

Article

Theological Intersections: Newman's 'Primacy of God' in Modern Church Discourse

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Abstract: This article critically examines the Catholic–Anglican theological dialogue, centering on John Henry Newman's 'Primacy of God', Catholic synodality, and Anglican comprehensiveness. It illuminates the interconnectedness of these elements, revealing their potential to enhance ecumenical conversations. Newman's concept of communal faith and divine primacy resonates across both traditions, advocating a transformative, experiential spiritual journey. This study juxtaposes Newman's stance on ecclesiastical authority and doctrinal development with contemporary synodal movements in the Catholic Church, paralleled by Anglican practices like the Lambeth Conferences. This comparison underscores a mutual commitment to participatory governance and theological inclusivity. Ultimately, the study envisions a unified Christian theology, fostering dialogue enriched by diverse traditions and promoting a harmonious convergence within the Christian theological spectrum.

Keywords: John Henry Newman; ecumenism; synodality; Anglican Communion; Lambeth Conference; comprehensiveness; Synod of Bishops; Der Synodale Weg

1. Introduction

In the realm of theological discourse, the exploration of diverse perspectives has been a perennial pursuit, seeking to unravel the rich tapestry of beliefs that define Christian traditions. This article embarks on a profound journey, delving into the intricacies of Catholic–Anglican dialogue through a meticulous examination of theological perspectives. With a specific focus on John Henry Newman's concept of the 'Primacy of God', synodality within the Catholic Church, and the idea of comprehensiveness inherent in Anglicanism, this study aims to illuminate the interconnections between these theological elements. Newman highlighted the idea of community as a fundamental aspect of religious life. His approach to the primacy of God influenced his understanding of the unity of the faithful within the Church.

In the spirit of promoting unity across Christian traditions, this study aims to highlight the distinctive contributions of each theological perspective. It also endeavors to identify common ground, a shared foundation that can serve as a launching pad for meaningful ecumenical conversations. The proposed approach to theological dialogue, inspired by Newman's emphasis on vibrant faith and the Catholic Church's model of synodality, envisions a synergy that transcends theological boundaries.

In conclusion, this article aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue between Catholicism and Anglicanism by drawing inspiration from the nuanced insights provided by the synodal practices of both denominations. This study explores the concepts of the 'Primacy of God', synodality, and comprehensiveness within various theological contexts. It aims to foster a deeper understanding of shared elements that can bridge these Christian traditions. Ultimately, this approach leads to a more unified future within the diverse landscape of Christian theology.

2. John Henry Newman's 'Primacy of God'

As Hermann Geissler FSO aptly notes in his article entitled *The Primacy of God in the Life and Writings of Blessed John Henry Newman* (Geissler 2011), the legacy of J.H. Newman



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stands as a testament to the dynamic nature of theological exploration. Newman, a figure of profound influence in the Catholic tradition, neither subscribed to nor aspired to become a scholastic theologian. In one of his letters, he wrote: "I like going on my own way, and having my time my own, living without pomp or state, or pressing engagements. Put me into official garb, and I am worth nothing; leave me to myself, and every now and then I shall do something. Dress me up, and you will soon have to make my shroud—leave me alone, and I shall live the appointed time" (Newman 1973, p. 213). His theological stance was characterized by a rejection of rigid conceptual patterns and a preference for an individual, experiential journey towards God. This article draws inspiration from Geissler's insights into Newman's theology, aiming to integrate them into a broader exploration of theological unity.

The central theme of Newman's theological contributions revolved around the 'Primacy of God'. In a world marked by diverse opinions and shifting philosophical landscapes, Newman saw the theologian as one who engages in a personal dialogue with the Creator. This dialogue, according to Newman, extends beyond abstract reasoning and involves a continuous seeking of God: "The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth, of which my whole being is so full; and the effect upon me is, in consequence, as a matter of necessity, as confusing as if it denied that I am in existence myself. If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me, when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflexion of its Creator. This is, to me, one of those great difficulties of this absolute primary truth, to which I referred just now. Were it not for this voice, speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist when I looked into the world" (Newman 1908, p. 241). The Newman's perspective acknowledges the theologian's role as an expert of God, delving into a personal communion with the Trinity through both conscience and the incarnate Son present in the Church, as Benedict XVI said in 2006 (Warsaw, Poland): "that they be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God. The priest is not asked to be an expert in economics, construction or politics. He is expected to be an expert in the spiritual life" (Benedict XVI 2006).

Such a conceptualization of priesthood was not unfamiliar to J.H. Newman. He advocated for a theology that transcends the realm of cold ideas and becomes a transformative force in individuals' lives. His emphasis on faith as a dynamic, life-enriching reality resonates with the ongoing efforts to foster unity between Catholicism and Anglicanism. The article draws upon 'Primacy of God' insights to underscore the relevance of Newman's theology in contemporary ecumenical dialogue, emphasizing the need for theological perspectives that extend beyond mere intellectualism.

Notably, his considered approach to the role of the mind, assent, and the logic of the process enabled J.H. Newman to adopt a broad perspective on the issue of the continuity of Christian doctrine. Consequently, Newman's ecclesiology focuses on expressing the Church's identity over time. "All such views of Christianity imply that there is no sufficient body of historical proof to interfere with, or at least to prevail against, any number whatever of free and independent hypotheses concerning it. But this, surely, is not self-evident, and has itself to be proved. Till positive reasons grounded on facts are adduced to the contrary, the most natural hypotheses, the most agreeable to our mode of proceeding in parallel cases, and that which takes precedence of all others, is to consider that the society of Christians, which the Apostles left on earth, were of that religion to which the Apostles had converted them; that the external continuity of name, profession, and communion, argues a real continuity of doctrine; that, as Christianity began by manifesting itself as of a certain shape and bearing to all mankind, therefore it went on so to manifest itself; and that the more, considering that prophecy had already determined that it was to be a power visible in the world and sovereign over it, characters which are accurately fulfilled in that historical Christianity to which we commonly give the name. It is not a violent assumption, then, but rather mere abstinence from the wanton admission of a principle which would necessarily lead to the most vexatious and preposterous scepticism, to take it for granted, before proof

to the contrary, that the Christianity of the second, fourth, seventh, twelfth, sixteenth, and intermediate centuries is in its substance the very religion which Christ and His Apostles taught in the first, whatever may be the modifications for good or for evil which lapse of years, or the vicissitudes of human affairs, have impressed upon it" (Newman 1909, p. 5).

In this spirit, Newman draws upon the patristic testimonies of the early centuries of Christianity. The British theologian justified the continuity of the Church of England with the early Church and formulated principles that validated his views. He did not deny the Church of England's participation in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, but highlighted differences in ecclesiastical authority and doctrinal development between Anglicanism and Catholicism. During Newman's time, intra-Anglican issues centered on the role of the papacy in the Church of England, emancipatory movements among Catholics, and declining religious interest among secular individuals and clergy.

In response to these issues, the Oxford Movement sought answers in the Apostolic Tradition and the writings of the Fathers of the Church. The questions about authority and the development of church doctrine remained relevant for Anglicans. To address these questions and preserve the Via Media theory, Newman formulated three core principles: the dogmatic, sacramental, and episcopal principles. The dogmatic principle emphasized accepting fundamental dogmas of faith common to Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Anglicanism. It resisted theological liberalism while allowing for the development of faith truths over time. The sacramental principle viewed the visible Church as the guardian of sacraments, channels of invisible grace. "For Newman, the sacramental principle is not only an inference that is made from the *doctrine* of the incarnation. The realities that exemplify the principle are, in fact, made possible exclusively by the *event* of the incarnation" (Clem 2021, p. 47). Newman based this on the Bible, the early Church's doctrine, and the Church of England, emphasizing baptism and the Eucharist as fundamental to participation in the Church's life. The episcopal principle described the Church's hierarchy, with bishops, priests, and deacons administering sacraments and overseeing church obligations. Bishops played a significant role as the shepherds of local Churches, successors of the Apostles, and Vicars of Christ. "Therefore, the dogmatic and sacramental principles are tied together in Newman's thought, which sees the very events of salvation history revealing their operation in the real life of the developing church. Even when doctrinal developments appear difficult to reconcile in terms of continuity with past utterances or views of the church, Newman affirms that such elaborations are preserving the underlying principles and thus maintaining the continuity of the faith and Christian system" (Cimorelli 2021). Newman upheld these principles as both an Anglican and a Catholic. Although he initially opposed Roman Catholicism, he eventually embraced it, as explained in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (Newman 1908, pp. 49–51). In his works such as *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, John Henry presented arguments attempting to capture the depth and significance of God's primacy in "daily Christian life" (Newman 1909, p. 400).

Simultaneously, Newman did not restrict the manifestations of this broadly understood activity of the baptized individual. Newman viewed the Church as both human and divine, existing within a universal plan of salvation. It invited individuals into a relationship with God, emphasizing the role of conscience with Newman's the very known sentence: "Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts, (which indeed does not seem quite the thing) I shall drink—to the Pope, if you please,—still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards" (Newman 1900, p. 261). His perspective on the Church gained universal significance amidst 19th-century cultural and economic transformations. He countered Anglican tendencies to emphasize nationality over participation in the Church of Christ.

Newman was aware that social tensions inevitably impact the community of believers. In this regard, he was far from developing 'principles of everything'. The idea of Christianity is too vast to be entirely dogmatized, and as originating from God, it continues to be an ever-unfolding mystery. Throughout the ages, it gradually reveals itself and calls for human cooperation. This continuous interpretation of Revelation and God's plan for humanity, in

the context of the entire Christian concept, is termed ‘development’ by Newman (Newman 1909). He extends this concept to individual Christian beliefs within specific sub-doctrines (e.g., chronic vigor and sacraments, etc.), which are integral parts of the overall doctrine.

In the Newman’s concept of the development of Christian doctrine, oppositional stances, critical evaluations, heretical views, or even encounters with overt paganism are not regarded as threats to Christianity itself. Instead, he sees them as evangelistic opportunities to better communicate the deposit of faith to those who hold such antagonistic views and to foster a deeper understanding of one’s own doctrine, thereby enabling a more profound experience of the professed faith.

Newman’s approach was closely tied to his personal inquisitiveness and his quest for principles that would maintain the continuity and identity of the Church of England with the Church of the early centuries. The identity of the Church is not only evidenced by its divine origin, which has continued over the centuries and is confirmed by biblical testimonies, but also by the mutual connection of present teaching with the past. In this way, the contemporary Church community is a successor, representative, and heir of the Church of the apostolic era. To find the true Church, one can analyze its catholicity (universality). For this purpose, Newman seeks objective criteria that would determine whether a particular sub-doctrine of Christianity is a faithful and healthy development (as well as an integral part) or a distortion of Christianity, a perversion of the truth, and a deviation from the faith.

To achieve this, Newman presents a specific test that highlights the characteristics of an infallible development of Christian doctrine. He enumerates seven distinct characteristics. (Newman 1909, pp. 169–206). Therefore, as Newman himself explains, distortion does not occur when the following conditions are met collectively: “There is no corruption if it retains one and the same type, the same principles, the same organization; if its beginnings anticipate its subsequent phases, and its later phenomena protect and subserve its earlier; if it has a power of assimilation and revival, and a vigorous action from first to last” (Newman 1909, p. 171).

The above test shows that there are different forms of development. There is healthy development, which takes place, for example, in the face of adversity, and there is also development that distorts and destroys, like a tumor or cancer. Therefore, it is necessary to subject a given sub-doctrine to the criteria mentioned above in order to recognize where among Christian communities the true Church is found—one in which the identity of the idea persists, despite its changing forms. It was precisely this test of the development of doctrine that allowed Newman to articulate his carefully reconsidered arguments regarding the truth of the Roman Catholic Church and its identity with the Church of the early centuries, to which both Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism appealed.

3. Searching for Theological Perspectives

In this context, the synodal search for new theological perspectives is noteworthy, both within the Anglican and Catholic traditions. The modern Anglican community has a much longer tradition in this regard, based on the Lambeth Conferences in London, compared to the Catholic Church, which only recently engaged the laity in a manner similar to the Church of England, a practice that has been ongoing for decades. It could even be ventured to state that the Lambeth Conferences served as an inspiration for Pope Francis and the Roman Curia in the ongoing organization of the Synod on Synodality. This is a clear example of transferring positive models into Catholic practice from Christians of another denomination. One might say that this represents the realization of practical ecumenism, as outlined in the recent *Ecumenical Vademecum for Bishops* published in the Vatican in 2020 (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity 2020).

The ecumenical inspirations concerning the preservation of the integrity of Christian doctrine and the practice of Christian life should be considered as highly motivating for synodal efforts. The Catholic Church’s embrace of synodality, another focal point of this article, represents a significant aspect of contemporary theological discourse. Synodality,

as discussed both by Catholic General Assembly of the Synod and German ‘Der Synodale Weg’, embodies a collaborative and consultative approach within the Church, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and collective discernment. The implications of synodality in the Catholic Church seek to understand how this model of governance aligns with and contributes to the broader quest for Christian unity: “Synodality is a fundamental quality of the Church as a whole. As St John Chrysostom said: “‘Church’ means both gathering [*systema*] and synod [*synodos*]’. The term comes from the word ‘council’ (*synodos* in Greek, *concilium* in Latin), which primarily denotes a gathering of bishops, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for common deliberation and action in caring for the Church. Broadly, it refers to the active participation of all the faithful in the life and mission of the Church” (Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church 2016, no. 3).

The shared Orthodox and Catholic understanding of the essence of synodality opens up new perspectives for theological exploration. Among these is the opportunity for greater closeness—stronger ecumenical rapprochement with Anglicanism and its characteristic comprehensiveness, which adds another layer to the theological dialogue. Exploration of Newman’s views on the necessity of dialogue with modern thought resonates with the inclusive spirit of Anglicanism. The notion of comprehensiveness in Anglicanism and its potential may be a catalyst for fostering unity with the Catholic tradition, especially as synodal pursuits demand an effective and inclusive path.

Synodality in the Orthodox Churches is a fundamental element of their ecclesial structure, reflecting the collegial and communal nature of the Church. Its theological foundations lie in the Trinitarian understanding of unity in diversity, where the Holy Trinity, being the unity of three distinct yet indivisible persons, serves as a model for the ecclesial community. Synodality in Orthodoxy manifests through various ecclesiastical structures, such as local, regional, and ecumenical councils, with the historically significant seven Ecumenical Councils establishing doctrinal and practical foundations for the Church. Decisions are made in the spirit of conciliarity, meaning they result from collective discernment and consensus, ensuring that they reflect the mind of the Church and are accepted by the faithful. A key role in this process is played by the bishop as a unifying figure, who, in collaboration with clergy and laity, makes decisions aimed at the spiritual welfare of the community and the protection of the Church’s doctrine: “In the first millennium, the Orthodox Church has been synodal at all levels: parish, diocese, regional, and universal. Since then, Orthodoxy has become less synodal at the universal level, but, in varying degrees, increasingly conciliar at the other levels, with different levels of lay involvement. The present article focuses on the theme of synodality at the universal level by addressing briefly the criteria for considering a Council ecumenical, the distinction between consensus and unanimity, the involvement of the entire church in synodality through consultation and reception and, in greater detail, the need for an Eastern-type of universal primacy that would facilitate universal synodality” (Bordeianu 2022, pp. 84–85).

Indeed, Orthodox synodality is not limited to hierarchical structures, but encompasses the entire people of God, calling for the active participation of all Church members in decision-making processes. A significant contemporary manifestation of synodality was the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete in 2016, which aimed to express unity and consensus within the Church, although not all Orthodox Churches participated (Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church 2016). This Council addressed various contemporary issues, such as the Church’s mission in the modern world, the Orthodox diaspora, ecclesial autonomy, the significance of fasting, and relations with other Christian Churches. The preparatory process for the Council involved extensive consultations, pre-conciliar documents (*The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World; Autonomy and the Means by Which it is Proclaimed; The Orthodox Diaspora; The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today; and Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*), and collaboration among bishops, theologians, and representatives from various Orthodox Churches (*Pre-Conciliar Documents* 2016). Thus, synodality in Orthodoxy

is both a theological principle and a practical model of operation that enables the Orthodox Church to maintain the unity of faith while respecting cultural, historical, and regional diversity, connecting them with apostolic Tradition and the sacramental life of believers.

In this context, it is noteworthy that, on 19 September 2023, the last day of the 13th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Kraków (Poland), Cardinal Kurt Koch (Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity) and Reverend Dr Anne Burghardt (General Secretary of the LWF) presented a *Common Word of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican (DPCU)*. Both underlined the importance of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025, stating that the Nicene Creed “creates an ecumenical bond that has its centre in Christ” (*Common Word of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican (DPCU) (2023)*). Looking ahead to the 500th anniversary of the Confessio Augustana in 2030, the Common Word states: “At the time of its writing, ecclesial unity was probably endangered, but ecclesial separation was not yet finally accomplished. As a ‘pre-confessional’ witness to the unity of the church, the Augsburg Confession is therefore not only of historical interest; rather, it holds an ecumenical potential of lasting relevance. A common reflection could lead to another ‘milestone’ on the way from conflict to communion, comparable to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)” (*Common Word of the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican 2023*). These words from significant figures in the world of ecumenical relations highlight not only the seriousness and importance of the ongoing inter-confessional dialogues, but also, most importantly, their purposefulness to a broader audience.

3.1. Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church

For this reason, the bonds of unity between sister Churches necessitate tangible outcomes from the dialogues and ecumenical efforts undertaken. To appreciate this, it is worth examining more closely the findings of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church in the documents from Chieti (2016) and Alexandria (2023), which represent further steps towards seeking a common understanding of synodality in the service of Church unity.

As highlighted in the Chieti document, the “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. On the basis of this common heritage, both must consider how primacy, synodality, and the interrelatedness between them can be conceived and exercised today and in the future” (*Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church 2016*, no. 21). Although this is the conclusion of the entire document, its essence and significance are well captured in point 6, which elucidates the theological perspectives focusing on the need for a joint reflection on the history of the Church and its liturgical, spiritual, institutional, and canonical traditions. The following point underscores the importance of the historical communion and structures of the Church from the first millennium as an inspiration for contemporary efforts towards unity.

The theological perspectives also include the necessity of understanding and practicing primacy and synodality in a mutually interconnected and complementary manner, which is essential for restoring full communion between Catholics and Orthodox, as noted in points 20 and 21 of the Chieti document. Here, we also find what J. H. Newman spoke of years ago about the ‘Primacy of God’, which belongs to His Head—Jesus Christ, and whose understanding is rooted in Christian tradition. The Trinitarian character of the ‘Primacy of God’ and its timeless dimension resonate from the very beginning of the document, reminding us that: “The unity that exists among the Persons of the Trinity is reflected in the communion (*koinonia*) of the members of the Church with one another” (*Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox*

Church 2016, no. 1). Moreover, the very essence of synodality is discussed as a fundamental characteristic of the Church in point 3 of the Chieti document. This concept primarily denotes the gathering of bishops under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for “common deliberation and action” in service of the Church ([Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church 2016](#), no. 3). Synodality also pertains to the active participation of all the faithful in the life and mission of the Church. This understanding of synodality aligns with what will be further elaborated upon in this article regarding the Catholic Synod of Bishops dedicated to this very topic.

Also in the Alexandria Document, synodality is discussed as a fundamental element of the Church’s structure, both in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. This document repeatedly refers to this practice in both the East and the West, emphasizing its significance for unity and collegiality. Synodality is understood here as a decision-making process that involves the entire Church community, not just its hierarchy. Furthermore, the Alexandria Document vividly portrays the arduous journey of the Church throughout the second millennium, much more thoroughly than the Chieti Document, which highlights the ecumenical nature of the councils of the first millennium and recalls numerous painful episodes in the history of both the Eastern and Western “lungs of the Church” ([John Paul II 1995](#), no. 54). Section 3.10 of the Alexandria Document summarizes the teachings of the First Vatican Council on the papal primacy of jurisdiction over the entire Church and papal infallibility, which, at that time, was considered as unacceptable by the Orthodox Church. Ultramontane ecclesiology, for the Orthodox, represents “a serious departure from the canonical tradition of the Fathers and the ecumenical councils, because it obscures the catholicity of each local Church. In the wake of Vatican I, arguments deployed by the Orthodox included, among others: that the head of the whole Church is not a mortal, sinful man, but the sinless and immortal God-man Christ; that St Peter himself was not a monarch nor mighty, but first among the apostles; that the jurisdiction of each patriarch is geographically determined by the sacred canons, and that none has jurisdiction over the Church as a whole. On the specific matter of infallibility, 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. It must be admitted that these arguments were often invoked in a polemical way, and not in a historical-critical manner” ([Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church 2023](#), sec. 3.10).

One can notice similarities in the tone of the Alexandria Document to the writings of J.H. Newman, who warned against excessive apotheosis of the papal office. This English theologian from Oxford pointed out that the infallibility of Christian doctrine derives not so much from *ex cathedra* declarations, but from the *sensus fidei* of the faithful throughout the Church regarding a particular truth of faith, exemplified by the world troubled by Arianism, in which the deposit of faith was preserved by a numerically few. Newman wrote in *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*: “the body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine, and because their consensus through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church” ([Newman 1859](#), p. 205).

Where, then, are the prospects for further ecumenical exploration based on the framework of the *Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church*? These are points of convergence, but also a kind of protocol of divergences. In the Chieti Document, what unites is particularly evident in points 1, 2, 7, 20, and 21: it is this common heritage of theological principles, canonical provisions, and liturgical practices from the first millennium that constitutes a significant point of reference and inspiration for both Catholics and Orthodox in their efforts to heal ongoing divisions. On the other hand, the agreements from the Alexandria Document highlight theological perspectives by emphasizing the need for a return to the sources (*ressourcement*) and the renewal of eucharistic ecclesiology. It underscores the importance of communion (*communio*) and collegiality in the Church, and the necessity of developing new forms of synodality

that respect both tradition and the contemporary needs of the Church, while also indicating the need for continued theological dialogue to overcome historical divisions.

3.2. Between 'The Synod on Synodality' and 'The German Synodal Way'

To better comprehend the significance of synodality within the ecumenical context, it is essential to consider how various Christian traditions implement this concept. The Chieti and Alexandria documents, developed by the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, emphasize the shared theological, canonical, and liturgical heritage of the first millennium, which serves as an inspiration for contemporary efforts towards unity. Specifically, the Alexandria document highlights the need for a return to the sources and the renewal of eucharistic ecclesiology, which can serve as an example for other ecclesial traditions, including Anglicanism. Consequently, synodality within the Catholic tradition, particularly in the context of current initiatives such as the Synod on Synodality, becomes a crucial element in the pursuit of Christian unity. It is also important to consider the German Synodal Way, which, despite its controversies, exemplifies striving for greater participation and inclusivity in the Church's decision-making processes.

3.2.1. The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

The announcement of the Synod on Synodality, particularly its inclusive approach to laity by granting them voting rights alongside the Catholic Church hierarchy, sparked significant controversy. This development has been met with resistance and accusations of undermining the traditional clerical decision-making authority. This resistance, including from some bishops, represents an anti-synodal sentiment, a point Pope Francis addressed in his homily marking the next phase of the synodal work. On 10 October 2021, Pope Francis officially launched the 2021–2023 Synod on Synodality with an opening Mass in St Peter's Basilica. "This welcoming gaze of Jesus also invites us to be a welcoming Church, not one with closed doors. In such a complex time as ours, new cultural and pastoral challenges emerge that call for a warm and kindly inner attitude so that we can encounter each other without fear. In synodal dialogue, in this beautiful 'journey in the Holy Spirit' that we are making together as the People of God, we can grow in unity and friendship with the Lord in order to look at today's challenges with his gaze; to become, using a fine expression of Saint Paul VI, a Church that 'makes itself a conversation' (Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 65)" (Francis 2023).

The Synod on Synodality, initiated by Pope Francis, is envisioned as a transformative process in the Catholic Church, transcending beyond mere document creation. Its aim is to foster a synodal church characterized by "communion, participation, and mission" (Holy See Press Office 2021). Historically, synods were periodic, Pope-invited bishop assemblies discussing key faith and doctrinal issues. The 16th Ordinary Assembly, starting October 2021, marks a paradigm shift: from event to process, emphasizing synodality—a discernment process guided by the Holy Spirit, involving clergy, religious, and laity. This extensive three-year journey, concluding in 2023, progresses through diocesan, continental, and universal phases, starting with diocesan consultations from October 2021 to April 2022.

The concept of a synodal Church, as articulated by Pope Francis, encapsulates communion, participation, and mission, aligning with the dynamic journey of the People of God. The Pope drew upon the narrative of the rich man in Mark 10:17–24 to illustrate the essence of the synodal process, emphasizing three key actions: encounter, listening, and discernment. These actions are integral to the Synod's approach, involving deep engagement with God and each other, devoted time for prayer, adoration, understanding, and embracing the diverse gifts within the Church community.

The main effect of Synod on synodality—*Synthesis Report* (published in 2023, October) is a comprehensive analysis of the Catholic Church's synodal journey, emphasizing its mission-oriented nature. It outlines the Church's synodal face, missionary discipleship, and community-building strategies. The report highlights key themes such as synodality's

practice and understanding, the role of women in Church life, and the Church's digital mission. It addresses the participation of laypeople and clergy in a synodal Church and delves into the intricacies of ecclesial communion, discernment, and ecumenism: "Ecumenism is first and foremost a matter of spiritual renewal that also requires processes for repentance and healing of memory. The Assembly was moved to hear testimonies of Christians of different ecclesial traditions who share friendship, prayer and above all a commitment to the service of those experiencing poverty. Dedication to the least of these cements bonds and helps us focus on what already unites all believers in Christ. Therefore, it is important that ecumenism is practised first and foremost in daily life. In theological and institutional dialogue, the patient weaving of mutual understanding continues in an atmosphere of growing trust and openness" (XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2023, p. 16). The document also explores the Church's interaction with diverse cultures and religions, underscoring the need for deeper theological reflection, pastoral adaptation, and open dialogue.

The *Synthesis Report* delves into the themes of ecumenism and dialogue with other religions, presenting two major aspects: convergences and proposals. A section of the report about convergences acknowledges the shared values and beliefs that exist between the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations, as well as with non-Christian religions. It emphasizes the common ground found in ethical teachings, spiritual insights, and the universal quest for truth and meaning. Moreover, the report highlights the significance of recognizing these convergences as a foundation for deeper dialogue and cooperation in addressing global challenges and promoting mutual understanding and respect among different faith communities.

The second part points out proposals which suggest practical steps to enhance inter-religious and ecumenical engagement. It proposes initiatives such as joint humanitarian projects, inter-religious dialogues, and educational programs to foster mutual respect and understanding. The report advocates for creating spaces for shared worship and reflection, encouraging exchanges between different religious leaders and communities. It stresses the importance of these actions in breaking down barriers of misunderstanding and prejudice, and in building a more inclusive and harmonious society. These elements underscore the Church's commitment to ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue as vital components of its mission in the contemporary world.

"It was also proposed that we might devise an ecumenical martyrology" (XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2023, p. 18). This proposition was actualized when Pope Francis, acceding to the entreaty of Orthodox Patriarch Tawahedo II, incorporated into the Roman Martyrology 21 Coptic martyrs. Francis had previously anticipated this in his remarks: "Just as in the early Church the shedding of the blood of martyrs became the seed of new Christians, so today the blood of the many martyrs of all the Churches has become the seed of Christian unity. The martyrs and saints of all the ecclesial traditions are already one in Christ. Their names are inscribed in the one martyrologium of the Church of God. The ecumenism of the martyrs is a summons to us, here and now, to advance on the path to ever greater unity. [. . .] Let us pray for one another, invoking the protection of the martyrs and saints upon all the faithful entrusted to our pastoral care" (Francis 2016).

3.2.2. 'Der Synodale Weg'

While the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops focused on strengthening synodality by engaging the laity in the decision-making process, the German Synodal Way ('Der Synodale Weg') represents another significant example of how synodality can be implemented in various ecclesial contexts. Initiated by the German Bishops' Conference, the Synodal Way plays a crucial role in addressing contemporary challenges, such as issues related to celibacy and sexual morality. Both initiatives, despite their differences in scope and approach, highlight the importance of synodality as a means to achieve more inclusive and participatory church structures. It is particularly noteworthy how the

Synodal Way strives to involve both women and men in the Church's decision-making processes, serving as an inspiration for other Christian traditions. These two models of synodality, despite their differences, share a common goal of renewing and adapting the Church in a changing world.

The German Synodal Way, as described on its official website, is a direct outcome of the German Bishops' Conference's Spring Plenary Assembly in March 2019 in Lingen. This assembly, significantly influenced by the MHG study on sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, centered its discussions on pivotal challenges facing the Church, including issues related to celibacy and sexual morality. A decision was made to embark on a Synodal Way aimed at fostering dialogue and initiating reformatory processes. Endorsed by Pope Francis, this path builds upon the foundations laid by previous synods, incorporating structured debates with the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK). Cardinal Marx notably highlighted the necessity of revising clerical life, re-evaluating the Church's stance on sexual morality, and augmenting the participation of both women and men in ecclesiastical dialogues. The support of the ZdK and the letter from Pope Francis to the German Church further accentuate the importance of the Synodal Way as a pivotal mechanism for Church reform and its engagement with contemporary societal issues.

The document outlining the intentions set forth for the German Synodal Way is titled "Universal Church in Motion: Synodal Paths", which is a comprehensive exploration of the concept of synodality within the Catholic Church, examining its global implications and specific applications in various regions. The foreword discusses the German Catholic Church's Synodal Way, placing it in the context of the global Church. The document is divided into sections, each focusing on different aspects of synodality, such as interviews, country-specific applications, and theological foundations. It addresses topics like the Church's reforms, the role of women, and the Church's response to contemporary challenges, showcasing a diverse range of perspectives and emphasizing the Church's dynamic and evolving nature. This summary captures the essence of the document in its exploration of the universal Church's transformation through synodal paths.

During these works and encounters, there was considerable controversy surrounding the German Synodal Way. The National Catholic Register's article provides a detailed timeline of the Vatican's responses to the German Synodal Way since its inception in 2019 (*The Vatican's Statements on the German Synodal Way: A Timeline* 2023). It highlights key moments and statements, including Pope Francis' personal interventions and letters expressing concerns about the direction of the Church in Germany. The author details the controversies surrounding the Synodal Way, particularly regarding proposals for major changes in Church teachings and practices. These developments have led to discussions about the unity of the Church and the potential for ideological harm, as well as Vatican interventions to address these issues. Participants have voted in favor of proposals calling for the priestly ordination of women, same-sex blessings, and changes to Church teachings on homosexual acts, prompting accusations of heresy and fears of schism (CNA Staff 2021).

The situation between the Vatican and the German Catholic Episcopate remains tense following the recent document *Fiducia supplicans* from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith 2023). This document indicates pastoral blessings, allowing them not only for heterosexual Catholic couples in non-marital relationships, but also for same-sex couples living in sin. Significantly, representatives of the German Synodal Path expressed dissatisfaction with the simultaneous prohibition against any pastoral blessing's resemblance, however distant, to a civil or sacramental union blessing. Since its inception, the German Synodal Path has advocated for blessings of same-sex couples on terms similar to sacramental marital unions (*The Vatican's Germany Strategy Is Coming into Focus—Including What Might Be Missing* 2023).

At this point, it would be apt to quote J.H. Newman, who, in his treatise on conscience, emphasizes that: "It seems, then, that there are extreme cases in which Conscience may come into collision with the word of a Pope, and is to be followed in spite of that word. Now I wish to place this proposition on a broader basis, acknowledged by all Catholics, and, in

order to do this satisfactorily, as I began with the prophecies of Scripture and the primitive Church, when I spoke of the Pope's prerogatives, so now I must begin with the Creator and His creature, when I would draw out the prerogatives and the supreme authority of Conscience. I say, then, that the Supreme Being is of a certain character, which, expressed in human language, we call ethical. He has the attributes of justice, truth, wisdom, sanctity, benevolence and mercy, as eternal characteristics in His nature, the very Law of His being, identical with Himself; and next, when He became Creator, He implanted this Law, which is Himself, in the intelligence of all His rational creatures. The Divine Law, then, is the rule of ethical truth, the standard of right and wrong, a sovereign, irreversible, absolute authority in the presence of men and Angels [. . .] This view of conscience, I know, is very different from that ordinarily taken of it, both by the science and literature, and by the public opinion, of this day. It is founded on the doctrine that conscience is the voice of God, whereas it is fashionable on all hands now to consider it in one way or another a creation of man" (Newman 1900, pp. 246–48).

Newman's perspective on the role of conscience should, therefore, resonate more strongly in discussions concerning various approaches to Church doctrine and practice: one should first carefully discern the voice of God in conscience, and then proceed to evaluate not only one's own practices, but also those of the faithful as a whole. It seems that the German Synodal Way has overlooked this aspect in its ecclesiological–pastoral deliberations, while the Vatican side, by not addressing the role of a well-formed conscience, has missed an opportunity to strengthen its argumentation, focusing instead on the legal–juridical aspect of the relationship of the local Church in Germany with the determinations of Rome. It must not be forgotten, however, that the challenges facing Christianity, as discussed by representatives of the German Synodal Path, are current, significant, and require a stance to be taken. In light of the above, it is necessary for the dialogue within Catholicism itself to be intensified, in order to prevent a *quiet schism* that would give rise to further divisions, antagonisms, and misunderstandings. This "schism takes various forms. The young, for their part, do not have a sense of Catholic identity, and the attempt to forge one around a restoration of the ecclesiastical *ancien régime* means nothing to them. They are not switched off; they were never switched on in the first place. Nostalgia for the preconciliar past provides them with no agenda for the future. And so they go, directionless, carried off by a popular culture without content or substance" (O'Sullivan 1994, p. 3).

In response to the aforementioned questions regarding Catholic synodality, it must be acknowledged that, while the concept is fundamentally positive, signaling new directions in liturgical, pastoral, ecumenical, and charitable activities, it is not devoid of challenges and even certain dangers associated with the decision-making weaknesses of overly broad assemblies. The concept of synodality in the Catholic Church has been implemented through structures like the 'Synod on Synodality' created. These structures embody a participatory and collegial nature in Church governance, where decisions on faith and practice are made collaboratively by bishops in unity with the pope. This is reflected in granting voting rights to the laity, thereby fostering inclusive decision making. A participatory approach to decision making in the Church contributes to understanding theological and practical diversity while sustaining unity in beliefs and practices. This approach, exemplified in synodality, allows for a collective discernment process involving clergy, religious, and laity. It encourages dialogue and understanding diverse perspectives within the Church, thereby enriching theological discourse and maintaining a cohesive faith community despite differences.

3.3. Looking towards a Church Fully Reconciled: ARCIC I-III

Another significant example of ongoing intra- and interdenominational processes is the Catholic–Anglican discussions initiated in the 1960s within the framework of theological ecumenical dialogue. The ARCIC (Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission) is a crucial component of this interconfessional space for doctrinal dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. One of the earliest joint documents

presented in Malta by the Joint Preparatory Commission (1967–1968) highlighted significant areas requiring reconciliation and outlined doctrinal issues needing further reflection. Among the commonalities, the same foundation of faith of the undivided Church and its Creed, the legacy of the Church Fathers, and notably, the “living traditions of liturgy, theology, spirituality, Church order, and mission” were appreciated (ARCIC Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission 1968, no. 3). Conversely, among the divisions between Catholics and Anglicans, it was noted that “divergences since the sixteenth century have arisen not so much from the substance of this inheritance as from our separate ways of receiving it. They derive from our experience of its value and power, from our interpretation of its meaning and authority, from our formulation of its content, from our theological elaboration of what it implies, and from our understanding of the manner in which the Church should keep and teach the Faith. Further study is needed to distinguish between those differences which are merely apparent, and those which are real and require serious examination” (ARCIC Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission 1968, no. 4).

Also, in the ARCIC documents, one can find inspirations from J.H. Newman and his concept of the ‘Primacy of God’. In the ARCIC I document (First Phase: 1971–1981) titled *Authority in the Church II* from September 1981, we revisit the Oxford theologian by reading: “It is Christ himself, the Way, the Truth and the Life, who entrusts the Gospel to us and gives to his Church teaching authority which claims our obedience. The Church as a whole, indwelt by the Spirit according to Christ’s promise and looking to the testimony of the prophets, saints, and martyrs of every generation, is witness, teacher and guardian of the truth (cf. Authority I, para. 18). The Church is confident that the Holy Spirit will effectually enable it to fulfil its mission so that it will neither lose its essential character nor fail to reach its goal. We are agreed that doctrinal decisions made by legitimate authority must be consonant with the community’s faith as grounded in Scripture and interpreted by the mind of the Church, and that no teaching authority can add new revelation to the original apostolic faith” (ARCIC Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission 1981, no. 23).

The ARCIC II (Second Phase: 1983–2005) agreements have had a significant impact on Anglican–Catholic doctrinal dialogue. Not only did they continue to address the role and significance of ecclesiastical authority, but they also highlighted fundamental truths binding both communities. These truths received full acceptance by the synodal body of the Church of England, specifically at the Lambeth Conference (the importance of which will be discussed in the following section). In the Palazzola Document (1998), it is enumerated emphatically that both Churches recognize that “the Spirit of the Risen Lord maintains the people of God in obedience to the Father’s will. By this action of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the Lord is active in the Church”, “because of their baptism and their participation in the *sensus fidelium* the laity play an integral part in decision making in the Church”, and “the complementarity of primacy and conciliarity” are elements of the episcopal ministry (*episcopate*) within the Church, so there is a need for “universal primacy exercised by the Bishop of Rome as a sign and safeguard of unity within a re-united Church” and the collegiality of bishops, as well as universal primacy and conciliarity, complementing rather than replacing each other (ARCIC Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission 1998, no. 1). The *Gift of Authority* (1998) report elaborates on the concept of authority in the Church, highlighting the shared understanding of this issue by Catholics and Anglicans. The document emphasizes the importance of authority as a gift from God, to be exercised in a spirit of service and unity. In 2007, the report *Looking Towards a Church Fully Reconciled* (2005) stressed the need for further rapprochement between the two communities, pointing to the shared heritage of the first millennium as a foundation for building future unity. Another significant step was the publication of Roman Catholic commentaries on the ARCIC III document, which underscored the importance of joint efforts in understanding the critical doctrinal differences and similarities, such as the role of the Pope and the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

Highlighting the importance of historical heritage, the ARCIC documents point to the key elements of shared tradition that can serve as a basis for further rapprochement.

This includes both theological and practical aspects of church life, such as the role of sacraments and church structures. Additionally, the Roman Catholic commentaries on the ARCIC III document indicate the need for further reflection, which is a significant element of ecumenical dialogue. A shared understanding of these issues can contribute to building a more united future for both communities. The ARCIC documents provide a solid foundation for ongoing discussions and reflections, showing how theological dialogues can lead to a deeper understanding and potential unity between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. To make this achievable and gain reception among the clergy and faithful of both denominations, it is essential to internally integrate the community of believers within each denomination around the themes of ongoing ecumenical dialogues. The space for synodal meetings between the clergy and laity within the Anglican Communion is provided by the Lambeth Conferences—an embodiment of the Church of England’s synodal implementation, attentive to the needs of both the faithful and pastors.

3.4. *The 15th Lambeth Conference 2022–2026*

Both approaches, namely, the “Synod on Synodality” and the “German Synodal Way”, despite their differences in scope and methodology, highlight the importance of synodality as a means to achieve more inclusive and participatory church structures. The German Synodal Way, initiated by the German Bishops’ Conference, addresses contemporary challenges such as issues related to celibacy and sexual morality. Similarly, the Synod on Synodality, initiated by Pope Francis, aims to incorporate the laity into the Church’s decision-making processes, which has sparked controversy. The common goal of both initiatives is to strive for the renewal and adaptation of the Church in a changing world. This transformative vision of synodality is also reflected in other Christian traditions, such as Anglicanism, which exhibits pronounced synodal characteristics. An example of this tradition is the Lambeth Conferences, which play a crucial role in ecclesiastical dialogue and theological reflection within the Anglican Communion.

As previously mentioned, the Church of England exhibits a pronounced synodal characteristic. The Lambeth Conferences, a significant tradition within Anglicanism, are decennial gatherings of bishops from the Anglican Communion, first convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury Charles Longley in 1867. These conferences are consultative and not legislative, aiming to address theological, social, and administrative issues affecting the Anglican Communion. “Resolutions of Lambeth Conferences have only persuasive or “moral” authority, and not binding force, throughout the Anglican Communion unless or until they are also adopted by the appropriate legislative synod of each province, and it is also remarked that the committee reports of the Lambeth Conferences are just that, reports of committees and no more, sometimes interesting and sometimes very well done by their authors, until or unless they happen to be endorsed by a resolution of the entire conference (which occasionally happens)” (Wright 1989, pp. 278–79). Reflecting on the Anglican ethos of diversity in unity, often tackling contentious issues like human sexuality, women’s ordination, and interfaith relations, Lambeth Conferences have played a pivotal role in shaping Anglican identity and practice, balancing autonomy with communal discernment. The outcomes of these conferences, though influential, are not binding on individual Anglican provinces.

The 15th Lambeth Conference epitomizes a quintessential gathering within the Anglican Communion, encapsulating the essence of ecclesiastical dialogue and theological contemplation. This venerable convocation, held decennially, is a testament to the enduring commitment to faith, unity, and diversity among the global Anglican community. The conference’s thematic focus is multifaceted, delving into pressing contemporary issues whilst steadfastly adhering to spiritual and doctrinal underpinnings. It embodies a profound engagement with topics such as social justice, environmental stewardship, and the challenges posed by modernity to traditional religious practices and beliefs (15th Lambeth Conference 2023a). A hallmark of this conference is its inclusivity, endeavoring to represent the rich

tapestry of cultures, perspectives, and experiences within Anglicanism. This inclusivity is not merely symbolic; it actively shapes the discourse, ensuring that a multiplicity of voices are heard and valued.

Another distinctive characteristic is the conference's commitment to fostering dialogue and understanding across different strands of Anglicanism. It serves as a crucible for both reaffirming shared beliefs and respectfully addressing doctrinal divergences (15th Lambeth Conference 2023b). This approach underlines the Anglican ethos of 'via media', navigating a middle path between divergent theological perspectives. The Lambeth Conference also underscores the Anglican Communion's engagement with the wider Christian ecumenical movement. It seeks to strengthen bonds with other Christian denominations, affirming commonalities and exploring avenues for collaborative action in addressing global challenges.

In the spirit of Anglican synodal works, numerous publications related to specific recommendations and guidelines have been issued, developed as outcomes of numerous meetings in small and large groups with defined competencies (15th Lambeth Conference 2022; Anglican Communion News Service 2022). This documentation was divided into smaller thematic sections, supported by debates, theological-pastoral conferences, and working group meetings according to a pre-established schedule and a thematically unified plan (handouts e.g.: *Personal Wholeness, Safe Spaces—Changing Our Future, Journeying with Hope in an Age of Uncertainty, Foundations for Leadership, Leading and Involving Others, Running an Effective Event, and Navigating Disagreement*) (15th Lambeth Conference: Spouses' Strengthening Sessions 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

Indeed, the document titled *Personal Wholeness* focuses on the personal development of bishops' spouses and emphasizes the importance of understanding one's identity in the context of various social and spiritual roles (15th Lambeth Conference: Spouses' Strengthening Sessions 2023b). The key themes include self-awareness, self-acceptance, and aligning one's identity with Christ. It offers insights into the dynamics of a spouse's role and encourages individuals to apply these teachings in their lives.

The *Safe Spaces—Changing Our Future* addresses the protection of vulnerable social groups and emphasizes the importance of understanding hidden attitudes and beliefs that influence behaviors towards children and vulnerable individuals (15th Lambeth Conference: Spouses' Strengthening Sessions 2023c). The document includes practical activities and biblical references to encourage individuals to take responsibility for creating safe environments. It also promotes a dialogue between the mind and the heart for meaningful change.

Additionally, *Journeying with Hope in an Age of Uncertainty* points out the need for support and connection in challenging times and presents practical activities like the String Game to illustrate life's frustrations and the importance of collaboration (15th Lambeth Conference: Spouses' Strengthening Sessions 2023a). The document explores faith-based reflections, prayer, and Bible study as strategies for coping with uncertainty. It encourages healthy habits, self-care, and engagement in activities that bring joy. That document underscores the virtues of integrity, courage, and humility in leadership, drawing from biblical examples and emphasizing self-reflection and the significance of understanding one's impact on followers. The document focuses on the dynamics of team collaboration and resource management, advocating for the empowerment of team members and their strategic involvement in shared visions and goals, outlining the key steps and considerations for organizing successful events, and highlighting the roles of preparation, resource allocation, and participant engagement. Moreover, it offers a guide for addressing conflicts and disagreements, promoting transformative habits such as curiosity, presence, and the capacity to reimagine situations for effective conflict resolution.

The series of documents from the Lambeth Conference handouts collection provide a comprehensive Christian perspective on community action, needs assessment, impact evaluation, and peace and reconciliation (Morris 2023). They blend biblical teachings with practical community engagement strategies. Key themes include sustainable change, local

leadership, biblical foundations for action, practical methods for community involvement, and reflection on the effectiveness of community actions. The collection emphasizes holistic and sustainable development, accountability, empowerment, and the integration of Christian values in community initiatives.

Phase 1 ran before the full conference met in Canterbury. During 2021–2022, bishops met together for online conversations and prayer about themes relevant to the conference. Spouses also took part in a program of ‘Global Conversations’.

Phase 1 of the journey included a series on the book of 1 Peter—which was chosen as the Biblical focus for the Lambeth Conference; Bishops’ Conversations—a discussion series on topics that would be explored at the full conference; ‘Ministry in a Conflicted World’—a formational leadership series for bishops, looking at principles of peace and reconciliation and Science and Faith panel—a series featuring members of the Anglican Communion Science Commission.

Phase 2 of the 15th Lambeth Conference, convened by The Most Revd Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was held in Canterbury from July 26 to August 8, 2022. This significant in-person event featured a range of activities including Bible Study, daily prayer, worship, plenary sessions, *Lambeth Calls*, and services at Canterbury Cathedral. Additionally, the conference incorporated a seminar program, a special program for spouses, and a dedicated day at Lambeth Palace focusing on environmental and sustainable development discussions. The key outcomes of the conference included the issuance of 10 *Lambeth Calls* on various church and world affairs, 14 *Statements of Support* from bishops addressing global issues, the establishment of the Anglican Communion Science Commission, and the launch of an environmental initiative named *The Communion Forest*. The conference also provided a rich array of resources, with many sessions being streamed and filmed, including Bible Expositions, sermons, and keynote addresses.

Phase 3, named *Witnessing Together*, commenced in 2023 and is scheduled to conclude in 2026. It will focus on formulating recommendations concerning a range of critical issues, including: Discipleship, Environment and Sustainable Development, Anglican Identity, Safe Church, Science and Faith, Human Dignity, Christian Unity, Mission and Evangelism, Inter Faith, and Reconciliation ([15th Lambeth Conference 2023b](#)).

In essence, the 15th Lambeth Conference is a microcosm of the Anglican Communion’s journey—a journey marked by introspection, adaptation, and an unwavering commitment to living out the Christian faith in a rapidly evolving world.

4. Conclusions

Identifying common elements within Newman’s perspective, synodality, and comprehensiveness reveals potential integrative aspects for Christianity as a whole, which could enhance ecumenical dialogue. By juxtaposing these perspectives, we uncover shared elements that form the foundation for interdenominational exchanges of ideas. Analyzing the relationship between God’s primacy in Christian life and synodality amplifies and sheds new light on the richness of theological reflection on Christian unity. Ecumenical dialogues reveal an intricate web of theological concepts interwoven in a tapestry of faith. Central to this dialogue is John Henry Newman’s ‘Primacy of God’, a concept resonating deeply within both traditions. Newman’s emphasis on a personal communion with God and the transformative power of faith transcends denominational boundaries, offering a common ground for ecumenical discourse.

A comparative analysis of the models of synodality in the Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox Churches reveals common elements such as collegiality and shared responsibility. These models, despite their historical and theological differences, have the potential to inspire one another, leading to deeper understanding and cooperation. The ARCIC documents provide a robust foundation for the continuation of dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. They contain key agreements on issues of ecclesiastical authority, sacraments, and hierarchy, which are essential for further rapprochement between these traditions.

Synodality across various Christian traditions, particularly in the context of Catholic–Orthodox and Catholic–Anglican dialogues, underscores the importance of a shared pursuit of unity. Theological models based on synodality can serve as platforms for constructive conversations and joint ecumenical actions. Initiatives such as the German Synodal Path and the Lambeth Conference illustrate the practical aspects of synodality and comprehensiveness, demonstrating how synodality and participatory governance can be implemented in practice. The solutions derived from these initiatives can also serve as a caution against undertaking excessively far-reaching changes that might undermine confessional integrity or obscure the transmission of the deposit of faith.

However, synodality in the Catholic context is not a novel concept discovered only by Pope Francis; rather, it is an age-old practice that has manifested with varying degrees of prominence and influence throughout history. As demonstrated in the presented article, synodality intersects not only with the ‘Primacy of God’ so strongly emphasized in the writings of J.H. Newman, but also with the Orthodox ideal of community modeled after the Holy Trinity and the Anglican tradition of inclusivity and comprehensiveness. This intersection manifests in a shared commitment to a participatory, consultative approach in theological reflections and church governance. The Anglican tradition’s openness to diverse perspectives complements the Catholic Church’s recent emphasis on synodality, creating a synergistic relationship that enriches both traditions. The experience of the Orthodox Church in this regard is inspiring for the Catholic community and clearly demonstrates that, in the Church, it is not only necessary to listen to one another, but also to not be afraid to share the responsibility for preserving and transmitting the deposit of faith. Those responsible for the Universal Church are not solely the clergy; the role and mission of the laity and various states within the Church must not be marginalized.

The exploration of these interconnected theological elements sheds light on the potential for a deeper understanding and appreciation of each tradition’s unique contributions. By examining the nuances and overlaps in their theological perspectives, this study aims to foster a dialogue that is not only informed by mutual respect, but also enriched by the distinct insights each tradition offers. The synergies between Catholic and Anglican theological concepts open up new avenues for ecumenical engagement. Newman’s ‘Primacy of God’ provides a foundation for exploring the dynamics of faith and reason, conscience, and the Church’s role in the contemporary world. This exploration leads to a shared understanding of faith as a journey towards a personal encounter with God, a theme prevalent in both traditions. Synodality and comprehensiveness further enhance this dialogue by introducing elements of inclusivity, participatory governance, and a broad theological spectrum. These aspects resonate with the current ecclesiological challenges and opportunities faced by both Churches, suggesting a collaborative approach to addressing them. This interconnection of concepts paves the way for meaningful ecumenical conversations, where the strengths of each tradition can be leveraged to address common challenges. It proposes a model of unity in diversity, where differences are not merely tolerated, but embraced as essential components of a vibrant, holistic Christian theology. This study synthesizes the theological insights gleaned from the examination of John Henry Newman’s ‘Primacy of God’, the concept of synodality in the Catholic Church, and the Anglican idea of comprehensiveness. These insights reveal a rich landscape of theological thought, marked by a commitment to personal faith, communal discernment, and inclusivity. The interplay of these concepts demonstrates the potential for a shared theological framework that respects the distinctiveness of each tradition while fostering mutual understanding and respect. This synthesis highlights the possibility of a deeper ecumenical relationship grounded in a shared quest for truth and a common commitment to living out the Christian faith. This study contributes to the ongoing dialogues by highlighting the interconnectedness of key theological concepts and the potential for synergistic engagement. It proposes a future where the rich diversity of Christian theology is not a source of division, but a foundation for unity. This envisioned future is one where dialogue, mutual respect, and shared exploration of faith become the hallmarks of inter-denominational relationships. It calls for a

continued commitment to understanding and learning from one another, recognizing that the journey towards theological unity is not just a goal but a continuous, dynamic process.

Ultimately, this study reaffirms the belief that the diverse landscape of Christian theology, with its various traditions and perspectives, can converge in a harmonious and enriching dialogue, paving the way for a more unified Christian witness in the modern world.

In conclusion, Newman's ecclesiology and principles provide a bridge between Anglicanism and Catholicism. John Henry Newman's teaching on authority, sacraments, and hierarchy continue to influence theological discourse in academic settings.

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