

the liturgical prayers and acclamations of the people, for example the Glory to God in the Highest, and the response to “The Lord be with You” are no longer shared by the churches. Unfortunately, such distancing from the prayers of our brother and sister Christians is a sign of the increasing desire for the more defined ecclesial identity mentioned previously.

### Conclusion

We have seen that the liturgical and sacramental fortunes of ecumenism have indeed been a mixed bag since the publication of *Ut Unum Sint* in 1995. They mirror the fate of the ecumenical movement as a whole, but they are of particular significance since they deeply affect the practical religious experience of Christians. One can only hope that setbacks like those recounted previously will be reversed in the future, especially inspired by the new openness signaled by Pope Francis. After all, spring follows winter.

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### IV. Reasons for Hope

A tempting response to this question is: how has it *not* changed during those years? The previous quarter century was a profoundly significant period for the ecumenical movement. The movement achieved remarkable breakthroughs on historically church-dividing issues, confronted the emergence of new church-dividing issues, fostered an exchange of gifts to help churches overcome their divisions (old and new), and deepened the churches' commitment to ecumenism, making the ecumenical movement a prophetic sign for our time. I will consider each of these points in turn. First, a word on the significance of *Ut Unum Sint* (*UUS*) itself.

When a pope invites Christians of other churches to engage with him in fraternal dialogue on papal primacy, that is indeed significant. The true significance of *UUS*, however, lies in what John Paul II understood as having demanded that invitation, that is, the ecumenical movement as an experience of Christ's call to conversion.

We Christians are divided by more than doctrinal disagreements. Our divisions are also the fruit of the sins we have committed against one another as

members of Christ's Body. It was for this reason that John Paul II stated that there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without conversion.<sup>49</sup> For it is only when we heed Christ's call to repentance that we are able to recognize Him in one another, nourishing lives of genuine holiness within the integrity of our churches and being reconciled as sisters and brothers in Him. This is a graced process that the Spirit affects in us, in fulfillment of Christ's great prayer: "that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21 NAB).

Conversion is the heart of the ecumenical movement. For that reason, no topic is off the proverbial table—not even, for Roman Catholics, papal primacy. To understand what the ecumenical movement has experienced since *UUS* was published, therefore, we must read its experiences in that light. A clear place to begin is with what the movement has achieved.

The achievements of the past quarter century were certainly a harvesting of fruits decades in the making. The decrees of full communion between churches of the Reformation tradition are noteworthy examples. So, too, are the *Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith* and the statements on papal primacy produced by both the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church and the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). In these achievements, breakthroughs occurred that no one could have anticipated twenty-five years earlier. The *Joint Declaration*, the fruit of decades of dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, was later adopted by the World Methodist Council and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. There was also the remarkable consensus reached by ARCIC on papal primacy in *The Gift of Authority*.<sup>50</sup>

Much has rightly been said about the Joint International Commission's dialogue on papal primacy. With due respect to those achievements, the depth of consensus that ARCIC reached on this historically contentious issue led it to propose that a universal primacy by the Roman pontiff "could be offered and received even before our churches are in full communion" as "an effective sign for all Christians as to how this gift of God builds up that unity for which Christ prayed" (§60). When making that proposal, ARCIC

<sup>49</sup> See John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (May 25, 1995), [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html), §15, citing the Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §7.

<sup>50</sup> The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Gift of Authority*, September 3, 1998, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_12051999\\_gift-of-authority\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_12051999_gift-of-authority_en.html).

was not blind to the challenges that Anglicans *and* Catholics would face to “re-receive” this gift together. As its most recent statement, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal*, witnesses, ARCIC remains clear-sighted.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of whether its proposal is accepted precisely as proffered, ARCIC’s breakthrough on papal primacy demonstrates how remarkable the results can be when we listen to Christ speaking to us through one another’s lives of faith.

Although the ecumenical movement has achieved remarkable breakthroughs on issues once considered irredeemably church-dividing, it has also had to confront the emergence of new church-dividing issues, the most glaring being the ordination of women and same-sex marriage. These issues have not only affected relationships between churches already separated. They have also strained relationships among members of the same churches. The churches of the Anglican Communion, for example, occasionally describe theirs as a state of “impaired communion.” The United Methodist Church is prepared to vote on whether to divide into separate denominations. True, neither of the above-named issues is new *per se*, but their effects on the ecumenical movement in recent years have been jarring. What might we make of it all?

There are several tempting replies. One that I have heard interprets these crises in church unity as instances of neo-tribalism. Although insights from the social sciences can be of great assistance to the ecumenical movement, following upon *UUS* I interpret this moment differently. What we are witnessing is *our* sisters and brothers grappling with difficult issues by the light by which they best understand the demands of Christian faith, that is, the light of their own church traditions. Has not (does not) every church do the same? Their struggles should elicit charity from every Christian, for the issues they are confronting are not theirs alone. They necessarily belong to all Christians as members of Christ’s Body.<sup>52</sup> How might the ecumenical movement encourage the churches to confront these challenges together, with patience and in charity, seeking only what Christ would have us do as His Body—His Church? In confronting this question, the ecumenical movement is not without gifts.

As John Paul II noted in *UUS*, ecumenical dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. It is always an “exchange of gifts,”<sup>53</sup> hence the rise of

<sup>51</sup> See “The Third Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission,” *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal*, 2017, <https://iarccum.org/doc/?d=721>.

<sup>52</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.

<sup>53</sup> See *Ut Unum Sint*, §28, citing the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, §13.

“receptive ecumenism.” In this approach to dialogue, what a church proposes as a gift from its own tradition is fundamentally understood to be a gift of the Spirit to all churches. Through dialogue, churches come to a clearer understanding of each gift’s nature and purpose for their common life and mission as one church of Jesus Christ—hence ARCIC having spoken of Catholics *re-receiving* the gift of the papal primacy. Churches never lose the gifts they offer. They receive those same gifts back purified and renewed for the purpose for which the Spirit has given them. An example of such a gift is *synodality*.

Pope Francis has recently been giving the Catholic Church a crash course in synodality. It was a guiding principle of the previous two synods of bishops and will be the topic of the next synod. The International Theological Commission has defined synodality as “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly, and take an active part in her evangelizing mission.”<sup>54</sup> Then, it had been on the basis of synodality that ARCIC reached its consensus on the gift of papal primacy,<sup>55</sup> and synodality had also been a topic of the Joint International Commission’s work.<sup>56</sup> Although it may seem novel to some Catholics, synodality has been a principle of the church’s life from its earliest years. Synodality is a heritage of all the churches. It is a gift of the Spirit—historically precious to some churches, newly rediscovered by others—that through dialogue is challenging all churches to renew their journeys of faith. Might a common re-reception of this gift by all the churches help them to overcome their divisions (old and new) and renew the unity that is already theirs in Christ?<sup>57</sup> It is a hope. As gifts are for the building up of Christ’s Body (see Eph 4:12), I believe it a hope that is sure.

At a special celebration of the Eucharist in All Saints Anglican Church in Rome, held after Benedict XVI’s installation as Bishop of Rome, Rowan Williams preached on ecumenism as a road with no exit whose sole end is

<sup>54</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, March 2, 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_synodalita\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_synodalita_en.html), §6.

<sup>55</sup> See the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Gift of Authority*, §34 and §60.

<sup>56</sup> Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church*, September 21, 2016, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/ch\\_orthodox\\_docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20160921\\_synodality-primacy\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/ch_orthodox_docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20160921_synodality-primacy_en.html).

<sup>57</sup> See *Ut Unum Sint*, §13.

Christ.<sup>58</sup> The ecumenical movement has experienced remarkable achievements in the twenty-five years since *UUS* was published. It has also experienced jarring crises. Through it all, the One who calls us to realize the unity we already have in Him has never left us bereft of hope. It is this hope that has deepened the churches' commitment to ecumenism and made the ecumenical movement itself a prophetic sign for our time.

It is a sin against charity not to acknowledge the goodness that fills our world. It is equally a sin not to see clearly the darkness that always threatens to cover it. That darkness has, indeed, been grim. The past quarter century has seen a resurgence (at times most violent) of nativism and neo-tribalism, the globalization of a culture of death, and an existential sense that the ties that once bound the community of nations are beginning to unravel—quickly and irreversibly. In the face of such darkness, the ecumenical movement is, indeed, a prophetic sign of what God will do if we allow our hearts and minds to be converted and begin to live anew the life that God's Son is, even now, living in us.

What does this prophetic sign look like? It looks like Pope John Paul II opening holy doors to celebrate the third Christian millennium, Orthodox and Anglican leaders at his side. It looks like Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew, together with Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, planting an olive tree as an expression of their commitment to peace. It looks like ecumenical commissions meeting and like Christians of all churches working together to defend the human rights of people whom the proverbial powers that be deem disposable. And it looks like this not in spite of all that divides our churches, but because of our common hope that the One who unites us as members of His Body will enable us to realize this unity, as He Himself prayed: "that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21).

How has the ecumenical movement changed in the twenty-five years since *Ut Unum Sint* was written? Indeed, how has it *not* changed? The breakthroughs it has achieved have introduced churches to possibilities none of them had imagined twenty-five years earlier. The emergence of new church-dividing issues has caused churches to recommit themselves to unity, to embrace those issues as their own, and to receive anew every gift of the Spirit for the sake of building up the Body of Christ in all His members. In this deepening of the churches' commitment to ecumenism, the Spirit has made the ecumenical movement itself a prophetic sign for our time—a clarion call for people of all faiths (and none!) to turn their

<sup>58</sup> This is my recollection of the sermon.

backs on demonization and sectarianism and to walk together with hope into the future that God is already opening before them. As we celebrate this twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ut Unum Sint*, therefore, may we never lose sight of that hope as we continue this journey of conversion to renewed life.

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