



The Bristol Text

The Bristol Text is offered as a contribution to the Bishops' Synodal Process

and to Catholics around the world as part of our common preparation for Rome in 2023.

It is also intended to give confidence to individual Catholics, to form our own thinking, learning, decision-making, conscience and practice.



Redefining and reclaiming liturgical ministry

1. Every baptised person is clothed in Christ Galatians 3:27

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‘There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ (Lumen Gentium 32, Vatican II). We should nowadays add, ‘people of all abilities and genders.’

We must learn to be open to all, and especially the destabilising influence of people ‘not like us.’ ‘Whoever wants to be first must be the last of all.’ (Mark 9:35)



Redefining and reclaiming liturgical ministry

2. The Church is the community of God

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‘For when two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.’ (Matthew 18:20) It is not an individual, but the community of saints, living and dead, who celebrate the act of thanksgiving to God, which is the Eucharist.

Jesus has made it easy to celebrate his presence with us, since the ritual of simple eating and drinking together is inscribed within us as human beings. It does not require a separated priesthood. St Peter states clearly of all the baptised, ‘you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood.’ (1 Peter:9)



Redefining and reclaiming liturgical ministry

3. The Holy Spirit's call to ministry may be heard by all people

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We need a clearer understanding of vocations. All the baptised are eligible to answer God's call to every ministry. That call is discerned within and by community of God, which is a companionship of empowerment.

Current research makes it clear that in the earliest Christian gatherings, women and men, single and married, led communities in worship, exercising their baptismal calling.



The Bristol Text

Embracing diversity

Affirming diversity is imperative for attesting the dignity and sanctity of every form of life, valuing the uniqueness and contribution of each person.

1. Hierarchy distorts the beauty of diversity

This calls for a radical re-imagination of the way of being Church, as it has become predominantly a hierarchical institution structured on an all-male leadership.



The Bristol Text

Embracing diversity

Church teaching on sex/gender is confused and contradictory. There is, in effect, no public policy.

2. Engage with the complexity of sex/gender

Male-female binaries are institutionalised through the historical understandings of 'family life' and 'natural law.' Transgender individuals challenge sex/gender binary norms, but scientifically we know that sex/gender is complex and that we also establish our identities through the stories we tell.

The Church needs a pastoral response to diverse family forms. It needs to think more deeply about its gender ideology.



The Bristol Text

Embracing diversity

3. Redefining 'we'

For many Catholics evangelization implies being truth tellers in one sphere and liars in another, making available an 'objective' Gospel that does not touch who we are. Our bodies and our spirits long for truthfulness, and come alive when we allow them to bear witness to it.

That means the construction of the new Catholic 'we' depends on all of us learning to preach the Gospel in the first person, singular and plural. We learn to see ourselves in our differently-aged, differently-abled, differently-gendered, differently-bodied, differently-sexually-oriented, differently-coloured, differently-tongued neighbour. Our similarity, not our difference is what counts.



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Embracing diversity

4. Accountability and apology

Accountability means taking responsibility for the ways in which our beliefs, theology and practices have contributed to the dehumanization and persecution of many people who are seen as ‘other’.

‘What have you done? Listen. Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground’ [Genesis 4:10]. The words spoken to Cain after killing his brother Abel point to the critical need for accountability, restitution and transformation as we seek to restore the dignity and rights of all persons as equal.

Then the harm done can be acknowledged in ways that include the participation of those harmed, creating affirming, equality-expressing theologies where no one is excluded and all are equal.



The Bristol Text

Moral Theology

1. Historical consciousness

The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself. 'The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word.' (Evangelii Gaudium 22). Appeals to unchanging laws and unchallengeable authorities stifle this creative freedom.

This calls for faith that continually evolves to meet the challenges of different contexts and cultures.



Moral Theology

2. Continuous formation in dialogue

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We propose that, rather than asserting authoritative moral rules to be obeyed, church teaching should be concerned with ways of thinking, helping us to see our lives as a process of continuous Christian formation along the path 'of wisdom, self-fulfilment and enrichment' (Evangelii Gaudium 168).

This moral vision is therefore not defined by lists of sins to avoid but by the endeavour to live as faithful disciples in a complex world, witnessing to God's love for all creation. The Good News is 'marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness ... readiness for dialogue, patience, warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental.' (Evangelii Gaudium 165)



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Moral Theology

We call for a holistic vision of the good life that is not dominated by issues of sexuality, but seeks the flourishing and dignity of the entire person.

3. A holistic vision

This means rejecting all forms of exploitation, abuse and violence, and encouraging each individual to discover their personal vocation to holiness. It is our living response to the prophetic vocation to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. (Micah 6:8)



The Bristol Text

Church authority

Jesus preached the Good News of the historical advent of the Kingdom of God, which brings justice and peace to all human beings, and liberation to the oppressed.

1. Equality and justice for all

For the Catholic Church to cooperate with God's Kingdom, it needs to model its organizational structure, and its Canon Law, on those principles of equality and justice for all.



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Church authority

2. Agreed by all

‘What touches all must be discussed and approved by all.’
By virtue of their common baptism, all adult Catholics have the fundamental right to participate and vote in all decisions on matters of doctrine, value, action, and any other issue concerning the common good of their community.

At every level, representative democratic councils should serve as the principal decision-making bodies, with the inalienable right to determine what falls within their competence. Discernment belongs to all. It cannot be confined to the few.



The Bristol Text

Church authority

3. Elected by all

‘The one who is to preside over all should be elected by all.’
Legitimate authorities in the church must be based on the consent of the people. The church community has the right to evaluate, approve, and commission all those putting themselves forward for a ministry.

Every adult Catholic has the right to vote for, and to be eligible as, a candidate for any church ministry. All Catholics also have the right to have their leaders render an account to them.