

**Allen Hall Seminary, Diocese of Westminster  
Formation Course for Ordination Candidates, Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham**

Contemporary Catholic Approaches to Ecumenism, Theology and Practice

I wish to thank Mgr O'Toole and Father Wang for inviting me here today to speak to you about contemporary Catholic approaches to ecumenism within England and Wales. I am pleased to provide you with a brief overview of how the Catholic Church in England and Wales shapes its commitment to ecumenism, grounded in Universal theological principles, and shaped in practice. The Catholic Church's ecumenical commitment is grounded in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, especially the Apostolic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, and the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

In 2002, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales published *The Search for Christian Unity, A Popular Version of the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*<sup>1</sup>. The original *Directory* was issued by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1993 and developed the earlier versions which had been published in 1967 and 1970. This document summarizes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on ecumenism, especially in the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and also gathers together the teaching, legislation and guidance issued by successive Popes and the Holy See, including the *Code of Canon Law*. The bishops' shorter version focuses mainly on those parts of the 1993 *Directory* judged by them to be of more immediate concern to clergy and laity at local and parish levels within England and Wales. It was produced following consultation with ecumenical partners, and presents the material in a way which is both accurate and readily accessible, and encourages personal and group reflection through a series of questions. This shortened version of the *Directory* was published under the authority of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; however, the bishops stress that the *Directory* itself is the complete and authoritative text.

The purpose of *The Search for Christian Unity* is clearly stated at the beginning:

The Catholic Church has gathered a great deal of ecumenical experience over the last thirty years. This experience, together with the need for Catholics to play a greater

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<sup>1</sup> The text is available at <http://www.cbcew.org.uk/document.doc?id=61>

part in ecumenism, means that accurate teaching and up-to-date discipline are called for. The *Directory* aims to provide this.<sup>2</sup>

The bishops state that in line with the *Directory*, it is the bishops in communion with the Pope who carry the responsibility for ecumenical policy, and that it is also the responsibility of every Catholic to pray and work for Christian unity. The bishops recognise that the text will also be helpful to those other Christian Churches and communities who wish to understand better Catholic ecumenical teaching and action. The bishops' document follows the structure of the *Directory* and has five chapters:

1. *The search for Christian unity* describes the Catholic Church's ecumenical commitment.
2. *Organisation in the Catholic Church at the service of Christian unity* describes how the Church structures its search for unity.
3. *Ecumenical formation in the Catholic Church* explores the issue of learning about ecumenism and forming an ecumenical attitude.
4. *Communion in life and spiritual activity among the baptised* describes appropriate ways of sharing in prayer and in sacramental and non-sacramental worship.
5. *Ecumenical co-operation, dialogue and common witness* explores the practical details of working, witnessing and sharing in ecumenical dialogue.<sup>3</sup>

We can see from this brief description that the Church's approach to ecumenism, both universal and local, is based on clear theological principles and is essentially pragmatic in its aims and outcomes. What follows is an exploration of these theological principles, followed by an examination of some contemporary practicalities.

The theological principles which underpin the Church's understanding of ecumenism are profound in their simplicity. First and foremost, the Church understands ecumenism to be a response to God's grace. The invitation to unity is for all Christians to put their faith in the Church God seeks, to hope for the day when the prayer of Christ 'May they all be one' may be realized in its fullness, and act in charity, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit and unites all those who believe in Jesus Christ. The call of the Second Vatican Council was for all Catholics to reach out to other Christians with a love that desires and works actively to overcome in truth whatever divides them from one another. The *Directory* speaks

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<sup>2</sup> The Search for Christian Unity, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1993

<sup>3</sup> The Search for Christian Unity, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1993

challengingly of this activity being 'inspired and guided by a true understanding of the Church as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God, and of unity of the whole human race'.<sup>4</sup> It is the desire for this 'intimate union' which drives the Church and all Catholics towards the unity for which Christ prayed.

The bishops continue their teaching by drawing on what the original *Directory* calls 'The Church's unity within the plan of God'.<sup>5</sup> God's wish is for all people and all of creation to be drawn into union with Him. To accomplish this, the crucified and risen Christ calls all human beings into the new People of God, the Church. To establish this People, Christ called the twelve Apostles, with Peter as head, and gave them the task of preaching the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and leading the People of God in love. The Church continues to be served by the ordained ministry of bishops, priests and deacons. The Church is held together by the bonds of faith and sacrament, and a ministry which is hierarchical. United in this way, the People of God forms a communion.

The bishops go on to reflect on the nature of the Church as communion as fellowship with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit. This fellowship reaches its fullness in heaven, but is present here on earth. When Christians are united in faith, hope and love, in common teaching and sacraments, and in the guidance of their pastors, they share in that communion. So, each local diocese gathered around its bishop, makes present the one communion and Church of Christ. This communion is also present between dioceses as well as within them. This world-wide communion is maintained by the communion between the bishops, and between them and the Successor of Peter. Each diocese carries forward the mission from Christ to bring the Good News of the Kingdom of God to all people, offering them this communion with God and with those who already share in it. As each diocese carries out this mission, the prayer of Jesus is being fulfilled: 'Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me' (*John 17:21*).

The Church is truly 'catholic' in the rich diversity of people and cultures that are, across the world and across the centuries, part of the Church. Although this rich diversity can give rise to tensions, the Spirit of God is continually calling Christians to ever deeper unity. It is also

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<sup>4</sup> *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, 9

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 11

Catholic teaching that this one Church of Christ ‘subsists’ in the Catholic Church, that the whole of revealed truth, sacraments and ministry are found within it.

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, stated that ‘The Catholic Church embraces with hope the commitment to ecumenism as a duty of the Christian conscience, enlightened by faith and guided by love’ (*Ut Unum Sint*, 8). It is this motivation which has moved the Church in England and Wales to develop its commitment to ecumenism over the years since the Second Vatican Council.

Before we go any further, however, it is important to reflect on what, for us as Catholics, is the significance of the Deposit of Faith, and how this relates to our ecumenical commitment. In the Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*, Pope John Paul II published the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The Constitution spells out the nature and purpose of the *Catechism*, recalling the task of the Second Vatican Council:

The principal task entrusted to the Council by Pope John XXIII was to guard and present better the precious deposit of Christian doctrine in order to make it more accessible to the Christian faithful and to all people of good will. For this reason the Council was not first of all to condemn the errors of the time, but above all to strive calmly to show the strength and beauty of the doctrine of the faith.<sup>6</sup>

Further on in the Constitution, Pope John Paul describes the nature of the *Catechism*:

The catechism will thus contain the new and the old (cf. Mt 13:52), because the faith is always the same yet the source of ever new light.

To respond to this twofold demand, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the one hand repeats the old, traditional order already followed by the Catechism of St Pius V, arranging the material in four parts: the *Creed*, the *Sacred Liturgy*, with pride of place given to the sacraments, the *Christian way of life*, explained beginning with the Ten Commandments, and finally, *Christian prayer*. At the same time, however, the

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<sup>6</sup> Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*, 1992

contents are often expressed in a new way in order to respond to the questions of our age.

The shape and order of the content of the *Catechism* reflects the coherence of the deposit of faith as handed on and understood within the Catholic Church. But the deposit of faith is not simply a static entity; there is true growth of understanding within the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* makes this clear:

This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.<sup>7</sup>

This constant move ‘toward the fullness of divine truth’ lies at the heart of how Catholic teaching understands and proclaims the deposit of faith. Its coherence and integral unity is what Pope John Paul in *Depositum Fidei* calls ‘the symphony of faith’ which is described thus:

The four parts [of the *Catechism*] are related one to the other: the Christian mystery is the object of faith (first part); it is celebrated and communicated in liturgical actions (second part); it is present to enlighten and sustain the children of God in their actions (third part); it is the basis for our prayer, the privileged expression of which is the *Our Father*, and it represents the object of our supplication, our praise and our intercession (fourth part).<sup>8</sup>

So, in the *Catechism* we see what Pope John Paul describes as the ‘wondrous unity’ of the mystery of God expressed in faith. It is this coherence of faith that Catholics understand and

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<sup>7</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 8

<sup>8</sup> *Depositum Fidei*

proclaim, and that provides the basis from which to engage ecumenically with Christians. Pope John Paul II says:

[The *Catechism*] is meant to support ecumenical efforts that are moved by the holy desire for the unity of all Christians, showing carefully the content and wondrous harmony of the Catholic faith.<sup>9</sup>

Having spent some time reflecting on the theological principles and coherence of context from which the Catholic Church in our countries maintains and develops its commitment to ecumenism, we now examine some of the main ways in which this is shaped.

The *Search for Christian Unity* describes the structures and resources in Catholic dioceses which carry out the work of for ecumenism. There are in the dioceses commissions and officers appointed by the bishop to carry out this ecumenical task. Each commission approaches the work in its own distinctive way, based on the bishop's mandate and the resources available within the diocese.

In 1997, at Swanwick in Derbyshire, Christian leaders including Cardinal Basil Hume and other Catholic bishops from across the British Isles signed a Common Declaration, which paved the way for what is known as 'Churches Together' in Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland. This was a hugely significant move that dissolved the British Council of Churches and created a new basis for ecumenical relating which for the first time included the Catholic Church as a full member. Following the Declaration, a complexity of national, intermediate and local structures emerged which sought to promote and develop effective ecumenical relationships between the Churches Together members in each nation. I'm sure you have your own opinions about these structures and we could easily fill the rest of today discussing their effectiveness. However, for the sake of this session, suffice it to say that the Catholic commitment has been generously maintained since the Swanwick Declaration, and Cardinal Hume's famous announcement that we –Catholics and other Christians- had now moved from 'cooperation to commitment'. There are still many opinions about what he actually meant and for some his comment was more about what might be achieved locally than a comment about the national scene. Whatever the meaning of the Cardinal's comment, today we are

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

increasingly faced with questions about the effectiveness of national structures that would seem to be more about structure than need, faced as Churches and Christian communities are with questions about resources and accountability. However, at the intermediate and local levels, ecumenical working frequently displays a maturity of understanding and relationship that expresses a healthy realism about what is achievable within the parameters of deepening understanding, closer commitment and resources.

The current ecumenical mantra continues to be about ‘mission’ as the best expression of ecclesial unity, a connection which Catholics, some Anglicans, the Orthodox and interestingly the Black Churches find discomfiting. But it fits with what might be described as a more ‘liberal Protestant’ commitment to maintain a lowest theological common denominator as the basis for unity and therefore for co-operation. There are those who would maintain that this misdirection was made soon after the Swanwick Declaration when the Churches Together process steered away from a deepening of theological understanding of each another’s traditions in favour of a more activist mission-based ecumenism. But the Catholic Church has stayed, sometimes wishing for observer status as in the British Council of Churches days when curiously, its teaching regarding ecumenism might have been heard more clearly. The Catholic Church has stayed in its commitment to ecumenical team chaplaincies as in the Armed Forces, Healthcare, prisons and education. The Catholic Church has stayed in its support for Churches Together theological and local unity discussions and especially local ecumenical partnerships, and so on. The Catholic Church has stayed in its providing accommodation for Non-conformist Chapel communities in Wales when they are unable to fund their own premises. The list goes on, thank God. So where does this leave you?

As you continue your formation for Holy Orders, bringing with you the richness of your own Anglican patrimony, it will be a challenge of your future ministry to see how your sacramental and pastoral responsibilities within the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham will serve the ecumenical commitment of the Church. There follows some suggestions, which I hope you will consider in the future.

The Catholic contribution to ecumenism in England and Wales has been greatly enriched over recent years by the development of the ‘exchange of gifts’ approach to Christian traditions. This works especially well at the local level and requires time and space to

develop. It may be that in time, you will be able to encourage this between the Ordinariate parishes and other local Christian parishes and communities. Cardinal Walter Kasper, when he was President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, consistently encouraged prayer for unity as the central activity of every ecumenical enterprise. Building on the ecumenical Evening Prayer and other moments of ecumenical prayer during Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the UK in 2010, we should encourage regular opportunities for prayer for the unity of the Church within the regular cycles of liturgy and prayer within parishes and groups. Offering hospitality to other local parishes and groups, to allow friendships to flourish and common needs to be addressed is another aspect of ecumenism which provides enrichment and support beyond the boundaries of the local community. In 2009 the bishops produced a series of leaflets entitled 'Together in Christ' to encourage Catholic parishes to carry out an ecumenical audit of their activity and effectiveness. In time, I would also encourage you to use these leaflets, which are available through the Bishops' Conference website.

It is also worth recognizing that ecumenical co-operation has achieved much to proclaim the Christian message, especially at the national level, regarding contemporary challenges to society. Debates about assisted dying, abortion and the current interpretation of marriage to include civil partnerships demonstrate a level of co-operation between Christian traditions that is the fruit of robust ecumenical relationships, deeper understanding and mature trust. This allows one tradition to take the lead with the support of the others as in, for example, the Methodist Church's recent opposition to gambling.

In November 2010, I was invited to provide a Catholic contribution to a Westminster Abbey Conversation about women bishops. The panel consisted of Anglican bishops, clergy and theologians and I, along with representatives from other churches, were invited to provide a wider context for the debate. I spoke about the Personal Ordinariate, since the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* had been published the previous October. The reason for doing so was two-fold: firstly, to promote the Holy Father's generous response to those Anglicans who sought full communion with the Catholic Church, and secondly to contrast the Anglican account of authority based on Scripture, tradition and reason with the Catholic belief in authority based on Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium. The outcome of the conversation was difficult to measure, but the Catholic contribution was well received as a reminder of the truth of the Church contained in Catholic teaching, and of the further



agreement regarding authority achieved by the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) published in the *The Gift of Authority* in 1998<sup>10</sup>.

I now wish to address an issue that is a cause of grave concern for you, and that is the ordination of women to the priesthood and the Episcopate. The Catholic Church's response to the Church of England's decision to ordain women to the priesthood and Episcopate is well documented. The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales expressed the Catholic position clearly in its response to the Rochester Report in 2005. Cardinal Walter Kasper as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury addressed the Church of England House of Bishops on the subject in 2006. He also expressed the Catholic Church's position again at the Lambeth Conference of 2008. The teaching of the Catholic Church is clear and consistent. Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, teaches that the priesthood is set aside by Christ when he chose twelve men as apostles. Jesus chose the Twelve (cf. Mk 3:13–14; Jn 6:70) after a night in prayer (cf. Lk 6:12) and that the Apostles themselves were careful in the choice of their successors. The priesthood is 'specifically and intimately associated in the mission of the Incarnate Word himself (cf. Mt 10:1, 7–8; 28:16–20; Mk 3:13–16; 16:14–15).' Pope John Paul II refers to the teaching of Pope Paul VI: '[The Church] holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood, for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his Church.'<sup>11</sup>

In 1995, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a clarification, explaining that *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, while 'itself not infallible, witnesses to the infallibility of the teaching of a doctrine already possessed by the Church. ...This doctrine belongs to the deposit of the faith of the Church. The definitive and infallible nature of this teaching of the Church did not arise with the publication of the Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*'. Instead, it was 'founded on the written Word of God, and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and

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[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)

<sup>11</sup> *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 1994

universal magisterium,’ and for these reasons it ‘requires definitive assent’.<sup>12</sup> Catholic teaching on this matter, therefore, is bound into the ‘wondrous unity’ of the deposit of faith and the Magisterium, which the Popes and the bishops safeguard.

It has been my privilege to support the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham since the publication of *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, when working within the General Secretariat of the Bishops’ Conference. Following its publication, the bishops established a commission of which I was a member to work through the Apostolic Constitution and provide for the erection of the Ordinariate. Since then, the bishops have provided generous support and encouragement to all those clergy, religious and laity who have sought full communion with the Catholic Church within the Ordinariate. This has effectively implemented Pope Benedict’s request to the bishops during his visit to England, ‘to be generous in implementing the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*’ which ‘...should be seen as a prophetic gesture that can contribute positively to the developing relations between Anglicans and Catholics’ and which ‘...helps us to set our sights on the ultimate goal of all ecumenical activity: the restoration of full ecclesial communion’.<sup>13</sup>

Ecumenically, the Ordinariate provides many positive opportunities to explore further with other Christians how Catholics understand the mystery of the Church, and how Anglicans who seek full communion are integrated into the life of the Church.

Finally, I wish to assure you of my personal prayers and ongoing support as you move towards ordination and ministry within the Catholic Church, and as clergy of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. You and your people, especially in these days of Lent preparation for reception and sharing in the Easter Eucharist, are a reminder to us all of the sacrifices you have made, with God’s grace, to come this far. Be assured of the prayers and the continuing support and guidance of the bishops, clergy and people of the dioceses with whom you share in the full communion of the Catholic Church.

Mgr Andrew J Faley  
6 March 2012

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<sup>12</sup> Responsum ad Dubium Concerning the Teaching Contained in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Approved for Publication by Pope John Paul II, October 28, 1995

<sup>13</sup> Pope Benedict’s Address at Oscott College, 19 September 2010