

Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and Faith and Order Commission
“The Bishop of Rome and Christian Unity”
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Presentation

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The document ‘The Bishop of Rome’ is both a point of arrival and a point of departure. Let us start explaining in which ways it is a point of arrival.

The document aims to be an objective and descriptive synthesis of recent developments in the ecumenical discussion on this theme. It is the result of a four years process of “harvesting of the fruits”. It was prepared in collaboration with the Institute for Ecumenical Studies (*Œcumenicum*) of the *Angelicum*.

It offers a structured thematic reading, preserving the different emphases, consensus and convergences of the sources, while maintaining the diversity of themes and approaches (biblical, traditional, patristic, canonical, historical, doctrinal, ecumenical and spiritual). The document is ecumenical by its sources, its process and its goal.² It shows the limits, proposals and intuitions of the various bilateral dialogues. It is an academic text that succeeds in decanting the pastoral proposal of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity.

For this reason, it may be difficult to read. Nonetheless, it is the result of a genuine dialogue between theologians, churches and peoples. A combination of scientific and spiritual methods: study and listening. It proposes a renewed reflection on the Bishop of Rome, from a particular ecumenical and pastoral perspective: primacy and synodality.

Three observations stand out:

- Firstly. Dialogue is the place to resolve our divisions, and theology is the privileged instrument of this dialogue. Pope John Paul II’s invitation to establish a dialogue between theologians and the Bishop of Rome (*UUS* 95) is important for the Petrine ministry.
- Secondly. Relationships of trust and mutual enrichment that are established between theologians of different traditions in the common search for truth in our times is a precious ecclesial result that needs to be preserved and promoted;
- Thirdly. The search for new expressions of truth, capable of communicating the meaning of the truths of the faith more accurately to today’s world.

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² See DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *The Bishop of Rome, Sources*, pp. 135-147

Regarding the process of discussion following its publication. It is worth saying that

- The Final document of the Synod of Bishops 2024 welcomed its publication. It explicitly reaffirms its concrete proposals and indicates that the document is a basis for further reflection with other Christians “together of course” on the way to Christian unity³.
- The document has been sent to the Heads of Churches and leaders of Christian Communion asking them to send their official reactions: the document has indeed launched an ecumenical process of reflection and exchange.
- This process is also taking place within the Catholic Church. We hope this reflection in concentric circles will lead to a further deepening, involving the pastors and the holy people of God in all continents.

In brief, the document “the Bishop of Rome” helps the reader

- To know or rediscover the treasures hidden in the various dialogue documents on this theme.
- By placing these treasures in a new light, the document makes them more accessible to those interested in the subject.
- To place them alongside other insights from other bilateral efforts, sometimes highlighting their value, sometimes relativising their results by showing their specific usefulness in a given context, and sometimes calling for interaction so to produce new syntheses.

Let us now explore the document as a point of departure by proposing some keys of interpretation and working, especially concerning the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity’s proposal.⁴

³ SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*, Final Document, n. 40: “The Synod welcomes the recent publication of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, which opens avenues for further study. The document shows that the promotion of Christian unity is an essential aspect of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome and that the ecumenical journey has fostered a deeper understanding of it. The concrete proposals it contains regarding a rereading or an official commentary on the dogmatic definitions of the First Vatican Council on primacy, a clearer distinction between the different responsibilities of the Pope, the promotion of synodality within the Church and in its relationship with the world and the search for a model of unity based on an ecclesiology of communion offer promising prospects for the ecumenical journey. The Synodal Assembly hopes that this document will serve as a basis for further reflection with other Christians, “together, of course”, on the exercise of the Ministry of Unity of the Bishop of Rome as a “service of love recognized by all concerned” (UUS 95)”.

⁴ DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *Towards An Exercise of Primacy in the 21st century. A Proposal from the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity based on the Study Document “The Bishop of Rome”*, *Collana Ut Unum Sint*, pp. 117-134