

SITUATING COLLEGIALITY WITHIN SYNODALITY

Rafael Luciani♦

Universidad Católica Andrés Bello of Caracas

Abstract

Hierarchy and ordained ministry must be understood in the light of the ecclesiology of the People of God. The juxtaposition of chapters two [People of God] and three [Hierarchy] of *Lumen Gentium*, led to a concentration of power and authority in the Hierarchy and contributed to the consolidation of a clericalized institutional culture. The need to situate Hierarchy within the People of God, as one more faithful, is fundamental for a synodal Church. Synodality offers the most adequate interpretative framework for understanding and reforming hierarchical ministry, and opens the way to overcome institutionalized clericalism. As a *constitutive dimension* of the Church, Synodality implies a new way of proceeding that needs to be learned, affecting styles of living, mentalities and structures. But, as Francis has reminded, it is impossible to think of an ecclesial conversion that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's People, not only in processes of consultation, but also in decision-making, decision-taking and their execution at all levels, including Church governance.

Keywords: Church Reform; Clericalism; Collegiality; Hierarchy; People of God; Primacy; Synodality

1. Responding to a “Possible Institutional Failure”

The work of Ronaldo Muñoz, *Nueva conciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina* [New awareness of the Church in Latin America],

♦**Rafael Luciani** is a Venezuelan layman, with a doctorate in theology from the Gregorian Pontifical University and with post-doctoral research at the Julius Maximilians Universität in Germany. He is Full Professor at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello of Caracas and Extraordinary Professor at the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College. He serves as Expert for the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) and the Latin American Confederation of Religious (CLAR). He is founder of the Ibero-American Theology Project and a member of the Peter & Paul Seminar for the Reform of the Church. Email: rafluciani@gmail.com

expresses with a clarity rarely found in Latin American ecclesiology the Council's call to bring about the reform not only of ecclesial mentalities but also of *ecclesial structures*. In 1972 Muñoz warned that "the *clerical institution* is one of the great *structural obstacles* to discovering the Gospel."¹ Because he understood the clericalization of the institution as a systemic problem, he proposed that the Church "reform its internal relations and institutions."² His views do not seem to have prospered much in the following decades, for there was no attempt to effect any significant changes. If the institution's historical form—theological-cultural model—is the means by which the memory³ of the faith is (or not) communicated in each epoch, then the Church is *always in need of reform*. As Francis has made clear, "Christ calls the pilgrim Church to *perennial reform*" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 26).⁴

Today we find ourselves at a crossroads. We are experiencing a crisis in the transmission of the faith, a crisis caused by the continued existence of a *clerical institutional model*. We are still dealing with "a *clerical and authoritarian church that is torn apart by the conflict* between groups with a renewed awareness and traditional groups with their established structures."⁵ In this context we must ask: what must be reformed? We begin by distinguishing between that which is permanent and that which is always subject to reform. As Congar explained long before the Council,

Christianity is eternal, but the *forms* in which it is expressed and currently embodied in Christian civilization, the actual organization of its apostolic life, the universal and local administrative structure of the church, even the celebration of worship and certain elements of the Christian philosophy of man and of society—all these in great part are linked to

¹Ronaldo Muñoz, *Nueva conciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974, 361.

²Muñoz, *Nueva conciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 353.

³Cf. Severino Dianich-Serena Noceti, *Trattato sulla Chiesa*, Brescia: Queriniana, 2002, 211-212.

⁴ Cf. Francis, *Christmas Address to the Roman Curia*, December 21, 2020 http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/december/documents/papa-francesco_20201221_curia-romana.html Also see: Peter De Mey, "Church Renewal and Reform in the Documents of Vatican II: History, Theology, Terminology," *Jurist* 71 (2011) 369-400; Sandra Arenas, "Ecclesial Extroversion. On the Reform in the Current Pontificate," in Mark D. Chapman and Vladimir Latinovic, ed., *Changing the Church. Transformations of Christian Belief, Practice, and Life*, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020, 315-322; Myriam Wijlens, "Reform and Renewal Implementing Vatican II," in Carlos M. Galli and Antonio Spadaro SJ, ed., *For a Missionary Reform of the Church. The Civiltà Cattolica Seminar*, New York: Paulist Press, 2017, 336-357.

⁵Muñoz, *Nueva conciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 362.

history and conditioned by a given stage of development. To desire to ascribe the value and the permanence of all these things to Christianity itself would mean absolutizing what is actually relative. This is a kind of idolatry related to the mistake of relativizing what is absolute (...). I want to clarify the distinction and the connection between what is permanently valuable and what by its nature can become obsolete.⁶

A number of diverse factors are at the root of the present crisis, and they have to be considered as a whole, not in an isolated manner. The crisis in which we find ourselves is “that of a particular Christian civilization, a certain Christian world, a certain Christian mentality – ultimately, a crisis of sociological structures that represent, not Christian reality, but rather *a certain concrete expression of the way things are done.*”⁷ Congar is speaking about a *model of institutionality* that has created and empowered an ecclesial culture and institution characterized by *clericalism*. Various international studies have confirmed this analysis, concluding that we are faced with a *systemic* problem in the Church.

We would like to refer to two recent studies that can shed light on our reflection: (a) the *Final Report* of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse,⁸ which was set up by the Australian government to study the period 1950-2017; and (b) the report on “Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests, Deacons, and Male Religious in the Area of the German Bishops’ Conference between 1946 and 2014,” commissioned by the German Bishop’s Conference and published in 2018.⁹ The Australian report made this emphatic declaration:

If one had to isolate one single factor that has contributed to the toxic response of Catholic Church leaders to victims of sexual abuse it would be clericalism. ... Clericalism is a virus that has infected the Church, or any church, whereby it is believed that the churchmen, the priests, the bishops, are in some form or way sacred and above ordinary people, and because of this sacredness, because of their importance, they must be held as more important and be more protected.¹⁰

⁶Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011, 153–154. Be it noted that the first edition of this work was published in 1950.

⁷Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, 160.

⁸*Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Final Report. Volume 16. Book 2, Commonwealth of Australia 2017, 616, <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/final-report>*

⁹Cf. *Sexueller Missbrauch an Minderjährigen durch katholische Priester, Diakone und männliche Ordensangehörige im Bereich der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz*, Mannheim-Heidelberg-Giessen, September 2018, <https://bistumlimburg.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Bereiche/missbrauch/MHG-Studie-gesamt.pdf>

¹⁰*Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse...* 611–612.

Both these studies, undertaken by interdisciplinary teams, agree that the problem of clericalism has to do with the conception and the exercise of power and authority in the Church. The Australian commission expresses the problem thus: “The deepest questions to be addressed at all levels in the Church are around the malaise of clericalism with its misunderstanding of power and authority and the specialness of ordination.”¹¹ Such a diagnosis is in close agreement with the analysis that Pope has been making. During his Apostolic Journey to Mozambique and Madagascar, Francis told the Jesuits: “Clericalism is a true perversion in the Church. ... Clericalism condemns, separates, frustrates, and despises the people of God.”¹² And he told the Synod of Bishops in 2018: “It is necessary to overcome decisively the plague of clericalism. ... Clericalism is a perversion and the root of many evils in the Church. We must humbly ask to be forgiven for them, and we must above all create the conditions not to repeat them.”¹³

Among the factors contributing to the consolidation of an ecclesial clerical culture are the theology of ordained ministry, the present ecclesiological model, the exercise of power and leadership in the hierarchy, celibacy and the culture of secrecy, the theology of forgiveness, and the work environment in ecclesial structures. All these factors share a common element that is at the base of the problem: “the relation between power and impotence in the clerical and hierarchical system of the Catholic Church, along with the idea of an ontological change at ordination.”¹⁴ The Pope uses a very forceful expression: “the complex of being chosen.”¹⁵ He is referring to the origin of what he calls the “pathology of ecclesial power.”

This problematic clericalism develops and flourishes in the formation houses of seminarians and male religious, it extends to the parishes, and it is strengthened with lifestyles that are not in accord with the prophetic dimension of ecclesial ministry. Francis criticizes

¹¹Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse... 613.

¹²Francis, *The Sovereignty of the People of God. Meeting of the Pope with the Jesuits of Mozambique and Madagascar*, 5 September 2019. Published in: <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-sovereignty-of-the-people-of-god-the-pontiff-meets-the-jesuits-of-mozambique-and-madagascar/>.

¹³Francis, *Opening of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Address at the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, 3 October 2018, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html

¹⁴Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse... 611.

¹⁵Francis, *Discourse to the Curia. Christmas Greetings for the Roman Curia*, 22 December 2014, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco_20141222_curia-romana.html

those who understand the call to priesthood or religious life in terms of a deformed theology of “being chosen.” According to such a theology, God separates¹⁶ a person from the world in order to grant him higher status with respect to other members of the Church. In this way ordained ministry and the clerical institution are *sacralized*; “priestly *service* is confused with priestly *power*. ... Ministry is understood not as service but as *promotion to the altar*.”¹⁷

The German report also recognizes that “clericalism denotes a hierarchical, authoritarian system that can lead priests to adopt a dominating attitude in relating to non-ordained individuals because they occupy a superior position by virtue of their ministry and ordination.”¹⁸ It is possible, therefore, to speak of a whole clerical culture in which priests form part of an institutional model that is monarchical in practice and socially stratified. The very nature of such a structure has created a “clerical aristocracy” that is expressed in lifestyles and clothing as well as in relations of power and obedience that are graded and never horizontal.¹⁹ A study published by CEPROME (Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Formation for the Protection of Minors in Mexico) corroborates this finding; it maintains that in the Church’s present institutional crisis “clericalism is an important element to consider in trying to understand both the distortion of the power exercised over persons by the cleric who is called to serve and, at the institutional level, the distortion of the power exercised by the hierarchy over the people of God.”²⁰

This means that we are faced with a whole ecclesial culture that is in need of reform; we are dealing with a “state of things,” not simply individual actions or isolated instances of abuse in the exercise of power. And since it is an ecclesial culture, it affects everything and everybody in the Church because “there are attitudinal, behavioral, and institutional dimensions to the phenomenon of clericalism.”²¹ In other words:

Clericalism arises from both personal and social dynamics, is expressed in various cultural forms, and often is reinforced by institutional structures.

¹⁶“Clericalism—that desire to lord it over lay people—signifies an erroneous and destructive separation of the clergy, a type of narcissism.” Interview given by Pope Francis to Father Antonio Spadaro SJ in *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly Spanish edition, Year XLV, 39 (2,333), Friday 27 September 2013.

¹⁷Francis, *The Sovereignty of the People of God...*

¹⁸ The report adds that “sexual abuse is an extreme consequence of that dominating attitude.” *Sexueller Missbrauch an Minderjährigen...*, 13.

¹⁹Cf. *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse...* 614.

²⁰Ángela Rinaldi, “Abuso sexual de menores y corrupción estructural,” in Daniel Portillo, ed., *Tolerancia Cero*, Mexico-Madrid: CEPROME-PPC, 2019, 33.

²¹*Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse...* 613.

Among its chief manifestations are an authoritarian style of ministerial leadership, a rigidly hierarchical worldview, and a virtual identification of the holiness and grace of the church with the clerical state and, thereby, with the cleric himself.²²

Theologian Eamonn Conway argues that this situation forces us to consider the possibility of “institutional failure.”²³ The problems concern not only organizational forms and technical procedures in the Church, which are mentioned also in a study commissioned by the U.S. Bishops’ Conference,²⁴ but above all an *ecclesiological model* whose theological and cultural bases are in crisis, making it clear that the ecclesial structure “has a problem with power.”²⁵ Jörg Fegert and Michael Kölch assert that these problems cannot be attributed to the bad conduct of individuals, something that can be corrected; rather, we are faced with the failure of the Church’s present *institutional form*.²⁶ Thus, as the German bishops point out, the abuse of power in Church, specifically sexual abuse,²⁷ is “responsible for the failure of the institution that does not protect victims.”²⁸

Lluís Duch speaks of the need to recover *structures of acceptance* that are able to mediate human relations and forge creative links between past, present, and future.²⁹ Ronaldo Muñoz speaks of the need of a Church in which “everyone can participate in solidarity *through adequate channels and structures*.”³⁰ It is a matter of following the lead of the Council so that the Church

becomes a community of free and open persons who cooperate responsibly. The Church should be a community in which all unite in

²²Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse... 614.

²³Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse... 585.

²⁴Cf. *The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by the Catholic Church in the United States between 1950-2010*, 87.91.92. Study done in 2002 by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of City University of New York at the request of the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Conference, <https://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/research/ageofinquiry/biogs/E000235b.htm>

²⁵Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse... 613, 641.

²⁶Jörg Fegert, Michael Kölch, Elisa König, Daniela Harsch, Susanne Witte, Ulrike Hoffmann, ed., *Schutz vor sexueller Gewalt und Übergriffen in Institutionen*, Universitäts Klinkum, Ulm: Springer, 2018, 305, 309.

²⁷On sexual abuse see Carlos Schickendantz, “Fracaso institucional de un modelo teológico-cultural de Iglesia Factores sistémicos en la crisis de los abusos,” *Teología y Vida* 60 (2019) 9–40.

²⁸*Sexueller Missbrauch an Minderjährigen...*, 68.

²⁹“The socialization, the identification, the putting into words, the symbolic anticipation becomes something truly important only in the fabric of human existence through the mediation of the structures of acceptance, which are those relational elements that allow for the establishment, in and from the present, of creative linkage with the past for the sake of imagining and configuring the future.” Lluís Duch, *Educación y crisis de la modernidad*, Barcelona: Paidós, 1997, 27.

³⁰Muñoz, *Nueva conciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 362–363.

solidarity and participate actively in an attitude of ongoing searching and self-criticism. At all levels there should be *structures of participation* for lay people, religious, and priests and the possibility of choosing the representatives and leaders. The hierarchy should consult the laity regarding their pastoral decisions and their declarations. The hierarchy should trust more in the maturity of the laity, especially working-class folk, and should recognize in practice the autonomy of initiative and movement that corresponds to the laity in temporal affairs. The priests, religious, and active laity of the local church should participate in the naming of the bishop.³¹

Consequently, if “the problem is systemic and [it exists] in every part of the Catholic Church at the international level,”³² if it adheres to a Constantinian ecclesiology³³ that defines an ontologically unequal society, and if it “gives rise to a dual model of Church in which the Church of the clergy is superior and more ‘holy’ when compared with the Church of the laity,”³⁴ then the question is: how do we build a new institutional model that is not clericalized? The answer necessarily involves the *conversion of the hierarchical institution*. In accordance with the spirit and the letter of Vatican II, this means situating collegiality within the People of God, not vice versa, with the objective of forging a synodal ecclesiology.

2. “The Renewal of the Ecclesial Hierarchy does not in itself Produce Transformation”

Hierarchy and the ministry of orders must be understood in the light of the people of God, as was proposed by Vatican II in chapters two [People of God] and three [Hierarchy] of *Lumen Gentium*. The juxtaposition of these two chapters led to a concentration of power and authority in the hierarchy by reason of ordination, thus provoking a difficulty in understanding synodality *not only in terms of more participative relations among ecclesial subjects, but also in terms of the structural reform of the institutions*.³⁵

The pontificate of Francis has advanced the reception of the Council by aligning chapters 2 and 3 of *Lumen Gentium* and

³¹Muñoz, *Nueva conciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 362–363.

³²Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse... 586.

³³Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse... 618.

³⁴“This ecclesiology gives rise to a dual model of Church in which the Church of the clergy is superior and more ‘holy’ when compared with the Church of the laity.” *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*... 620.

³⁵Cf. Serena Noceti, “What Structures are Needed for a Reform of the Church,” *Concilium* 4 (2018) 85–100; Joseph Komonchak, “People of God, Hierarchical Structure, and Communion: An Easy Fit?” in *Canon Law Society of America, Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Convention* (1998) 91–102.

proposing that both primacy and collegiality should be reformed by understanding their existence and exercise in function of the People of God. Such an understanding reveals them to be services of a transitory and historical nature, rather than ontological, eschatological, or self-referential. As the International Theological Commission explained, “the sequence [of *Lumen Gentium*]—Mystery of the Church (chapter 1), People of God (chapter 2), Hierarchical Constitution of the Church (chapter 3)—makes it clear that the *ecclesiastical hierarchy is placed at the service of the People of God* so that the mission of the Church is carried out in conformity with the divine design of salvation, following the logic that gives priority to the whole over the parts and to the end over the means.³⁶

It is with this ecclesiological framework that the contribution of Francis needs to be further developed and linked to institutional reforms that allow us to move beyond the prevailing ecclesial model. Otherwise it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to move beyond the clericalization of ecclesial culture and the sacerdotalization of ministries,³⁷ processes that have caused a large part of the hierarchy to lose “direct contact with the People of God.”³⁸ The words Francis addressed to the Chilean bishops are instructive:

The renewal of the ecclesial hierarchy does not in itself produce the transformation to which the Holy Spirit impels us.³⁹ The Church’s immune system resides in that faithful and silent people (“Private Letter to the Bishops of Chile”). [Therefore] I invite all diocesan organizations—whatever area they are in—to seek out diligently and wisely spaces of communion and participation, so that the Anointing of the People of God can find concrete ways to make itself manifest.⁴⁰

The papal text is not just calling for reform of mentalities on the part of the hierarchy; it is calling for the creation of *concrete mediations*—that is, structural changes—that allow the People of God to play a

³⁶International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, 54, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_sp.html

³⁷Cf. Alberto Parra, “El proceso de sacerdotalización. Una histórica interpretación de los ministerios eclesiales,” *Theologica Xaveriana* 28 (1978) 79–100.

³⁸ Francis, *Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/december/documents/papa-francesco_20131221_auguri-curia-romana.html

³⁹Francis, *Letter to the Pilgrim People of God in Chile*, 31 May 2018, http://www.va/content/francesco/es/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180531_lettera-popolodidio-cile.html

⁴⁰Francis, *Letter to the Pilgrim People of God in Chile*, 31 May 2018, http://www.va/content/francesco/es/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180531_lettera-popolodidio-cile.html

manifest role in the ecclesiastic institution. However, this will be possible only if there is first a *real change in the ecclesiological model*, a change that affects both the institutions and the relations among ecclesial subjects and subjectivities. If no such change happens, then the structures will not change either.⁴¹ As a first step, this means doing away with the pyramidal model and understanding all ecclesial subjects as equal members of the People of God. Since all the faithful are related horizontally by baptism and the common priesthood, there is a need to re-envision the interaction and the existing channels of participation among all the faithful from a perspective that gives priority to the totality over the part. Let us examine this.

2.1. “What is Permanent is the People of God; What is Transitory is the Hierarchical Service”⁴²

Nowadays the image of an inverted pyramid is inadequate for the reforms that are needed, but we should remember that it refers to a radical change of the ecclesiological model and not simply its renewal. Vatican I (1869-70), in its constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, built its ecclesiology on the image of the *perfect society*; in light of papal infallibility, it stressed the centrality of primacy over the episcopal college and the laity, so that the juridical took priority over the communion of the faithful. In this conception the magisterium resided fully in the Pope and only by participation in the episcopal college. The dominant model was that of the pyramid, the fruit of the Gregorian reform, which made an absolute distinction between the *ecclesia docens*—as the only active subject, repository of the power to interpret and teach—and the *ecclesia discens*—the passive subject that simply heard and obeyed. This vision of Church had already been expounded in the *Decree of Gratian*, which distinguished two classes of subjects by reason of their power: the clergy and the laity, those who preside and the subjects who obey.⁴³

⁴¹Cf. Peter De Mey, “Synodality as a Key Component of the Pontificate of Pope Francis: The Difficult Way from Theory to Practice,” in Mark D. Chapman and Vladimir Latinovic, ed., *Changing the Church. Transformations of Christian Belief, Practice, and Life*, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020, 323–331.

⁴²This is a phrase of Mons. De Smedt during the Council found here. Cf. *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, 32 tomos, Ciudad del Vaticano: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970-99, 1/4, 143.

⁴³Cf. Juan Fornés, “Notas sobre el ‘Duo sunt genera Christianorum’ del *Decreto de Graciano*,” *Ius canonicum* 60 (1990) 607–632. See especially pages 622–623, where he describes the shift from recognition of the radical equality of all Christians, the *Christifideles* exercising diverse functions, to the medieval system of *Christianitas*, which established a hierarchical estate system by reason of power: the ecclesiastical and the secular.

During the Second Vatican Council this model gave rise to many debates since it involved overcoming mentalities and structures that were inspired by the triumphalism, juridicism, and clericalism that had dominated the Church's life and mission for almost a millennium. In this conception, the relations among ecclesial subjects – pope, bishops, clergy, laity – were viewed in the light of an *unequal society*. During the conciliar discussions Bishop Émile-Joseph De Smedt explained it in these terms: “You are familiar with the *pyramid*: pope, bishops, priests, each one of them responsible for teaching, sanctifying, and governing with their due authority. Then, at the base are the Christian people, who are mostly receptive, in a way that accords with the place they seem to occupy in the Church.”⁴⁴ What was at issue was not a simple reversal of positions of power in the Church or the creation of an inverted pyramid. De Smedt warned: “In speaking of the Church we should be careful not to fall into hierarchicalism, clericalism, episcopolatry, or popolatry. *What comes first is the People of God.*”⁴⁵

An authentic ecclesiological shift was taking place, one that included *all the faithful* in the category of the People of God, *granting them equal dignity and thus making them subjects with the same rights and duties*. Therefore, “in the People of God we are all united with one another. We have the same basic laws and duties. We all share in the real priesthood of the people of God. The Pope is one of the faithful: bishops, priests, laity, religions, *we are all the faithful.*”⁴⁶ In claiming that “we all are the faithful and what comes first is the People of God,” De Smedt is calling for *a new way of proceeding*, one that produces an ecclesiological shift away from the old juridical, clerical model; one that includes all ecclesial subjects as part of a *totality* as faithfuls. At least three criteria of discernment stand out:

- (a) the primacy of “the whole over the parts,” stressing the common baptismal dignity and the equal participation of all in the common priesthood;
- (b) a horizontal exercise of the *sensus fidelium* that integrates the episcopal college and the successor of Peter into the totality of the people of God, and in precisely that order: first the people of God (all), then the bishops (some), and finally the Bishop of Rome (one).

⁴⁴Cf. *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, 32 volumes, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Vatican City, 1970–99, 1/4, 142.

⁴⁵Cf. *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, 32 volumes, 1/4, 143.

⁴⁶Cf. *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, 32 volumes, 1/4, 143.

(c) and recognition of the transitory nature of priestly ordination and the hierarchy. In the words of Bishop De Smedt: “It needs to be noted that hierarchical power is only transitory. ... What is permanent is the people of God; what is temporary is the hierarchical service.”⁴⁷ The condition of hierarchical service is historical and temporal: *pertinet ad statum viae*. That which is permanent is what defines and qualifies, not that which is transitory.

In this context, Francis teaches that “the Pope is not in himself above the Church; rather, he is in the Church *as one baptized among the baptized*, and he is in the episcopal college as *one bishop among the bishops*.”⁴⁸ This is an essential element for institutional reforms: the “conversion of the papacy” as a step toward the necessary decentralization in the Church (EG 32). The principle of hierarchical ministry is integrated into the search for unity by reason of the Church’s evangelizing mission and not by a vertical command structure; it is analogous to the way in which the magisterium is at the service of the word of God and not vice versa.

In accord with the conciliar spirit, Pope Francis states that “in this Church, as in an *inverted pyramid*, the peak is found below the base. That is why those who exercise authority are called ‘ministers’: the original meaning of the word is ‘the smallest of all.’ Every bishop, by serving the People of God, becomes part of the flock that has been entrusted to him; he becomes *vicarius Christi*, a vicar of Christ who at the Last Supper stooped down to wash the feet of the apostles (cf. John 13:1–15). In that setting, the Successor of Peter himself is the *servus servorum Dei*.”⁴⁹ Therefore, the objective of inverting the pyramid is not to improve episcopal practice by seeking a better balance between papal primacy and the episcopal college, nor is it simply a redistribution of ecclesial co-responsibility. The real novelty consists in understanding the *People of God* as the *basic active subject* of the whole Church and thus giving priority to evangelization—a responsibility of all the faithful—rather than to sacramentalization, which is reserved to the

⁴⁷Cf. *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, 32 volumes, 1/4, 143.

⁴⁸Francis, *Discourse at the Commemoration of 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html

⁴⁹Francis, *Discourse at the Commemoration of 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*.

ministers.⁵⁰ The power of evangelizing is always superior to the power of baptizing (1 Cor 1:17).

Such a vision shows that it is necessary to involve the *whole* People of God in the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing since all ecclesial subjects are newly qualified as the faithful and so possess the same rights and duties with regard to the Church's mission. None of the faithful can be excluded from any ecclesial structure because the final objective and the *raison d'être* of any institutional structure of the Church is its *mission*, and the mission is determined by the participation of *all* in the *tria munera Christi*—priest, prophet, and king—, and not by the exercise of the ministerial authority resulting from ordination.

The novelty of the notion *faithful* is that it constitutes a *totality* and not a unity or an aggregation of various groups of subjects. This is the novelty brought about by the so-called ecclesiological shift of the Council. The identity of each ecclesial subject is defined by its interaction with the others, and not by itself. We can speak of a circular reciprocity that *overcomes the pyramid from below and from within*, resulting in an ecclesial style and a way of proceeding that seek out new mechanisms, spaces, and institutional—therefore socio-structural—modes. Emphasizing the totality means favouring the “common work... [and] the participation of all according to the diversity and originality of the goods and services.”⁵¹ In fact, “because of the Baptism received ..., it would be inadequate to conceive of a program of evangelization that was carried out by qualified agents while the rest of the faithful were simply recipients of their actions” (EG 120). Soon after the Council ended, Cardinal Suenens explained this with the following words:

Thus, viewed from the perspective of baptism and not the hierarchy, the Church appeared from the beginning as a sacramental and mystical reality before becoming also a juridical society. *It rests on its base, the people of God, rather than on its peak, the hierarchy.* The pyramid of our manuals has been inverted: a Roman prelate was able to write that it was a true Copernican revolution. For this very reason, and here I go directly to your

⁵⁰The document of *Medellín—the Second General Conference of the Latin American Bishops* in 1968—had already requested the abrogation of the pre-conciliar model of Christendom since it was “based on sacramentalization, with little emphasis on prior evangelization” (*Medellín, Concluding Document, Popular Pastoral*, 1). A recent edition of the complete Documents of *Medellín* was published by the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá in 2018. The English Excerpts published by Orbis Books in 1990 do not include the Document on *Popular Pastoral* quoted here.

⁵¹Gilles Routhier, “Évangile et modèle de sociabilité,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 51, 1 (1995) 69.

question, the bishop also must *situate himself among the people of God* who have been entrusted to him; he must be ever closer to his clergy and his faithful, living in equality of conditions with them, even as regards clothing.⁵²

The basis for overcoming clericalism and for a *Synodal Church* is *situating the hierarchy within the people of God*, regarding it as one more subject among all the faithful, because clericalism “has a tendency to diminish and devalue the grace of baptism ...; it forgets that the visibility and sacramentality of the Church *belong to all the People of God* (LG 9–14) and *not just to a few chosen illuminati*.”⁵³ Therefore,

since the subject responsible for the mission is the whole People of God, authority must be exercised within the framework of synodality [...]. Synodality thus seems to be the most important and fruitful perspective for a united Church, one in which recognition of the sacrament of the pastors remains always united to the valorizing of the sacrament of baptism and the charisms of all the faithful.⁵⁴

2.2. The People of God as the Totality of the Faithful

While it is true that the Church builds up communion to the extent that it becomes constituted as the People of God (EG 113), it cannot achieve this goal except through a *synodal* way of proceeding.⁵⁵ This means giving primacy to the ecclesial form of knowing called *sensus fidei*,⁵⁶ which is a capacity given to every baptized person, but only when exercised as *sensus fidelium*, that is, as part of the totality of baptized persons. This is what Vatican II teaches when it states that “The *entire body of the faithful*, anointed as they are by the Holy One

⁵²The complete interview was published here: “*La unidad de la Iglesia en la lógica del Vaticano II*. El cardenal Suenens contesta las preguntas de José Broucker,” *El Ciervo* 184 (June 1969) 5.

⁵³Francis, *Letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America*, 19 March 2016, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html

⁵⁴Severino Dianich, *Diritto e Teologia. Eclesiologia e canonistica per una riforma della Chiesa*, Bologna: EDB, 2015, 123.

⁵⁵Cf. Rafael Luciani, “Reforma, conversión pastoral y sinodalidad. Un nuevo modo eclesial de proceder,” Rafael Luciani, ed., *La sinodalidad en la vida de la Iglesia. Reflexiones para contribuir a la reforma eclesial*, San Pablo, Madrid 2020, 41–66.

⁵⁶Cf. Dario Vitali, *Lumen Gentium. Storia, Commento, Recezione*, Rome: Studium, 2012. Especially page 67; Myriam Wijlens, “Primacy-Collegiality-Synodality. Reconfiguring the Church because of *Sensus Fidei*,” *Source: Peter Szabo, ed., Proceedings of the 23rd Congress of the Eastern Churches*. Debrecen, September 3–8, 2017. *Kanan XX V*, Nyiregyhaza 2019, 237–260; Dario Vitali, “The Circularity between *Sensus Fidei* and Magisterium as a Criterion for the Exercise of synodality in the Church,” in Carlos M. Galli and Antonio Spadaro SJ, ed., *For a Missionary Reform of the Church*, 196–217; and Herve Legrand, “Reception, *Sensus Fidelium*, and Synodal Life: An Effort at Articulation,” *Jurist* 57 (1997) 405–431.

(cf. 1 John 2:20, 27), cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole people's supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals" (LG 12). As we have explained before, the ecclesiological shift of the Council has to do with the notion of the *totality of the faithful*, or all the faithful understood within a logic of reciprocity. From this point of view, we can then speak of synodality.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, we find further developments of the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* 9 and 12, with the use of the notion of *sensus fidei* (EG 119, 198) when speaking of the whole People of God as called to discipleship and mission. The faithful are not understood as a collection of individuals or as an undifferentiated mass; rather, they are understood as a *body* joined in the *reciprocal interaction* that arises from the participation of each member *suo modo et pro sua parte* (LG 31) in the mission of the Church in the World by way of discipleship. It is this active participation of the totality of the People of God that enables the infallibility *in credendo* of *all*, and not only of one (Primacy) or some (Collegiality):

In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith. ... God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith—*sensus fidei*—which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression (EG 119).

According to this vision, we can say that the *sensus fidelium* and the *magisterium* are distinct but *complementary* subjects whose constant reciprocity produces and regulates the intelligence of faith. If this were not so, the *depositum fidei* would become an abstract, unilateral reality without any connection to the People of God. The unity between these two subjects does not result from the similarity in the way they exercise that function, but in the necessity of interrelating both subjects in order to achieve authentic *ecclesial consensus*. If the two subjects are complementary, the *consensus omnium fidelium* should be the fruit of a *sensus fidei totius populi* because all ecclesial subjects are called to interact in light of the principle of *singularis antistitum et fidelium conspiratio*, according to the Council (DV 10).

The elaboration of the *consensus* among all ecclesial subjectivities depends on the discernment of the whole, since “the discernment is not only done in the Church, but it *makes the Church* insofar as it takes place amid all the diversity of vocations, charisms, and ministries, where the baptized hear the Word of God, examine the signs of the times, and participate in history under the action of the Holy Spirit. Discernment is an ecclesial process that requires the participation of all the faithful, according to the interest and involvement of each person. In principle, discernment arises from ecclesial synodality, but it requires institutional translation into the concrete places, instances, and organs by which it can be practiced in the Church.”⁵⁷ This implies an ecclesial way of proceeding that needs to be formed, because it changes our ways of being, living, acting and thinking. We need to convert and re-learn how to relate to each other, re-learn how to elaborate and take decisions – not anymore by one or some, but by all –, and therefore, re-learn practices of discernment and *consensus* building. All these words may not be new to us, but in a synodal Church they embody a new way of proceeding, and because it is new, we need to be open to conversion and re-learn from the best practices found in the tradition of the Church, as well as the contribution of contemporary sciences, such as sociology, psychology and politics.

By situating the hierarchy within the People of God and understanding the latter as the principal and basic subject that encompasses everyone in the Church, the processes of discernment and decision making are the responsibility of all the faithful, and not of the bishops and the Pope alone.⁵⁸ This *shared responsibility* is fundamental for a synodal Church in which “all can participate in solidarity, through adequate channels and structures.”⁵⁹ Thus, whereas collegiality and papal primacy have their *raison d’être* in service to the People of God, it can be said that synodality “offers us the

⁵⁷Alphonse Borras, “*Votum tantum consultivum*. Les limites ecclesiologiques d’une formule canonique,” *Didaskalia* 45 (2015) 161.

⁵⁸“In general, [the bishop] will act according to canon 127: he will not take issue with what the ecclesial community has expressed unless there is significant reason. By virtue of their ordination and in accord with their office, the pastors will make the decisions. The making of decisions means that what was *developed jointly* is ‘handed over to the Church’; the decision is in fact made by the authority of those who fulfill this role of articulation among the communities. ... According to this perspective, the pastors do not exercise their ministry in isolated fashion; they do so with the other faithful, and not without them. In this way a *communal modality in the exercise of ministry* is rediscovered.” Alphonse Borras, “*Votum tantum consultivum*...,” 161.

⁵⁹Muñoz, *Nueva conciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 363.

most adequate interpretative framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself.”⁶⁰

3. Situating Collegiality within Synodality

3.1. Primacy, Collegiality, and Synodality: Advancing by Overcoming Juxtapositions

While collegiality refers to the nature and form proper to the episcopacy as it is exercised among bishops with and under Peter (LG 22-23),⁶¹ synodality is instead *a constitutive note of the whole of ecclesial life*; it is *the whole Church's way of proceeding*, and, therefore, it involves the totality of the People of God joined together.⁶² This being the case, collegiality must be conceived and understood on the basis of synodality, and not vice versa. This is the path toward the clericalization of *ecclesial practices and structures*, a task that “bishops and priests can in no way accomplish by themselves.”⁶³ As Francis reminds, “it is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God’s People.”⁶⁴

We can understand this better if we situate ourselves within chapter III of *Lumen Gentium*, recognizing that the unresolved juxtaposition between primacy and collegiality has given rise to a type of subordinate relationship that has not helped synodal reform. Even the notion of “college” did not have an easy time making its way through the Council. Countering the pressure of the conservative minority, who wanted to save the doctrine of primacy promulgated by Vatican I, Paul VI added an explanatory note to *Lumen Gentium*, making it clear that “the Supreme Pontiff, as Supreme Pastor of the Church, may freely exercise his power at any time, as his own ministry requires of him. In contrast, the College, although it always exists, does not for that reason act permanently with *strictly* collegial action. ... It acts with strictly collegial action

⁶⁰International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*.

⁶¹Bernardo Bayona Aznar, “Nacimiento, letargo y renacimiento de la colegialidad en el Concilio Vaticano II,” *Didaskalia* 45, 1 (2015) 117–134.

⁶²Cf. Carlos María Galli, “La figura sinodal de la Iglesia según la Comisión Teológica Internacional,” in Rafael Luciani, ed., *La sinodalidad en la vida de la Iglesia. Reflexiones para contribuir a la reforma eclesial*, Madrid: San Pablo, 2020, 17–40.

⁶³Pedro Trigo, *Concilio Plenario Venezolano. Una constituyente para nuestras Iglesia*, Caracas: Centro Gumilla, 2009, 329.

⁶⁴Francis, *Letter to the People of God*. 20 August 2018, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html

only at intervals and *with the consent of the Head*" (LG. Explanatory note 4). This juxtaposition (LG 22) can be overcome if we situate both subjects—bishops and Pope—within the interpretative framework that synodality offers us, with the spirit of achieving the "healthy decentralization" (EG 16)⁶⁵ that is proper to a synodal model of Church, as we have previously explained and insisted.

During the *Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, Francis described a new model: "A synodal Church is a Church that listens, with the understanding that listening 'is more than hearing.' It is reciprocal listening in which everyone has something to learn."⁶⁶ Listening becomes a characteristic that defines the identity of the *faithful* or *ecclesial subjects* by reason of the "common priesthood" in which the whole People of God takes part: Pope, bishops, laity, etc. Furthermore, if according to the Council (LG 10) "the common priesthood and ministerial hierarchical priesthood" are "ordered to one another," listening also characterizes the whole *process* of interaction and connection that occurs among all of them: "Faithful people, episcopal college, Bishop of Rome: each one listening to the others, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of Truth' (Jn 14,17), to know what he "is telling the churches' (Rev 2,7)."⁶⁷ It is "each one listening to the others" and "all listening to the Holy Spirit" that links together both the subjects and the processes in a reciprocal and horizontal dynamic. Something yet to be thought, formed and learned in the current Church mentalities and structures.

By 1962, the year when the Council formally began, Bishop De Smedt had already advanced in this direction. At that time, he maintained that "the teaching body [bishops] does not rely exclusively on the Holy Spirit's action on the bishops; it should also *hear* the action of the same Spirit *on the People of God*. Therefore, the teaching body not only speaks to the People of God, but it also *listens to this People* in whom Christ continues his teaching."⁶⁸ The teaching body not only listens *to* the People of God but listens *as part of the People of God*. What is heard from the People should then find ecclesial channels and structures—or as Francis said, "concrete

⁶⁵Francis, *Discourse at the Commemoration of 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*.

⁶⁶Francis, *Discourse at the Commemoration of 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*.

⁶⁷Francis, *Discourse at the Commemoration of 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*.

⁶⁸Emile-Joseph De Smedt, *The Priesthood of the Faithful*, New York: Paulist Press, 1962, 89–90.

mediations” –that link it to magisterial decisions. If steps are not taken now to concretize this type of necessary ecclesial structure, then “the insufficient consideration of the *sensus fidelium*, the concentration of power, the isolated exercise of authority, the centralized and discretionary style of government, and the opacity of regulatory procedures”⁶⁹ will become all the more evident.

We must also be aware that, if synodality is a constitutive note of the Church, it cannot be reduced to the institution of the Synod, or to an Assembly. The objective of the Synod of Bishops is to bring together bishops from all over the world to advise the Roman primate (CDC, canon 342), without the advice given being in any way binding on the final decision of the Pope. Although the Code of Canon Law gives the Pontiff the ability to concede a deliberative and binding force to the decision of the bishops (CDC, canon 343), the episcopal institution continues to be a body of collaboration and counselling that expresses only affective collegiality (*Christus Dominus* 5). In order for this to change and become effective, the Pope would have to *ratify and promulgate* the conclusion reached by the synodal fathers. Francis opens up this possibility in article 18 of *Episcopalis Communio*, but he has not yet exercised it:

§ 1. Once the final Document of the Assembly is approved by the Members, it is presented to the Roman Pontiff, who decides about its publication. If it is expressly approved by the Roman Pontiff, the final Document becomes part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter. § 2. If the Roman Pontiff grants the Assembly of the Synod deliberative powers, according to canon 343 of the Code of Canon Law, the final Document becomes part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter once it has been *ratified* and promulgated by him. In this case the final Document is published with the signature of the Roman Pontiff along with the signatures of the Members (*Episcopalis Communio*, Art. 18).

3.2. The Elaboration and the Making of Decisions in the Construction of Consensus

The Synod, as an expression of the relation between the primacy and collegiality, cannot exist outside the totality of the faithful who make up the People of God: laity, religious, Bishops, Pope. As Francis explains: “Although structurally it is essentially configured as an episcopal body, this does not mean that the Synod exists separately from the rest of the faithful. On the contrary, it is a suitable

⁶⁹ Alphonse Borras, “Sinodalità ecclesiale, processi partecipati e modalità decisionali,” Carlos María Galli-Antonio Spadaro, ed., *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, Brescia: Queriniana, 2016, 208.

instrument to *give voice to the entire People of God*" (*Episcopalis Communio* 6). The reform of a structure like that of the Synod cannot be seen only as a problem of *method*; such a reform has already been achieved in the recent synodal assemblies convoked by Francis. An authentic reform of this institution, or the creation of another one, but more *ecclesial* and less *collegial*, must deal with the *synodal way of proceeding*, which is expressed in the processes for elaborating ecclesial consensus. This means considering the forms of interaction among the different ecclesial subjects during all stages of the processes that lead to a final decision. Though, a real insertion of collegiality within synodality should be translated into new ecclesial structures yet to be formed, rather than more collegial and advisory ones that will continue to embrace a pyramidal way of proceeding in the Church. If *all* ecclesial subjects are really responsible of the mission of the Church, then reforms cannot be thought from top to bottom, but the other way around.

Lumen Gentium 30 indicates this path when it recognizes that "everything that has been said concerning the People of God is intended for the laity, religious, and clergy alike." This being so, pastors should also recognize the services and charisms of the laity⁷⁰ "so that all, according to their proper roles, may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind" (LG 30). Thus, if synodality "concerns all the faithful, it is constituted through the participation or convergence of all the baptized, each one according to their proper condition. It is founded on the baptismal co-responsibility of all the faithful in the diversity and complementarity of their charisms."⁷¹ In line with the Council, then, there is a need not only to create and develop more ministries but also to give space to and promote the diversity of charisms and services in the Church (LG 32a). It is the Spirit, active in each person (LG 9), who empowers us all equally to discern by "testing all things and holding fast to that which is good" (LG 12). On this basis, there can be no rigid separation between *Ecclesia docens* and *Ecclesia discens*, and there is therefore a need to create new *ecclesial* structures—and not only *collegial* ones—, and procedures of interaction that are not limited to simple consultation or advisory.⁷²

⁷⁰Cf. Antonio José de Almeida, "Laicos y laicas en la práctica de la sinodalidad," in Rafael Luciani, ed., *Reforma de estructuras y conversión de mentalidades. Retos y desafíos para una Iglesia Sinodal*, Madrid: KHAF, 2020, 243–276.

⁷¹Borras, "Sinodalità ecclesiale, processi partecipati e modalità decisionali," 211.

⁷²On the limits of the consultative character, see: Alphonse Borras, "Votum tantum consultivum. Les limites ecclesiologiques d'une formule canonique," 145–62.

A synodal structure must start out from the lowest point possible so that the *process for elaborating decisions* is truly binding on the whole People of God, to the point that the *subsequent process, which corresponds to the one or the few who make the decision, can ratify what was elaborated by all*, the fruit of an interaction of the totality of the faithful, from below and from within. In a word, “it would be better to say that the consultative organs *elaborate* the decision for which the pastoral authority, which *assumes* it, has the final responsibility.”⁷³ This has already happened *circumstantially* in Latin America, both at *Medellín*⁷⁴ – the Second General Conference of the Latin American Bishops – and more recently at the *Venezuelan Plenary Council*.⁷⁵

What is at stake in the processes by which consensuses are constructed is the conversion and the transformation of the hierarchy. This does not affect the sacramentality of the episcopate but rather situates it and qualifies it in view of its character as transitory service defined by a co-responsible interaction and integration with all in the ecclesial body. The episcopate is therefore just *one faithful more*, even in the process of the evolution of doctrine,⁷⁶ because “the formal authority of an official post does not dispense the person exercising it... from the obligation of effectively procuring... the consent of those who are affected by a decision.”⁷⁷ Therefore, the consensus is not a mere organizational matter or a redistribution of spaces and powers; rather, it is an *ecclesiological model* that entails the configuration of a new *synodal ecclesial identity*. This new identity takes up the question about *power* and *authority* in the Church and discerns it in the light of

⁷³Borras, “Sinodalità ecclesiale, processi partecipati e modalità decisionali,” 231–232.

⁷⁴Cf. Rafael Luciani, “Medellín como acontecimiento sinodal. Una colegialidad fecundada y completada,” *Horizonte* 50 (2018) 482–516. Also, Rafael Luciani, “From Collegiality to Synodality in Latin America,” *Asian Horizons: Dharmaram Journal of Theology* 14 (2020) 151–166.

⁷⁵Venezuelan Bishops’ Conference, *Documentos del Concilio Plenario Venezolano*, CEV, Caracas, 2006; Pedro Trigo, *Concilio Plenario Venezolano. Una constituyente para nuestras Iglesia*, Caracas: Centro Gumilla, 2009; And a complete description and analysis of the Council is found in: (Mons.) Raúl Biord Castillo, “El Concilio Plenario de Venezuela. Una buena experiencia sinodal (2000-2006),” in Rafael Luciani, ed., *La sinodalidad en la vida de la Iglesia. Reflexiones para contribuir a la reforma eclesial*, Madrid: San Pablo, 2020, 293–328.

⁷⁶“The teaching body [bishops] did not receive from the beginning a perfectly explicit expression of Catholic truths that it gradually presented to the People of God. In the Church there is a certain development of doctrine. Is this more profound vision of the Gospel achieved only by the action of the Holy Spirit on the bishops? No, *the whole Church* – bishops and faithful – are in a certain sense *involved in this growth in understanding of the Word*.” De Smedt, *The Priesthood of the Faithful*, 89–90.

⁷⁷Karl Rahner, *Cambio estructural de la Iglesia*, Madrid: PPC, 2014, 85 (Orig. *Strukturwandel der Kirche als Aufgabe und Chance*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1972).

the *good practices of shared power*. We can here recall the classical principle according to which “*what affects all should be discussed and approved by all.*”⁷⁸ Even if we sometimes forget the implications of the last part of the axiom.⁷⁹

Conclusion

As we have explained in this article, instituting the practice of collegiality and intensifying it in the context of chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium* is the path by which the hierarchy can be transformed and adapted on the basis of its service to the People of God. This will allow for the conversion of an institution that has been nourished on its own self-referencing; by moving out of its own centre, it will live fully as one faithful more in that People that mediates the voice of Christ.⁸⁰ *Episcopalis Communio*, following LG 12, reminds us that it is the *totality of the faithful* who “show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals,” that is, all who make up the People of God, “from Bishops to the last of the lay faithful” (*Episcopalis Communio* 5). Therefore, every bishop in every particular Church should “carry out the consultation of the People of God by recourse to the participatory bodies provided for by the law, without excluding other methods that they deem appropriate” (*Episcopalis Communio*, canonical disposition no. 6). Therefore, the hierarchy is called to create the “concrete mediations” necessary for involving all the faithful, so that even “the laity participate in the discernment, the decision making, the planning, and the execution.”⁸¹

The foreseen principle of the totality of the faithful and its hermeneutics of reciprocity, viewed synodally, expresses a *new way of proceeding* that “has its point of departure but also its point of arrival in the *People of God*” (*Episcopalis Communio* 7), because “synodality is a constitutive dimension of the Church, which, precisely *through synodality, manifests itself and configures itself as the pilgrim People of God* and as the assembly convoked by the risen Lord.”⁸² Making a commitment to

⁷⁸Cf. Yves Marie Congar, “Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari et opprobri debet,” *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 36 (1958) 210–259.

⁷⁹Cf. Rafael Luciani, “Lo que afecta a todos debe ser tratado y aprobado por todos. Hacia estructuras de participación y poder de decisión compartido,” *Revista CLAR* LVIII/1 (2020) 59–66.

⁸⁰International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 56.

⁸¹Cf. *Aparecida*, 5th General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, 371.

⁸²International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 42.

greater synodality requires correct application of canonical dispositions, proper understanding of the decision-making modalities, and profound confidence in the People of God—all of which must be linked to the elaboration of the decisions that the pastors must make in order to realize ‘the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone’ (EG 31).⁸³

After this exposition, we can safely affirm that reforming a failed institutional model⁸⁴ means generating a new process of *ecclesiogenesis*⁸⁵ in the light of an authentic theologico-pastoral conversion, re-creation and re-learning. All this must touch the very heart of ecclesiology and not just reorganize the structures superficially. A renewed Church, which is not a new Church, involves at the present time not only a process of creative reception of the Council but a theologico-cultural re-creation of the foundational spirit that led to the original formation of the Church. There is a need to revise the identities and the *good practices* of the institutions and the formation of mentalities of the ecclesial subjects in order to create new structures and interactions that respond to a synodal Church whose “internal institutions must become more fraternal, more participatory, more open to dialogue, more flexible, and more poor.”⁸⁶

⁸³Borras, “Sinodalità ecclesiale, processi partecipati e modalità decisionali,” 232.

⁸⁴Expression used by Eamonn Conway in the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Final Report. Volume 16. Book 2*, 585. See also: Schickendantz, “Fracaso institucional de un modelo teológico-cultural de Iglesia Factores sistémicos en la crisis de los abusos,” 9–40.

⁸⁵ Cf. Rafael Luciani, “La reforma como conversión pastoral y sinodal. Ecclesiogénesis de una recepción conciliar,” Rafael Luciani, ed., *Reforma de estructuras y conversión de mentalidades. Retos y desafíos para una Iglesia Sinodal*, 173–202.

⁸⁶Muñoz, *Nueva conciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 362.