of the Church, many ecumenical dialogues mention *subsidiarity* as an important principle for the exercise of primacy and synodality. Initially developed in the context of the social doctrine of the Church, it means that no matter that can properly be dealt with at a lower level should be taken to a higher one.[6] When applied to ecclesiology, the ambiguity (see above §8) and sociological origins of this principle (which presupposes that authority is delegated downwards from the higher level) should be borne in mind in order to avoid a merely administrative approach to Church life. Nonetheless, its intention and content could contribute, in an ecclesial context, to a synodal exercise of primacy by ensuring the participation of the whole People of God in the decision-making process, especially in matters that affect them directly.[7]

14. Among the proposals expressed by the dialogues, the call for a Catholic *'re-reception' or official commentary of Vatican I* seems particularly important. Assuming the hermeneutical rule that the dogmas of Vatican I must be read in the light of Vatican II, especially its teaching on the People of God (*LG*, chapter II) and collegiality (*LG* 22–23), some dialogues reflect that Vatican II did not explicitly interpret Vatican I but, while incorporating its teaching, complemented it (*LG*, chapter III, 18). It remains therefore necessary to present the Catholic teaching on primacy in the light of a *communio* ecclesiology, within the framework of the 'hierarchy of truths' (*UR* 11).

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[6] See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 185–188.

[7] The International Theological Commission distinguishes in the synodal process *decision–making* "through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and co–operation", from *decision–taking*, see *Synodality in the Life and the Mission of the Church* (2018), 69.

It is also essential to re-read Vatican I in light of the whole Tradition, "according to the ancient and constant belief of the universal Church" (*Pastor æternus*, *Introduction*, DH 3052), and against the horizon of a growing ecumenical convergence on the biblical foundation, historical developments, and theological significance of primacy and synodality. Here again it is necessary to clarify the terminology adopted, which often remains equivocal and open to misinterpretation, for example: ordinary, immediate and universal jurisdiction; infallibility; government; supreme authority and power.

15. Another important proposal is that a *clearer distinction be made between the different responsibilities of the Pope*, especially between his ministry as head of the Catholic Church and his ministry of unity among all Christians, or more specifically between his patriarchal ministry in the Latin Church and his primatial ministry in the communion of Churches. The removal of the title 'Patriarch of the West' from the *Annuario Pontificio* in 2006 raised some concerns in ecumenical circles and gave an opportunity to begin a reflection on the distinction between these different responsibilities, which needs to be continued.

16. Since the different responsibilities of the Pope are grounded in his ministry as Bishop of Rome, the Church presiding in charity over all the Churches, it is also essential to *highlight his episcopal ministry at the local level*, as a bishop among bishops. In this regard, it is remarkable that Pope Francis has emphasised his title of 'Bishop of Rome' from his first public words after his election, saying that "it was the duty of the Conclave to give Rome a Bishop" and that "the diocesan community of Rome now has its Bishop".[8] More recently, the listing of his other pontifical titles as "historical" (see *Annuario Pontificio* 2020), may contribute to a new image of the papacy. Similarly, the cathedral of the diocese of Rome has been given a greater prominence since recent papal documents and correspondence have been signed from Saint John Lateran, a church which could play a more significant role also at the inauguration of a new pontificate. Nevertheless, the terminology used in official Catholic documents and statements concerning the ministry of the Pope often fails to reflect these developments and lacks ecumenical sensitivity.

[8] Pope Francis, *Apostolic Blessing* "Urbi et Orbi". *First Greeting from Central Loggia of St Peter's Basilica*, 13 March 2013.

17. The *synodal shaping* of the Catholic Church is crucial for her ecumenical commitment. It is a duty that the Catholic Church owes to its dialogue partners to demonstrate in its own ecclesial life a convincing and attractive model of synodality. As Pope Francis states, "the commitment to build a synodal church – a mission to which we are all called, each with the role entrusted him by the Lord – has significant ecumenical implications".[9] Indeed, "it is clear that the way in which the Catholic Church experiences synodality is important for its relations with other Christians. This is a challenge for ecumenism."[10] More recently, Pope Francis underlined the dual relationship between synodality and ecumenism, affirming that "The journey of synodality undertaken by the Catholic Church is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical journey is synodal".[11]

18. Many synodal institutions and practices of the Eastern Catholic Churches could inspire the Latin Church, as indeed could, in a spirit of 'exchange of gifts', the synodal institutions and practices of other Christian communions (see *EG* 246), which could be systematically identified and studied to this end.[12] New means of communication might also offer new opportunities for a synodal Church in a digital age. Of course, the practices of synodality may be diverse and should be appropriate to the particular ecclesial level and cultural context. In this search for a more synodal shaping of the Catholic Church, a reciprocal relationship between canon law and ecumenical dialogue is essential: "Canon law is not only an aid to ecumenical dialogue, but also an essential dimension of it. Then too it is clear that ecumenical dialogue also enriches canon law".[13]

19. At the local and regional level, it seems necessary to recover and strengthen synodal structures that include all the faithful, as

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[9] Pope Francis, *Address marking the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015.

[10] Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the Conference Promoted by the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches*, 19 September 2019.

[11] Pope Francis, *Address to His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos–Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East*, 19 November 2022.

[12] See for example the proposal of Patriarch Maximus IV of a "permanent synod" on the model of the Eastern *synodos endemousa* (see below § 22); or the suggestion to create a new "General Pastoral Council" at the universal level of the Catholic Church, including lay faithful, on the model of some Western communions (see Study Document § 155).

[13] Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the Conference Promoted by the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches*, 19 September 2019.

envisaged by Vatican II and provided for in the *Code of Canon Law*, such as diocesan pastoral councils (*CIC* can. 511–514), diocesan synods (*CIC* can. 460–468), and also plenary and provincial councils (*CIC* can. 439–445), which are rarely, if ever, convoked. The *Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches* provides synodal structures including also laity, such as the patriarchal assembly (*CCEO* can. 140–145) and the eparchial assembly (*CCEO* can. 235–242), which could be instructive for the Latin Church. It is also important to realize the call of the Second Vatican Council concerning episcopal conferences, "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" (*EG* 32, referring to the Motu Proprio *Apostolos suos*, 1998). In particular, it might be observed that the parallel between the episcopal conferences and the ancient patriarchates drawn by *Lumen gentium* 23 (see also O–C 2007, 29; *EG* 32) has not been developed, either theologically or canonically. In line both with this parallel and the suggestion to create 'new Patriarchates' or 'major Churches' (see Study Document, footnote 25), reflection is needed on the ecclesial meaning of the continental episcopal bodies, whose supranational dimension can protect them from political pressures and nationalistic interests.

20. At the universal level, the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches* offer provisions for a more collegial exercise of papal ministry. These could be further developed in practice and strengthened in a future revision of both texts. For example, the *Code of Canon Law* affirms that in fulfilling his supreme *munus*, the Pope "is always joined in communion with the other bishops and with the universal Church" and includes the possibility for a collegial exercise of this ministry, a provision of which more use could be made (*CIC* 333§2). Similarly, besides ecumenical councils, the *Code of Canon Law* foresees a collegial exercise in the governance of the Church (*CIC* 337§2) and in the formulation of infallible teaching (*CIC* 749§2).

21. A major development concerning the synodal shaping of the Catholic Church has been the renewed practice of the Synod of Bishops. The Apostolic constitution *Episcopalis communio* (2018) makes explicit the ecumenical significance of this renewal: "The activity of the Synod of Bishops will be able to make its own contribution to the reestablishment of unity among all Christians, according to the will of the Lord (cf. Jn 17:21). By doing so, it will help the Catholic Church,

according to the desire expressed years ago by John Paul II, to 'find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation'(*UUS* 95)" (*EC* 10). Affirming that the synodal process "not only has its point of departure but also its point of arrival in the People of God" (*EC* 7), *Episcopalis communio* promotes a broader participation of the whole People of God through processes of consultation (*EC* art. 5–7). It also expands the possibility for the Synod of Bishops to be a deliberative body, in which case the final synodal document, which "participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter", is published with the Pope's signature "together with that of the members" (see *CIC* 343; *EC* art.18). The 2021-2024 synodal process for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops entitled "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission," based on a broad consultation of the whole People of God at the local, regional (national/continental) and universal levels, is a favourable occasion to deepen the reflection on the synodal dynamic articulating the personal, collegial and communal dimensions of the Church.

22. The reform of the Curia is also an important aspect of the synodal shaping of the Catholic Church. The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium* (2022) affirms that this reform is based on the "life of communion [which] gives to the Church a synodal character" (*PE* I.4). Emphasising that "the emergence of Episcopal Conferences in the Latin Church represents one of the most recent forms in which the *communio Episcoporum* has expressed itself at the service of the *communio Ecclesiarum* based on the *communio fidelium*" (*PE* I.7), it insists that "the Roman Curia does not stand between the Pope and the Bishops, but rather is at the service of both in a way that is in keeping with the nature of each" (*PE* I.8) and promotes a "sound decentralization" (*PE* II.2). Pope Francis established "a further expression of episcopal communion and assistance to the *munus petrinum* which the Episcopate across the world is able to offer", when, in the first year of his pontificate, he created a Council of Cardinals.[14] Though not part of the Roman Curia, this Council, alongside the ordinary and extraordinary Consistories (*CIC* can. 353), could be the first step towards a permanent synodal governing structure at the level of the entire Church, involving active participation of local

[14] *Chirograph by which a Council of Cardinals is established to assist the Holy Father in the governance of the universal Church and to study possible revisions of the Apostolic Constitution* 'Pastor Bonus' *on the Roman Curia*, 28 September 2013.

bishops. This was already suggested during Vatican II by the Melkite Patriarch Maximus IV, who proposed that a "permanent synod" representing the episcopal college be established on the model of the Eastern *synodos endemousa*, with the task of assisting the Pope in the central, daily governance of the Church.[15] One should, however, bear in mind that Orthodox synods generally have a deliberative character, while Catholic synodal structures are mostly consultative.

23. The synodal shaping of the Church is not only a question of structures and ecclesial processes at the institutional level, nor captured by specific synodal events, but also a *modus vivendi et operandi of the whole Church*. As the International Theological Commission states: "First and foremost, synodality denotes the particular *style* that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel" (ITC 2018, 70).

24. A synodality *ad extra*, promoting regular meetings among Church representatives at the worldwide level, sometimes called 'conciliar fellowship', is indicated as a promising way to make visible and deepen the communion already shared. Even if conciliarity/synodality constitutes an aspect of the internal life of the Church already united, nevertheless a certain synodality ('walking together') among the Churches is promoted whenever Church leaders come together in the name of Jesus Christ for common prayer, action and witness, or for consultations and participation in each other's synodal processes. Without waiting for full visible communion as a pre-condition for speaking and acting together, such a practice might enable the Churches to listen to one another and start joint discernment and decision-making processes on urgent matters of shared concern. This could foster opportunities to deepen mutual understanding, and enable Churches to better support one another. In this regard, the invitation to other Christian communions to participate in Catholic synodal processes at all levels is particularly important, and could be extended to the *ad limina* visits, as suggested by different dialogues. At another level, the 2018 meeting in Bari of Church leaders gathered at the invitation of Pope Francis, to pray, reflect and exchange informally on the situation of Christians in the

[15] *Acta Synodalia Sacrosanti Concilii Œcumenici Vaticani II,* vol. 2, pars, 4, Città del Vaticano, p. 517–518.

Middle East, indicates a new way of exercising synodality and primacy. A joint preparation and commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325) could provide the occasion to practise this synodality among Christians of all traditions.

TOWARDS A MODEL OF COMMUNION

25. Building on the above principles and recommendations, which are fruits of common ecumenical reflection, it may be possible for the Catholic Church to renew the exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome and to propose a model of communion based on "a service of love recognised by all concerned" (*UUS* 95). Avoiding a superficial and unrealistic opposition between law and communion, this proposal should not be expressed in juridical terms alone, but on the basis of a *koinonia* ecclesiology rooted in the sacramental understanding of the Church favoured by the Second Vatican Council (see *LG* 1, 9, 48). Such an ecclesiology is based on the *sensus fidei* of all the faithful by virtue of their baptism; on the Eucharist, which "constitutes the criterion of ecclesial life as a whole" (O–C 2007, 3); and in the sacramental nature of the episcopate (see *LG* 21). Since "ecclesial communion, conciliarity and authority" are understood as the "ecclesiological and canonical consequences of the sacramental nature of the church" (see the title of the Ravenna Document), "institutional structures" of the Church should "visibly reflect the mystery of this *koinonia*" (O–C 2007, 3).

26. Even though there is one essential 'service of love', such a model of communion would be differently realised in East and West. With regard to the *Orthodox Churches*, with which the Catholic Church recognizes a common ecclesial order based on the apostolic tradition and the sacraments, this model might align closely with the often quoted principle that "Rome must not require more of the East than was formulated and lived during the first millennium".[16] The restoration of full communion, as Pope Francis has stated, "does not signify the submission of one to the other, or assimilation. Rather, it

[16] These words of Cardinal Ratzinger are cited in the *Response to Ut unum sint of the House of Bishops of the Church of England* (1997), see Study Document §91. Cardinal Ratzinger nuanced this idea further by saying that to neglect the developments of the second millennium would represent "a flight into the artificial which should be firmly resisted", J. Ratzinger, Anglican–Catholic Dialogue, *Insight*, 1 (1983), pp. 2–11, here p. 7; see Study Document §§ 109, 171.

means welcoming all the gifts that God has given to each, thus demonstrating to the entire world the great mystery of salvation accomplished by Christ the Lord through the Holy Spirit."[17] It implies the recognition of the right of the Eastern Churches to "govern themselves according to their discipline" (*UR* 16), in particular regarding the election of bishops. This model could include two responsibilities identified by the dialogues related to the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome: a specific role in Ecumenical councils (such as convening and presiding; see Study Document §106), and a role of mediation in case of conflicts of a disciplinary or doctrinal nature, through the synodal exercise of the procedure of appeal (as described for example by the Council of Sardica, 343; see Study Document §103, and also *UR* 14).

27. Some *Western Christian communions* also recognize the first millennium as a point of reference. Even if some fundamental ecclesiological issues remain to be resolved, such as apostolicity and ordained ministry, and the sacramental nature and ordering of the Church, many dialogues recognize the need for a primacy for the whole Church to promote Christian unity and mission. At the same time, they highlight the primacy of the Gospel and the necessity of a communal and collegial exercise of primacy. They also insist on the ecclesiological value of the regional level and on the principle of subsidiarity. These dialogues offer important insights and perspectives towards an acceptable exercise of a ministry of unity by the Bishop of Rome, a primacy of proclamation and witness (*kerigma-martyria*), which could be received by other Western Christians even before the restoration of full communion.

28. A renewed exercise of primacy must ultimately be modelled on *diakonia*. Authority and service are closely interrelated. Peter's role in strengthening the brethren (Luke 22:32) is a leadership of service grounded in the consciousness of his own weakness and sinfulness. The "primacy of service, ministration, and love" invoked by Pope Paul VI, the "service of love" proposed by Pope John Paul II, is a ministry of unity understood as that of a "*servus servorum Dei*" (*ES* 114; *UUS* 88 citing Pope Gregory the Great). This ministry is inextricably bound up with the self-emptying and self- sacrifice of Christ undergone precisely so "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). Primacy should

[17] Pope Francis, *Address during the Divine Liturgy*, Patriarchal Church of St George, Istanbul, 30 November 2014.

therefore be rooted in the mystery of the Cross and modelled on the kenotic example of Christ.

UNITY, A GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

29. Spiritual ecumenism is the soul of the ecumenical movement (*UR* 8). An important dimension of spiritual ecumenism are pilgrimages, which have played "a significant role in promoting communion and communication among believers of our churches" (OO–C 2009, 68). Many Christians from different traditions come in pilgrimage to Rome to visit the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Such a shared devotion is already a powerful expression of the bonds of communion rooted in the apostolic faith. As custodian of these holy places, the Church of Rome has a specific responsibility in welcoming these pilgrims from other Christian communions and supporting their prayer and devotion. In an ecumenical spirit, provision for them, such as dedicated chapels, could serve as a spiritual foundation in the search for unity.

30. One of the basic intuitions of the ecumenical movement is that the unity for which Christians long will not be primarily the fruit of their own efforts, nor will it be realized through any preconceived model or blueprint. Rather, unity will be a gift received "as Christ wills and by the means that he wills" (Prayer for unity of Father Paul Couturier), by the work of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the proposals harvested from ecumenical dialogues and from responses to the encyclical *Ut unum sint* may serve as signposts for the Churches, in confidence that the Holy Spirit is at work illuminating the way towards an acceptable ministry of unity for the communion of the Churches as Christ wills. As Pope Francis has said: "Unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather, unity comes about in journeying; the Holy Spirit does this on the journey. If we do not walk together, if we do not pray for one another, if we do not collaborate in the many ways that we can in this world for the People of God, then unity will not come about! But it will happen on this journey, in each step we take. And it is not we who are doing this, but rather the Holy Spirit, who sees our goodwill."[18]

[18] Pope Francis, *Homily for the Vespers on the Solemnity of the Conversion of Saint Paul the Apostle*, 25 January 2014.

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2. BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL DIALOGUES

2.1. BILATERAL DIALOGUES (IN ALPHABETIC ORDER)

Anglican–Catholic Dialogue

– Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission

- *Authority in the Church* (1976)

- *Authority in the Church: Elucidation* (1981)
- *Authority in the Church II* (1981)
- *The Gift of Authority* (1998)
- *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to be Church – Local, Regional, Universal* (2018)

— Anglican–Roman Catholic Consultation in England

- *Some Notes on Indefectibility and Infallibility* (1974)

— Anglican–Roman Catholic Dialogue in Canada

- *Agreed Statement on Infallibility* (1992)
- *Reply to the Vatican Response to the Final Report of ARCIC* (1993)
- *A Response to The Gift of Authority* (2003)

— Anglican–Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States of America

- *Agreed Report on the Local/Universal Church* (1999)
- *Response to The Gift of Authority* (2003)

— International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission (IARCCUM)

- *Statement: Communion and Mission* (2000)
- *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* (2007)

Baptist–Catholic Dialogue

— International Conversations between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance

- *The Word of God in the Life of the Church* (2010)

Disciples of Christ–Catholic Dialogue

— International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Catholic Church

- *The Church as Communion in Christ* (1992)

Evangelical–Catholic Consultations

— International Consultation Between the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance

- *Church, Evangelization and the Bonds of koinonia* (2002)

Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue

— International Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity

- *The Gospel and the Church ("Malta Report")* (1972)
- *The Ministry in the Church* (1981)

– Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia
  - *The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church* (2007)
  - *The Petrine Ministry in a New Situation* (2016)
– Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States of America
  - *Differing Attitudes Toward Papal Primacy* (1973)
  - *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church* (1978)
  - *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries* (2004)
– Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops – Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
  - *Declaration on the Way. Church, Ministry, and Eucharist (2015)*
– Bilateral Working Group between the German Bishops' Conference and the Church Council of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany
  - *Communio Sanctorum. The Church as the Communion of Saints* (2000)
– Swedish Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue
  - *The Office of Bishop* (1988)
– Roman Catholic Lutheran Dialogue Group for Sweden and Finland
  - *Justification in the Life of the Church* (2009)
– Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Commission for Finland
  - *Communion in Growth. Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry* (2017)
– Groupe des Dombes
  - *The Ministry of Communion in the Universal Church* (1985)
  - *One Teacher: Doctrinal Authority in the Church* (2014)
– Farfa Sabina Working Group on the Petrine Ministry
  - *Communion of Churches and Petrine Ministry: Lutheran–Catholic Convergences* (2009)

Mennonite–Catholic Dialogue

- International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference
  - *Called Together to be Peacemakers* (2003)

Methodist–Catholic Dialogue

- Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission
  - *Towards a Statement on the Church* (1986)
  - *God in Christ Reconciling* (2022)

Old Catholic–Catholic Dialogue

- International Roman Catholic–Old Catholic Dialogue Commission (Union of Utrecht)
  - *Kirche und Kirchengemeinschaft. Erster* und Zweiter Bericht der Internationalen Römisch–Katholisch – Altkatholischen Dialogkommission 2009 und 2016*, Paderborn, 2017

    *English translation: *The Church and Ecclesial Communion* (2009)
- Roman Catholic–Polish National Catholic Dialogue in the United States
  - *Joint Declaration on Unity* (2006)

Oriental Orthodox–Catholic Dialogue

- Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches
  - *Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church* (2009)
  - *The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion Today* (2015)
- Joint international commission between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church
  - *Principles for Guiding the Search for Unity between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church (*1979)
- Joint International Theological Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church
  - *Joint Statement regarding Episcopacy and Petrine Ministry* (2002)

Orthodox–Catholic Dialogue

- Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (as a whole)
  - *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity* (Munich, 1982)
  - *The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church with Particular Reference to the Importance of Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God* (Valamo, 1988)
  - *Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion* (Balamand, 1993)
  - *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority* (Ravenna, 2007)
  - *Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church* (Chieti, 2016)
  - *Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today* (Alexandria, 2023)
- North American Orthodox–Catholic Theological Consultation
  - *Apostolicity as God's Gift in the Life of the Church* (1986)
  - *An Agreed Statement on Conciliarity and Primacy in the Church (*1989)
  - *Steps Towards a Reunited Church: A Sketch of an Orthodox–Catholic Vision for the Future* (2010)
  - *A Common Response to the Ravenna Document on Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority* (2009)
  - *A Response to the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church Document Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church* (2017)
- Joint Committee for Catholic–Orthodox Theological Dialogue in France
  - *Roman Primacy in the Communion of Churches* (1991)
- Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox–Catholic Working Group

- *Serving Communion. Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality* (2018)

Pentecostal–Catholic Dialogue

– International Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders
  - *Perspectives on koinonia (*1989)

Reformed–Catholic Dialogue

– International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches
  - *The Presence of Christ in Church and World* (1977)
  - *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (1990)

2.2. MULTILATERAL DIALOGUES

– Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church
  - *The Church: local and universal* (1990)

– Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches
  - *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* ("Lima Report", 1982)
  - *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005)
  - *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013)

ABBREVIATIONS

ARCIC	Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission
1976	*Authority in the Church* (1976)
1981 *Eluc*	*Authority in the Church: Elucidation* (1981)
1981	*Authority in the Church II* (1981)
1999	*The Gift of Authority* (1999)
2018	*Walking Together on the Way: Learning to be Church – Local, Regional, Universal* (2018)
ARC Canada	Anglican–Roman Catholic Dialogue in Canada
ARC-USA 1999	Anglican–Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States of America, *Agreed Report on the Local/ Universal Church* (1999)
Communionis notio	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, 1992
DPCU	Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity
Dombes	*Groupe des Dombes*
1985	*The Ministry of Communion in the Universal Church* (1985)
2014	*One Teacher: Doctrinal Authority in the Church* (2014)
DH	Denzinger, Heinrich. *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*. 40th ed. Edited by Peter Hünermann. Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 2005
DV	Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei verbum* on Divine Revelation (1965)
EC	Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* (2018)
EG	Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013)
ES	Pope Paul VI, Encyclical on the Church *Ecclesiam suam* (1964)
Farfa 2009	Farfa Sabina Working Group on the Petrine Ministry, *Communion of Churches and Petrine Ministry: Lutheran–Catholic Convergencies* (2009)
FO	Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches
1982 *BEM*	*Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* ("Lima Report", 1982)

2005	*The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005)
2013 *TCTCV*	*The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013)
IARCCUM 2007	International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission, *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* (2007)
ITC 2018	International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and the Mission of the Church* (2018)
JWG 1990	Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, *The Church: local and universal* (1990)
L–C	International Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity
1972	*The Gospel and the Church* ("Malta Report") (1972)
1981	*The Ministry in the Church* (1981)
L–C Aus	Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia
2007	*The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church* (2007)
2016	*The Petrine Ministry in a New Situation*
L–C Fin 2017	Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue Commission for Finland, *Communion in Growth. Declaration on the Church, Eucharist, and Ministry* (2017)
L–C Germ 2000	Bilateral Working Group between the German Bishops' Conference and the Church Council of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, *Communio Sanctorum. The Church as the Communion of Saints* (2000)
L–C US	Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States
1973	*Differing Attitudes Toward Papal Primacy* (1973)
1978	*Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church* (1978)
2004	*The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries* (2004)
2015	*Declaration on the Way. Church, Ministry, and Eucharist* (2015) (Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops – Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)
LG	Ecumenical Council Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (1964)
MERCIC 1986	Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission, *Towards a Statement on the Church* (1986)

O–C	Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church
1988	*The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church with Particular Reference to the Importance of Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God* (Valamo, 1988)
1993	*Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion* (Balamand, 1993)
2007	*Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority* (Ravenna, 2007)
2016	*Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church* (Chieti, 2016)
2023	*Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today* (Alexandria, 2023)
O–C Fr 1991	Joint Committee for Catholic–Orthodox Theological Dialogue in France, *Roman Primacy in the Communion of Churches* (1991)
O–C US	North American Orthodox–Catholic Theological Consultation
1986	*Apostolicity as God's Gift in the Life of the Church* (1986) 1989 *An Agreed Statement on Conciliarity and Primacy in the Church* (1989)
2010	*Steps towards a Reunited Church: A Sketch of an Orthodox–Catholic Vision for the Future* (2010)
2009	*A Common Response to the Ravenna Document on Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority* (2009)
2017	*A Response to the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church Document 'Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church'* (2017)
OC–C 2009	International Roman Catholic–Old Catholic Dialogue Commission, *The Church and Ecclesial Communion* (2009)
OO–C	Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches
2009	*Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church* (2009)

2015	*The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion Today* (2015)
PA	Ecumenical Council Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor æternus* (1870)
PCPCU	Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity R–C International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches
1977	*The Presence of Christ in Church and World* (1977)
1990	*Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (1990)
St Irenaeus 2018	Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox–Catholic Working Group, *Serving Communion. Re-thinking the Relationship between Primacy and Synodality* (2018)
UR	Ecumenical Council Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* (1964)
UUS	John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on Commitment on Ecumenism *Ut unum sint* (1995)