

THE HEART OF THE CURRENT
RECEPTION OF THE ECCLESIOLOGY
OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD
“NEW PATHS IN THE THEOLOGY AND
PRACTICE OF *SENSUS FIDEI*”

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Abstract:

The current synodal process is fostering a deepening of the *sensus fidei*, as a precious theological treasure in the listening of the Spirit on the part of the People of God. It supposes an *ecclesiological turn*, which has its novelty in the intertwined reading of *Lumen gentium* 12 (*sensus fidei*) and 23 (local Churches). It foresees a new reception of pneumatology and a spiritual and binding dynamic of all the faithful, and introduces *restitutio* (or giving back) as a new step on the way to build the *sensus totius populi*. We are living in an ecclesial stage in which a first emergence of what will be a *synodal ecclesiality* can be appreciated, though not fully yet theorized. We will try to develop this in the following contribution.

Key Words: People of God, *Sensus fidei*, Ecclesiology, Synodality

Introduction

The current synodal process (2021-2024) is fostering a deepening of the theology of the *sensus fidei* in light of its practice through

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communicative dynamics such as consultation, listening, discernment in common and the elaboration of decisions in order to discover what the Spirit is asking of the Churches today. Its development and implementation are expressions of the maturing of the ecclesiology of the People of God in recent years and, especially, the ecclesiology of the local Churches. We are facing a new ecclesiological turn that sinks its roots in the intertwined reading of *Lumen gentium* 12 (*sensus fidei*) and 23 (local Churches). This foreshadows the emergence of a new reception of pneumatology in ecclesial life with important implications for the co-responsible bonding of all the faithful in the Church.

One of the most novel elements arises from a new communicative dynamic called *restitutio*, as we will explain, which allows us to advance on the path towards the construction of the *sensus totius populi*, since we cannot speak in a generic way of a consensus among all the faithful, as if they were subjects without diverse identities, lifestyles and cultures. This dynamic gives shape to a new trilogy to be taken into account, namely: *traditio-receptio-restitutio*, which makes ecclesial processes permanent in relation to the interpretation and evolution of the deposit of faith. And this *ecclesiogenesis* is based on the action of the Spirit itself. In all this, we are experiencing a first emergence of what will be a *synodal ecclesiality*. We will now present some elements that characterize the heart of this new phase of the current reception of the ecclesiology of the People of God in the light of the local Churches, which recovers and deepens the pneumatological dimension of the Church.

The Rebirth of the Theology and the Practice of the *Sensus Fidei*

According to Vincent de Lérins, we hold “what has been believed everywhere, always and by all” (*quo ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*) (Commonitorium, ch. 2,6). Although the word *sensus fidei* is not explicitly mentioned, Lérins’ adage still expresses the awareness of a reception and an evolution in the understanding and experience of faith that involves both people and local Churches. For the motto to work, it needs constant dynamics of consensus building and processes that sustain communion in the Church. This presupposes an understanding of tradition as a living body capable of being discerned, interpreted and deepened through the sense of faith of all the faithful, which is not exempt from hermeneutical tensions, whether generated by continuities, discontinuities or novelties, in the interpretation and evolution of the deposit of faith. It is clear that

“doctrine cannot be preserved without making it progress”¹ but, today, the understanding that this progress or development can also arise from the practice of the *sensus fidei fidelium* is being recovered, because “in the Church, the living reality of the conscious knowledge of the faith comes progressively more and more to itself, not in a reflection prior to the act, but in the act itself.”²

Here, the *sensus fidei* plays a key role as a *locus theologicus* insofar as it is a source and mediation of revelation by connatural experience and knowledge, thus providing a continuous maturation in the comprehension of that same revelation. For the believer, the *sensus fidei* rests on the conviction that the Spirit received in baptism makes the believer capable of expressing things about the contents of the faith. The authority of the Church as *universitas fidelium* is based on this personal condition of each believer, but it is the Church lived as a whole, as the totality of the baptized –and not one faithful alone– that *cannot err* in believing. Therefore, we can say that the *sensus fidei* is a personal and interior disposition, an anthropological existential openness in each person manifested by virtue of baptism, but that is only realized through the interaction of all the faithful by means of communicative dynamics, that is, as *sensus fidelium* in order to achieve the *singularis antistitum et fidelium conspiratio*.³

The explicit recourse to the *sensus fidei* has been used for the declaration of the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.⁴ In this case, we can apply the definition by which

¹ “Tradition is a living reality and only a superficial glance can see the deposit of faith as something static. The Word of God cannot be preserved in mothballs, as if it were an old blanket to be protected from moths. No! The Word of God is a dynamic reality, always alive, that progresses and grows because it tends towards a fulfillment that men cannot stop. This law of progress, according to the felicitous formulation of St. Vincent of Lerins: “*Annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate*” (Commonitorium, 23.9: PL 50), belongs to the peculiar condition of revealed truth insofar as it is transmitted by the Church, and in no way entails a change of doctrine. Doctrine cannot be preserved without making it progress.” Francis, Address on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (October 11, 2017) https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171011_convegno-nuova-evangelizzazione.html

² Karl Rahner, “Sobre el problema de la evolución del dogma,” *Escritos de teología, Cristiandad*, Madrid 2000, Tomo I, 53.

³ Cf. Dario Vitali, *Lumen Gentium. Storia, Commento, Recezione*, Studium, Roma 2012, 67.

⁴ One of the best studies on the evolution of doctrine and the *sensus fidei* in the case of the two Marian dogmas can be found in: Félix Palazzi, *La tierra en el cielo. Disertación*

“the sense of faith is a free charism belonging to *all* the members of the Church, a charism of internal agreement with the object of faith, in virtue of which *the Church in its totality*, which is expressed in the consent of faith, recognizes the object of faith and confesses it in the unfolding of its life in constant consonance with the ecclesial magisterium.”⁵ Nowadays, this is deepened in the light of synodality and is conceived as a spiritual dynamic that activates the co-responsible participation of all ecclesial subjects –*christifideles*– in relation to the whole development of the life and mission of the Church, and not only to the deposit of faith or the declaration of dogmas. Therefore, “synodality not only proposes a model of exchange and consultation, but above all allows everyone to participate (...) in the diversity and originality of the gifts and services.”⁶

The current practice of the *sensus fidei* gives channel to this way of proceeding, laying the foundations –such as attitudes, atmosphere, arguments– and the way –consultation, listening, discernment, decisions– of being and doing Church, and provides the most adequate ecclesial dynamics to put into practice the classic principle that says: “what affects all must be dealt with and approved by all.” This implies, today, to think of a better articulation “between the *sensus fidei* with which all the faithful are marked, the discernment exercised at the various levels of realization of synodality and the authority of the one who exercises the pastoral ministry of unity and government.”⁷ In this reciprocity that allows us to think about the rearticulation of *all*, *some* and *one*, the sense of faith of all the faithful plays a fundamental role because it is not a matter of a mere individual experience, but of an authentic spiritual dynamic that makes and constitutes the Church in the light of the experience of the Spirit and” in the life of the spirit even reflection never fully grasps the reasons and motives that really act in a knowledge or in an action. In the simple and direct look at reality we always know more things than can be recorded by reflection and a thorough analysis of this knowledge and its depth. In acting we

sobre el dogma de la Asunción de la Beata Virgen María, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Caracas 2007. Esp. 129-143.

⁵ Wolfgang Beinert, Bedeutung und Begründung des Glaubenssinnes (*sensus fidei*) als eine dogmatischen Erkenntniskriterium,” *Catholica* 25 (1971), 293.

⁶ Gilles Routhier, “Évangile et modèle de sociabilité,” in *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, 51/1 (1995), 69.

⁷ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and the mission of the Church* (2018) 72 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_sp.html

have more motives than we can express in a reflection before or after the act.”⁸

The emergence of this ecclesial way of proceeding is found in today’s process of the Synod on Synodality (2021-2024). The *Continental Stage* of the *Synod on Synodality* takes up this practice by rescuing “the exquisitely theological treasure contained in the experience of listening to the voice of the Spirit enacted by the People of God [and] allowing its *sensus fidei* to emerge” (*Document for the Continental Stage* 8. From now on this document will be quoted DCS). The novelty lies in the fact that the starting point has been “the shared sense of the experience of synodality lived by those who took part” (DCS 9). In this way, the *sensus fidei* opens up “the path of conversion toward a synodal Church. This means a Church that learns from listening how to renew its evangelizing mission in the light of the signs of the times, to continue offering humanity a way of being and living in which all can feel included as protagonists” (DCS 13).

Moreover, it is also a channel for the grasping and development of faith, since, as Rahner explains, “since the knowledge of faith takes place in the power of the Spirit of God and since this Spirit is the indivisible reality that is believed, the object of faith is not merely a passive object, indifferent to the attitude that one has towards it, but rather a joint principle through which it is grasped as an object. [Therefore,] it is no longer possible to say that the conscious development of the Church’s faith advances solely on the basis of conceptual-logical penetration.” It also does so through the practice of the *sensus fidei* which “expresses the shared sense of the experience of lived synodality” (DCS 9).

From this experience has “emerged a profound reappropriation of the common dignity of all the baptized” (DCS 9) that promotes “the co-responsibility of all, values the presence of the charisms infused by the Holy Spirit in the People of God.” We can maintain that here we find the heart of the current reception of the ecclesiology of the People of God. As Card. Grech explains, “many interpreters rightly stress the theme of the Church as the People of God; but what most characterizes this people for the Pope is the *sensus fidei*, which makes it infallible *in credendo*. This is a traditional fact of doctrine that runs through the whole life of the Church: the totality of the faithful cannot err in

⁸ Karl Rahner, “Sobre el problema de la evolución del dogma,” *Escritos de teología*, Cristiandad, Madrid 2000, Tomo I, 62.

believing, by virtue of the light that comes from the Holy Spirit given in baptism.”⁹

The lived experience of synodality is the channel of a synodal ecclesiality that begins to emerge in the light of the ecclesiology of the local Churches and that rescues the pneumatological dimension in the Church, since the practice of the *sensus fidei* has its beginning and its culmination in each *portio Populi Dei* – diocese – in order to reach the consensus ecclesiae that expresses the spiritual convergence lived with and among all the faithful that is being built through the practice of communicative dynamics. The document Guidelines for the Conduct of Meetings of the World Council of Churches notes how consensus procedures leave more room for consultation, exploration, questioning, and prayerful reflection with less rigidity than formal voting procedures. By promoting collaboration rather than adversarial debate, consensus procedures help the assembly (or a commission or committee) to seek together the mind of Christ.

In light of the above, we can affirm that the *sensus fidei* is the most adequate dynamic for the permanent reconfiguration of ecclesial life, because it links together all the ecclesial subjectivities – or faithful – through the action of the Spirit and with the purpose of making together the pastoral decisions that best suit the mission of the Church in each place.¹⁰ In this way, it links the discernment to be made by the apostolic ministry with the prior realization of processes of consultation and listening to all the faithful, thus ensuring that the elaboration of pastoral decisions is built among all, so that they are then discerned and ratified by the hierarchy as an expression of the *sensus ecclesiae*. Consequently, the search for consensus is an essential part of a Synodal Church because it allows us to sustain and strengthen ecclesial communion in virtue of baptism and the exercise of co-responsibility.

⁹ Interview to Cardinal Mario Grech, *The Roman Observatory*, may 21, 2021. Cf. <https://www.vaticannews.va/es/vaticano/news/2021-05/sinodo-obispos-entrevista-cardenal-grech.html>

¹⁰ We find expressions of this vision in the Conclusive Document of *Aparecida*, the V General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate in 2007, when it affirms that the laity must participate not only in the processes of listening, discernment and decision making, but also in the decision-taking processes in the Church (Cf. *Aparecida* 371). This text has also served as inspiration for the most recent process of restructuring and reform carried out by the *Latin American Episcopal Council* (CELAM).

The implications of this synodal way of proceeding for the apostolic ministry were envisioned during the Council by Bishop De Smedt.¹¹ He saw in the *sensus fidei fidelium* the pneumatological foundation to live the exercise of the hierarchical ministry among the faithful: “*Inter fideles cointelliguntur evidentem membra Hierarchiae.*”¹² That is, all ecclesial subjects – laity, religious women and men, presbyters, bishops and the Pope – walking together. It is a matter of situating oneself again in the People of God, “among the faithful. Also, in *Dei verbum* 8 we find another key reading. The expression *perceptio*¹³ was used, which refers to a connatural knowledge by means of which the pastors, together with the rest of the faithful, experience a dynamic process that enables the common sense of the faithful.¹⁴ Therefore, walking together is not something optional. It is the indispensable way of proceeding in order to make Church and to achieve the *singularis fiat antistitum et fidelium conspiratio* (DV 10).

We find beautiful examples of this in the traditions of the first millennium. St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, proposed the way of “collaborative councils of bishops, priests, deacons, confessors and also (...) a substantial number of lay people (...), because no decree can be established that is not ratified by the consent of the plurality.”¹⁵ In the exercise of his episcopal authority, all the faithful participated in the elaboration and verification of decisions so that the decision-taking would be an expression of the advice that the community brought to his ministry according to the principle of essential and pastoral co-responsibility. Thus, having himself participated in the process, the bishop welcomed and ratified the decision. This reminds us that what was and still is at stake is the search for the *sensus ecclesiae* and not the

¹¹ Cf. AS 3/6, 97. *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Ciudad del Vaticano, 1970-99. From now on: AS.

¹² Cf. *Relatio of Lumen gentium* 12 quoted by Francisco Gil Hellín, *Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis*, 96-97.

¹³ Cf. AS 4/5, 704.

¹⁴ Cf. AS 3/3, 139.

¹⁵ “Sic collatione consiliorum cum episcopis, presbyteris, diaconis, confessoribus pariter ac stantibus laicis facta, lapsorum tractare rationem (...), quoniam nec firmum decretum potest esse quod non plurimorum videbitur habuisse consensum.” Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologiae Latina*, Tomus 4 (S. Cypriani), 312.

feelings of the few or the many,¹⁶ because it is always a matter of maintaining the organic communion of the whole People of God.¹⁷

A New Reception of a Pneumatological Ecclesiology

The novelty of the current ecclesiological turn is found in the intertwined reading of *Lumen gentium* 12 (*sensus fidei*) and 23 (local Church), which implies the deepening of the pneumatological dimension of all ecclesial life. This is found in the discussions during the drafting of *Lumen Gentium* 12, when the Council Fathers came to the understanding that it is the Spirit who *manifests* through the communicative dynamism that is set in motion by the *sensus fidei* of the whole People of God as a *collective subject*.¹⁸ This reveals an important aspect of the pneumatological dimension of the Church, which is the recognition that the Spirit makes no distinction of any kind in manifesting. This appears in the *textus receptus* of *Lumen gentium* 12. There, the Council Fathers substituted the expression *exercet* for *manifestat*: “*mediante supernaturali sensu fidei totius populi manifestat.*” This presupposes the understanding that we are not the owners of the Spirit, or of its ways and forms of communicating. Hence, the Council Fathers could sustain that “the Holy Spirit not only sanctifies and guides the People of God through the sacraments and ministries, but

¹⁶ “The 2004 Directory *Apostolorum Successores* on the Pastoral Office of Bishop emphasizes the organic character of ecclesial communion and participatory bodies (n. 165) and, in the sense of canon 127§2,2, prescribes that the bishop should not depart from the opinions or votes expressed by a large majority unless there are grave reasons of a doctrinal, disciplinary or liturgical nature (n. 171a). Thus, in a consultative body, the faithful whose opinions are solicited by the pastors elaborate together with them decisions concerning the life, government, witness and mission of the community. In other words, the pastors do not govern or accompany the people of God without the faithful whom they are called upon to consult in conformity with the Code or, in the event of “other (institutional) forms of dialogue,” according to what, in their judgment, the pastoral government of their flock requires.” Alphonse Borras, “La sinodalidad como elaboración conjunta de decisiones: salir del punto muerto del *votum tantum consultivum*,” *Revista Teología* 135 (2021) 106.

¹⁷ “A so-called Copernican revolution is given, first of all, by the category of the People of God made concrete with the insertion of the second chapter in *Lumen Gentium*. The inclusive notion of the people of God, which underlines above all the common belonging to the Church prior to any differentiation of condition or function, plays a structuring and architectural role; it constitutes the privileged category, the carrying beam of this new model of the Church that the Council laboriously elaborated.” Carlos Schickendantz, “A la búsqueda de una completa definición de sí misma. Identidad eclesial y reforma de la Iglesia en el Vaticano II,” *Teología y vida* 61/2 (2020) 112.

¹⁸ Cf. Serena Noceti, “*Sensus fidelium* e dinamiche ecclesiali,” in *Marriage Family and Spirituality* 23 (2017) 86-98. Esp. 89-91.

also distributes his gifts to each one as he wills, makes him fit, and prepares him to undertake various works or services, for the benefit of the *renewal and further edification of the Church*.¹⁹ The text highlights the unity between the action of the Spirit and ecclesial renewal.²⁰

This makes it clear that the *sensus fidei* is not only an exercise, function or putting into practice of an operation of the intelligence of faith, but it is also, and overall, a *spiritual community dynamic* that enables conversion by linking all the ecclesial subjects together and configuring them as an *organic and co-responsible whole* on the basis of what the Spirit is manifesting through the interaction of the whole People of God, and not just some of them. As Bishop De Smedt explained at the very beginning of the Council, “the teaching body [bishops] does not rest exclusively on the action of the Holy Spirit on the bishops; it [must] also listen to the action of the same Spirit on the people of God. Therefore, the teaching body not only speaks to the People of God, but also listens to this People in whom Christ continues His teaching.”²¹

We have to recognize that *Lumen gentium* 12 has not been a text exempt from controversy, both in the conciliar debates and in its unfinished reception during the post-conciliar period. One of the aspects that stands out is the *munus propheticum* of the entire Messianic People, which today is being revalued and deepened. Congar said that this text shows how “the Holy Spirit makes infallible the whole Church as such, and within it each organic part according to what it represents.”²² In the framework of this *organic totality* (LG 32), the bishop is the voice of a portion of the People of God — diocese— (LG 23) in which he lives as witness, custodian and guarantor (DV 8), in such a way that magisterial *infallibility* is qualified by being exercised

¹⁹ Francisco Gil Hellín, *Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis. Constitutio Dogmatica De Ecclesia Lumen Gentium*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, 99-100.

²⁰ “*Lumen gentium*’s ecclesiology did not understand real involvement in the church exclusively as coming transcendently from Christ and concretely from the hierarchy, as *Mystici corporis* did, but opted often for a more radical theological view, thereby sometimes allowing space for the type of bold and concrete articulation of the Spirit’s active involvement in the church seen in articles 4 and 12.” Jos Moons, *The Holy Spirit, the Church, and Pneumatological Renewal*, Brill, Leiden (Netherlands) 2022, 313-314. Also, chapter 4 of this Book is one of the best works written on the relation between pneumatology and ecclesiology in the Second Vatican Council. It offers all the core arguments of a pneumatological ecclesiology in *Lumen gentium*.

²¹ Emile-Joseph DE SMEDT, *The Priesthood of the Faithful*, 89-90.

²² Yves Congar, *Jalones para una teología del laicado*, Editorial Estela, Barcelona 1963, 351.

within the *infallibility* of the whole People of God through the practice of the *sensus fidei*. Moreover, this theology and practice brings new implications for ecclesial governance and accountability as well. As canonist John Beal explains, canon 369 of the current Canon Law recognizes that

the portion of the people of God is primary; both logically and historically, it precedes the bishop and the presbyterate. This portion of the people of God is entrusted (*concreditur*) to a bishop, that is, the bishop is constituted in a fiduciary relationship with the portion of the people of God, a relationship which theologically and canonically is called shepherding. The bishop is bound by virtue of this fiduciary relationship to act always for the benefit of the portion of the people of God entrusted to him and is, therefore, *accountable* to them for his shepherding. The presbyterate cooperates in the bishop's pastoring function and, therefore, share in a subordinate way in his fiduciary relationship with and accountability to this portion of the people of God.²³

Consequently, the pneumatological dimension of the *sensus fidei* means that the episcopal ministry is mainly qualified by the *testificatio fidei* because it is the Spirit who manifests through all the faithful — *universitas fidelium*²⁴ and the bishop is both witness and party and should live his ministry as service to the rest of the faithful. A new and challenging sign of the development and maturity of a Synodal Church, should be that no discernment and decision-taking be made by the hierarchy without prior consultation and listening to the rest of the faithful, nor without procedures of verification and accountability after the decision has been taken. This is a way of proceeding that should not be optional because the relationship and responsibility that the bishop has with the portion of the People of God, or diocese, in which he pastors, binds and obliges him.²⁵ This is expressed in the *Ravenna Document*: “the authority linked to the grace received at

²³ John P. Beal, “The consultation in Church governance,” *Canon Law Society of America Proceedings* 68 (2006) 38.

²⁴ Cf. Dario Vitali, *Lumen Gentium. Storia, Commento, Recezione*, Studium, Roma 2012, 67.

²⁵ “Canonically speaking this implies that the people of God is seen as a community of people who have come of age (Mündigen) and who therefore must exercise their rights and obligations. It implies that the relationship ‘people of God — ministers of the church’ cannot be characterized by an ‘obedience — order’ model, because the purpose of the exercise of authority is to attend to Christ who must work in and through the people. Ultimately this can find an expression in legal terms when ministerium and synodality are both foundational elements of the Church.” Myriam Wijlens, “The doctrine of the People of God and hierarchical authority as service in Latin Church legislation on the Local Church,” in *The Jurist* 68 (2008) 342.

ordination is neither a private possession of the one who receives it, nor something delegated from the community, but is a gift of the Holy Spirit destined for the service (*diakonia*) of the community and never exercised outside of it. Its exercise includes the participation of the whole community (*St Cyprian*, Ep. 66, 8).²⁶

In light of this, the recovery and deepening of the theology and the practice of the *sensus fidei* is a fundamental element of contemporary ecclesiology that fulfills a normative role in the constitution of ecclesial identities from relationships and communicative dynamics that are lived among all of them and bind them and co-constitute them within the one organic subject that is the People of God. A synodal ecclesiology must therefore articulate these communicative dynamics, including listening and discernment. Referring to the synodal processes 2021-2024, Card. Mario Grech sustains “that the strength of the process lies in the reciprocity between consultation and discernment. Therein lies the fruitful principle that can lead to future developments of synodality.”²⁷ This way of being and proceeding in the Church expresses the primary form of Christian communion, but, as it is said in the *Document for the Continental Stage*, this “requires a style based on participation, which corresponds to the full assumption of the co-responsibility of all the baptized for the one mission of the Church that derives from their common baptismal dignity” (DEC 11).

The pneumatological dimension of the *sensus fidei* allows us to recognize the manifestation of the Spirit through many mediations, not only the ministerial one, and will help us to avoid falling into the temptation of wanting to substitute ourselves for the Spirit. However, we have to ask ourselves honestly if we believe that the Spirit manifests freely through all persons and their life stories, through the many charisms, ministries, services and gifts, even in views that are completely different and diverse from our own positions. The latter is also a mediation of the Spirit that we often forget because it can be uncomfortable to listen, talk and discern in common, with others. If we

²⁶ The Joint Theological Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority*, 13. Ravenna, October 13, 2007 <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese.html>

²⁷ Interview to Cardinal Mario Grech, *The Roman Observatory*, 21-05-2021. Cf. <https://www.vaticannews.va/es/vaticano/news/2021-05/sinodo-obispos-entre-vista-cardenal-grech.html>

become obstacles to the free manifestation of the Spirit, we will be hindering the building of the *ecclesial we*, which is the Church as the People of God on the way.

Communicative Dynamics that Constitute us as Co-Responsible Subjects

If we take a step forward in our reflection, we can sustain that the interwoven reading of the ecclesiology of the local Churches and the theology of the *sensus fidei* forms an ecclesial model, “a vision and practice of the church”²⁸ based on *relationships and communicative dynamics* through which we co-constitute ourselves and become People of God and discover what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (*Episcopalis Communio* 5.8). Amongst them we can refer to the actions of *consultation, listening, dialogue, common discernment, taking counsel, decision-making, decision-taking and accountability*. The Document for the Continental Stage of the Synod on Synodality recognizes all of these spiritual mediations and highlights how “listening and dialogue are the way to access the gifts that the Spirit offers us through the multifaceted variety of the one Church: of charisms, of vocations, of talents, of skills, of languages and cultures, of spiritual and theological traditions, of different forms of celebrating and giving thanks” (DCS 102).

Francis uses these same *communicative dynamics* to define a synodal Church. He tells us: “a synodal Church is a Church of listening (...). It is a *reciprocal listening* in which each one has something to learn (...). It is listening to God, to the point of listening with him to the cry of the people; and it is listening to the people, to the point of breathing in them the will to which God calls us.”²⁹ The exercise of *reciprocal listening* and *discernment in common* is indispensable in a synodal ecclesiology because it starts from the recognition of the proper identity of each ecclesial

²⁸ Following Jos Moons, “the specific topics of charisms and *sensus fidelium* imply something broader and more general, namely *a vision and practice of the church*. Here, one would need to speak of the church as a community and of synodality. While these are indeed ecclesiological topics, ultimately, they are rooted in pneumatology. It is because the Spirit dwells in all the faithful, builds up the church through gifts distributed amongst all the faithful, and gives all the faithful a sense of the truth, that the church is to be conceived of as a communion, which, in turn, means that synodality must be part of the governing of the church.” Jos Moons, *The Holy Spirit, the Church, and Pneumatological Renewal*, Brill, Leiden (Netherlands) 2022, 330.

²⁹ Francis, *Address for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, October 17, 2015 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html

subjectivity based on relationships that “mutually complete each other” (AA 6: *mutuo se complent*).³⁰

Consequently, Reciprocal listening, as understood today, acquires a binding character since all the faithful form an organic *whole* in which each subject contributes something according to *suo modo et pro sua parte* (LG 31). In this way, “each member is at the service of the other members.... [so that] the Pastors and the other members of the faithful are bound to one another by *mutual necessity*” (LG 32). Hence, we cannot separate these communicative dynamics according to ecclesial subjects, because, as Cardinal Suenens explained in interpreting the Council’s ecclesiology, “in the People of God, functions, tasks, ministries, states of life and charisms are *organically* united in a multiform network of structural bonds and vital relationships (LG 13).”³¹ We never exist as isolated individuals, but rather as co-constituting ourselves in a big *ecclesial we*, as it has been called by theologian Serena Noceti. The complexity and challenge of this communicative dynamic lies in its *inclusive* character because

listening requires that we recognize others as subjects of their own journey. When we do this, others feel welcomed, not judged, free to share their own spiritual journey. This has been experienced in many contexts, and for some this has been the most transformative aspect of the whole process. The synodal experience can be read as a path of recognition for those who do not feel sufficiently recognised in the Church (DCS 32).

This organic practice of listening is being revived today. In the synodal process, people “spoke of how, after decades of church going, they had been asked to speak for the first time” (EC Pakistan)” (DCS 23). They also said that “many emphasised that this was the first time the Church had asked for their opinion and they wish to continue this journey (...), in which all members of the congregation or community can openly and honestly express their opinion (EC Latvia)” (DCS 17). Listening to others is a powerful communicative dynamic that opens the path to ecclesial conversion, at all levels. In fact,

not listening leads to misunderstanding, exclusion, and marginalization. As a further consequence, it creates closure, simplification, lack of trust and fears that destroys the community. When priests do not want to listen, making excuses, such as in the large number of activities, or when questions go unanswered, a sense of sadness and estrangement arises in

³⁰ Cf. Rafael Luciani, “Hacia una eclesialidad sinodal una nueva comprensión de la Iglesia Pueblo de Dios?,” *Horizonte* (Brasil) 59 (2021) 547-581. Esp. 571.

³¹ Card. Léon-Joseph Suenens, *Coresponsibility in the Church*, Herder and Herder, NY, 1968, 10.

the hearts of the lay faithful. Without listening, answers to the faithful's difficulties are taken out of context and do not address the essence of the problems they are experiencing, becoming empty moralism. The laity feel that the flight from sincere listening stems from the fear of having to engage pastorally. A similar feeling grows when bishops do not have time to speak and listen to the faithful (DCS 33).

Hence, the art of listening will require formation and experience, as well as to provide the necessary means at our disposal, in order to avoid empty discussions based on opinions or cultural wars, such as "to encourage the fuller dissemination of information, to allow consultation and the serene expression of diverse points of view, to support study leading to the maturing of ideas, to frame the exchange and deliberation leading to decision making, to encourage feedback in order to understand the orientations taken, and so on."³²

Theologically, this experience of listening and being listened to reveals something more profound such as the recognition of the other, the awareness of a common baptismal dignity, and the consciousness of a shared responsibility in all that concerns the life and mission of the Church. This is how the *Document for the Continental Stage* puts it: "practices of lived synodality have constituted a pivotal and precious moment to realize how we all share a common dignity and vocation through our Baptism to participate in the life of the Church (EC Ethiopia). This foundational reference to baptism, not as an abstract concept but as a felt identity" (DCS 22). What has emerged throughout the many voices that have been listened to during the synodal path is a lived reception of the text and the spirit of Vatican II that, "in presenting the Church as the people of God, the Council immediately took a stand, more fundamental than the organic and functional distinction between hierarchy and laity and considered that which is *common to all*: baptism (...). In the Church of God, this fundamental equality for all is the primary fact. There is no super-baptism, there are no castes, no privileges (Gal. 3, 28)."³³

All this calls to imagine an ecclesial life that should be constructed and evaluated by all, by virtue of the horizontality that arises from baptismal dignity. The document on the *Sensus fidei in the life of the Church* of the International Theological Commission expresses it in the following words:

³² Gilles Routhier, "La synodalité dans l'Église locale," *Scripta Theologica* 48 (2016) 695-696.

³³ Card. Léon-Joseph Suenens, *Coresponsibility in the Church*, Herder and Herder, NY, 1968, 30-31.

there is true equality in the dignity of all the faithful, because through their baptism, all have been reborn in Christ. By virtue of this equality, all, according to their own condition and office, cooperate in building up the Body of Christ. Therefore, all the faithful have the right, and sometimes even the duty, by reason of their own knowledge, competence, and prestige, to express to the sacred pastors their opinion on what pertains to the good of the Church (ITC, *Sensus fidei* 120).

During the first consultation phase of the Synod on Synodality, we find this same awareness. Some said how “the experience made [...] has helped to rediscover the co-responsibility that comes from baptismal dignity and has let emerge the possibility of overcoming a vision of the Church built around ordained ministry in order to move toward a Church that is ‘all ministerial,’ which is a communion of different charisms and ministries” (CE Italy) (DCS 67). However, there is still much to do. Members of the hierarchy also said that: “as bishops we recognize that the baptismal theology promoted by the Second Vatican Council, the basis of co-responsibility in mission, has not been sufficiently developed, and therefore the majority of the baptized do not feel a full identification with the Church and even less a missionary co-responsibility. Moreover, the leadership of current pastoral structures, as well as the mentality of many priests, do not foster this co-responsibility” (CE Mexico) (DCS 66).

As seen here, co-responsibility is essential to a Synodal Church because it’s the way in which baptismal rights and duties are exercised by all members of the Church in order to be and become People of God.³⁴ Cardinal Suenens explained, after the Council, that: “if we were to be asked what we consider to be that seed of life deriving from the council which is most fruitful in pastoral consequences, we would answer without any hesitation: it is the rediscovery of the *people of God as a totality*, as a single reality; and then by way of consequence, the co-

³⁴ The Argentine theologian Carlos Maria Galli has developed the reception of the ecclesiology of the People of God in Latin America and its theological implications for the life of the Church in virtue of baptism and participation in the common priesthood of the faithful. In speaking of the state of its current reception, the author explains how Pope Francis has achieved a unified reading of *Lumen gentium*, *Gaudium et spes* and *Ad gentes*. Two important works in this regard are: “Il Popolo di Dio missionario: la ricezione della *Lumen Gentium* in America Latina,” in Giovanni Tangorra, *La Chiesa, mistero e missione: a cinquant’anni dalla Lumen Gentium* (1964-2014), Lateran University Press, Città di Vaticano 2016, 251-290; and the updating of this ecclesiology in the light of Pope Francis is developed by him in: “La reforma misionera de la Iglesia según el papa Francisco. La eclesiología del Pueblo de Dios,” en Carlos M. Galli y Antonio Spadaro (eds.), *La reforma y las reformas en la Iglesia*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2016, 51-77.

responsibility thus implied for every member of the Church.”³⁵ Therefore, in a Synodal Church all the communicative dynamics are not an end in itself, nor can they be lived in a fragmented manner. They have a specific purpose: to *learn* and *take advice* from what has been listened to, and this is a duty proper to those who exercise authority in a co-responsible way, because “the co-responsibility of all in the mission of the Church refers to the exercise of power in the Church, to be exercised always in a synodal way, guided by the *sensus fidelium*.”³⁶

Restitutio: A New Step on the Path to the Consensus Totius Populi

The current reception of the theology and the practice of the *sensus fidei* is not limited to what has been presented here. A new communicative dynamic has emerged in the current synodal path (2021-2024). It's called *restitutio*, which means to *restore* or to *give back* [in Spanish: *restitución*; in Italian: *restituzione*] what was listened and discerned by *all* and by *some* in the local Churches and through the lens of their own reality. Hence, *restitutio* becomes part of the way of proceeding of a synodal Church that must always seek the consensus of the entire People of God through organic processes of interaction and communication amongst *all*. This novelty has been put into practice today through the way in which the *document for the continental stage* (DCS) of the Synod on Synodality was conceived. That is, as it “gathers and restores [*restitutio*] to the local Churches what the People of God of the whole world has said. [This] is meant to guide us and enable us to deepen our discernment” (DCS 105). In this way, another path is opened up to continue deepening and institutionalizing the theology and the practice of the *sensus fidei* in a new synodal ecclesial model.

Ecclesiologically speaking, underneath lies the understanding of the Church as “the People of God incarnated in the peoples of the earth, each of whom has its own culture” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 115), that corresponds to “the perception of Vatican II, according to which the socio-cultural particularity of a region (AG 22) is part of the theological definition of a local Church.”³⁷ Here it is relevant to recall what Karl

³⁵ Card. Léon-Joseph Suenens, *Coresponsibility in the Church*, Herder and Herder, NY, 1968, 30-31.

³⁶ Agenor Brighenti, “O exercício do ministério presbiteral e a corresponsabilidade na missão da Igreja,” *Seminarios* 231 (2022) 215.

³⁷ Hervé Legrand, “Iglesia(s) local(es), Iglesias regionales o particulares, Iglesia católica,” in Juan Carlos Scannone and others, *Iglesia universal. Iglesias particulares*, Argentina 2000, 139.

Rahner called the great challenge of the Church after the Council: to become a *Weltkirche* — world Church —, which means that the Universal Church only exists in concrete and incarnated communities that are visible through their own socio-cultural forms.³⁸ In light of this ecclesiological assessment, we can sustain that the *restitutio* supposes a first step towards a vision and practice that will allow to recognize and enhance theological, liturgical, spiritual, pastoral and canonical particularities in each socio-cultural place where the Church exists (EN 62, LG 23, UR 4, AG 19).

Another newness of the *restitutio* is that it does not end necessarily at first in a process of reception or appropriation. It is conceived according to the principle by which “the synodal process has its point of departure and also its point of arrival in the People of God” (*Episcopalis Communio* 1) and this may continue until a consensus of the whole People of God is reached. The words of Cardinal Grech during the inauguration of the *Synod on Synodality* are illuminating:

What would happen if, instead of ending the assembly by handing the final document to the Holy Father, we took another step, that of *returning* the conclusions of the synodal assembly to the particular Churches from which the whole synodal process began? In this case, the final document would go to the Bishop of Rome, who is always and universally recognized as the one who issues the decrees established by Councils and Synods, already accompanied by the consensus of all the Churches. Moreover, the consensus on the document could not be limited only to the bishop’s *placet*, but extended to the people of God whom he summoned again to close the synodal process opened on October 17, 2021. In this case, the Bishop of Rome, the principle of unity of all the baptized and of all the bishops, would receive a document that jointly manifests the consent of the People of God and of the College of Bishops: it would be an act of manifestation of the *sensus omnium fidelium*, which would also be at the same time an act of magisterium of the bishops dispersed throughout the world in communion with the Pope.³⁹

According to this vision *restitutio* comprises the realization of consensus-building *processes* until a consensus of the whole People of

³⁸ “Either the Church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures, within which it must become a world Church, and from this recognition draws the necessary consequences with Pauline audacity, or it remains a Western Church, in the final analysis, thus betraying the meaning of Vatican II.” Karl Rahner, “Theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils,” *Schriften zur Theologie. Band 14*, Benzinger Verlag, Einsiedeln 1980, 298.

³⁹ Card. Mario Grech, *Moment of reflection for the beginning of the synodal process. Message of Cardinal Mario Grech*, October 21, 2021 https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/opening/12.-MESSAGGIO_GRECH-IT.pdf

God is achieved. This will be reached, “if a decision is accepted by the community of believers as a whole, then it has the seal of validity: in the given circumstances, in the present historical situation, presupposing the general forms and conditions of knowledge and thought, the decision should be seen in this way and no other. The *consensus ecclesiae* confirms it.”⁴⁰ Consensus is not built from the top, but at the bottom and in a polyhedric form that avoids all homogeneity; it is not elaborated only by *some* but by *all*; it is not linear, but circular and *process-based*; and in returning to the local Churches by means of “restoring or giving back” (*restitutio*) what was said by the People, the voices and claims of the faithful are publicly recognized and have the right to verify (*accountability*) what was gathered in order to discern it anew until the *communio omni populo dei* is reached.

A clear consequence of this *process-based* communicative dynamic, is that in a synodal Church consensus-building cannot only be conceived as the *consensus omnium fidelium* – or the consensus among all the faithful in a generic way – as if believers (*christifideles*) were subjects without diverse identities and lifestyles, or as if consensus refers only to a procedure or a method. Within the framework of the ecclesiology of the local Churches, consensus has to be built on the identity differences that define each *christifideles* as a member of a *people-culture* and integrating gender diversity. Otherwise, consensus will become a means to justify new processes of ecclesial homogenization and cultural colonization, as happened in the second millennium. A synodal Church builds communion without annulling intercultural diversity. This presupposes, as it was in the first millennium, the possibility of different liturgies, theologies, spiritualities and ministries that recognize and integrate the diversities that constitute the human, ranging from socio-cultural to gender. We can sustain that the scope and aim of *restitutio* is to build the *consensus totius populi*,⁴¹ that is, of the whole people of God but from the concreteness of its many cultural forms with all its rich and diverse implications for the development of life and the mission of ecclesial life in each place.

⁴⁰ Peter Hünemann, “Lumen Gentium kommentiert von Peter Hünemann,” in Peter Hünemann und Bernd Jochen Hilberath (eds.), *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Herder, Freiburg 2004, Vol. 2, 440.

⁴¹ This expression is developed in: Rafael Luciani, “Reforma, conversión pastoral y sinodalidad. Un nuevo modo eclesial de proceder,” Rafael Luciani (ed.), *En camino hacia una Iglesia Sinodal: de Pablo VI a Francisco*, PPC, Madrid 2020, 165-189; Also, in Part II of his Book: *Synodality. A new way of proceeding*, Paulist Press, NJ 2022.

The *restitutio* needs its own method, since listening and discernment acquire relevance and fulfill their *raison d'être* in the phase of consultation that initiates every synodal process. For this, it is necessary to rethink the *traditio-receptio* duology by adding a third element: *traditio-receptio-restitutio*. In the processes of reception, the *sensus fidei* is related to the development of tradition and is usually exercised in a linear way until the implementation of what has been received. However, the process of *restitutio* takes place within the framework of a dynamic and creative tension that is capable of maintaining unity in diversity. First, because it is a matter of reaching the consensus of all the faithful without harming the communion among them. That is, maintaining the balance between *consensus fidelium* and *communio fidelium*. Second, because achieving the consensus of the whole Church must not nullify communion among the Churches. Namely, that the *consensus ecclesiae* not be to the detriment of the diversity proper to the *communio Ecclesiarum*.⁴² Such tensions are proper to the act of giving back or restoring, which entails rethinking the existing articulation between *all*, *some* and *one*, in a circular, reciprocal and permanent way, rather than in a linear or pyramidal way.⁴³ This will require an ecclesial awareness and maturity that knows how to distinguish between consensus and communion, and a method or way of proceeding accordingly.

The International Theological Commission offers two relevant texts in this regard. On the one hand, it points out “the circularity between the *sensus fidei* with which all the faithful are marked, the discernment carried out at various levels of realization of synodality and the authority of the one who exercises the pastoral ministry of unity and

⁴² Without referring to or knowing this new communicative dynamic, Legrand points out some issues that can be applied to understand it: “however, in other historical periods the churches above all are the subjects of reception within the framework of the *communio ecclesiarum*. In short, must one not express more clearly and decisively reception and ecclesial communion, whose most explicit expression is synodality (infra, section III)? That is to say, must not the privileged places and instruments of the process of reception be the different councils where the churches’ communion in faith is expressed, be it regionally or universally? Or again, do not diocesan synods and analogous organs explicitate the local communion of all?”. Herve Legrand, “Reception, *sensus fidelium*, and synodal life: an effort at articulation,” *The Jurist* 57 (1997) 412.

⁴³ In my opinion, the theologian who offers one of the best articulated reflections on the *all-some-one* triad with regard to the decisional processes in the Church is the Italian Serena Noceti. Cf. “Elaborare decisioni nella Chiesa. Una riflessione ecclesiological,” in Riccardo Battocchio-Livio Tonello (eds.), *Sinodalità. Dimensione della Chiesa, pratiche nella Chiesa*, Messaggero, Padova 2020, 242-247.

government.”⁴⁴ On the other hand, it defines the purpose of a synodal process which is none other than to reach an agreement in the discernment of the truth since “synodality, as a constitutive dimension of the Church, is expressed in the dynamic circularity of *consensus fidelium*, episcopal collegiality and the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.”⁴⁵ The *restitutio* thus inserts the binomial *traditio-receptio* in a permanent process of development and evolution of the deposit of faith in the light of the inculturation of the Christian Kerygma.⁴⁶ Here we find the heart of a pneumatological ecclesiology, which makes it possible to overcome the pyramidal model and offers a polyhedral and reciprocal dynamic by which all ecclesial life is lived in a permanent and processual state of conversion or *ecclesiogenesis*.

If, as we have said, the novelty of the current ecclesiological turn is to be found in the intertwined reading of *Lumen gentium* 12 (*sensus fidei*) and 23 (local Churches), this means then that the Church is defined not only by being the People of God (constitutive dimension), but above all by becoming the People of God (constituent dimension) in every place, time and epoch. Therefore, the circularity and interaction between *traditio*, *receptio* and *restitutio* continues with further processes and phases of

⁴⁴ “This circularity promotes the baptismal dignity and the co-responsibility of all, values the presence of the charisms infused by the Holy Spirit in the People of God, recognizes the specific ministry of the Pastors in collegial and hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome, guaranteeing that the synodal processes and acts are carried out in fidelity to the *depositum fidei* and in an attitude of listening to the Holy Spirit for the renewal of the Church's mission.” International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and the mission of the Church* (2018) 72 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_sp.html

⁴⁵ “Synodality, as a constitutive dimension of the Church, is expressed in the dynamic circularity of *consensus fidelium*, episcopal collegiality and the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. The Church, affirmed on this foundation, is challenged at all times by concrete circumstances and challenges, and in order to respond to all this in a manner faithful to the *depositum fidei* and with a creative openness to the voice of the Spirit, she is called to activate the listening of all the subjects who together form the People of God in order to reach an agreement in the discernment of the truth and on the path of the mission.” International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and the mission of the Church* (2018) 94 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_sp.html

⁴⁶ Rahner explains how “there is in fact an evolution of dogma, as is proved by the effective way of working in the Church in the preaching of her doctrine (...). The real intellection of what is revealed and its existential appropriation by man and woman absolutely require that the propositions of faith originally heard be translated into propositions that relate what is heard to the historical-spiritual situation of the person who hears them.” Karl Rahner, “Sobre la evolución del dogma,” *Escritos de teología*, Cristiandad, Madrid 2000, Tomo I, 59.

consultation, listening, communal discernment and elaboration of decisions that make it possible to build the *communio totius populi* as a precondition for proceeding to the act of decision-taking that expresses and represents the *consensus omnium populo dei*. This is the most appropriate form of ecclesial consensus in a synodal Church.

Finally, the *restitutio* – or giving back – to each *portio Populi Dei* of what was gathered during the consultation and listening processes, allows all the faithful to exercise an act of *recognition, verification, and corroboration* that qualifies the *consensus of the whole People of God* in a *Church of Churches*. This is not a new practice. We find it in the tradition of the Church. This is the case of St. Cyprian's golden rule that reads: *Nihil sine consilio vestro et sine consensu plebis mea privatim sententia gerere*. For this bishop, *taking counsel* from the presbyterate and *building consensus* with the people shaped his episcopal exercise. He had to devise methods that made this way of proceeding possible because he did not take a decision until a consensus with the people was achieved. This meant, concretely, that sometimes he had to repeat over and over again the processes of consultation, listening, discernment in common and elaboration of decisions. Each successive process led to a new deepening of what had been previously experienced. Consensus building was not understood as a linear or pyramidal process.

St. Cyprian had even practices that today could be set as examples of ecclesial *accountability*, to the point of involving the community in the election of bishops. In one of his synodal letters we find a sample: "God commands that the priest be chosen in the presence of all the people, that is, he teaches and manifests that episcopal consecrations are not to be made except with the knowledge of the people and in their presence, so that in the presence of the people the crimes of the bad or the merits of the good may be discovered, and thus, with the suffrage and examination of all, the ordination may be just and legitimate."⁴⁷ This is perhaps the high point, not without complexity, in the current reception of the *sensus fidei fidelium*. One in which we have to learn how to recover and put into practice the classic principle with which we started this reflection and that provides the value of the new communicative dynamic mentioned above (*restitutio*): "what affects all must be dealt with and approved by all."

⁴⁷ Synodal Letter of the Council of Carthago (254), *In causa Basilidis et Martialis Cyprianus, Epistulae*, 67. IV,2.

Open Conclusion

Let us finish by evoking the words of Pope Paul VI in his opening speech at the second session of the Council on September 29, 1963. He expressed the “desire, the need, and the duty of the Church finally to provide a *more complete definition* of herself.” In this new phase of the Council’s reception, we are faced with the challenge of building a *Synodal Church* for the third millennium by advancing in the hermeneutics and the reception of the Church as People of God walking together in each place and time. This can only happen by building a new institutional model inspired by a *synodal ecclesiality* able to mature the articulation amongst the *all* (People of God), the *many* (collegiality) and the *one* (primacy).

The aim is to reach an *effective synodalization* of all ecclesial life, and not remain only in mere formal or isolated procedural modifications. It is here where the role of theology and the practice of the *sensus fidei* find their place and challenge today, as it is the most appropriate dynamic for the permanent reconfiguration of the whole life and mission of the Church. As mentioned above, this synodal way of proceeding links all the ecclesial subjectivities —*faithful*— to one another through the action of the Spirit and with the aim of walking together.

We can conclude with Francis’ words to the Diocese of Rome before the opening of the *Synod on Synodality*: “the theme of synodality is not just a chapter in a treatise on ecclesiology; even less is it a passing fashion, a slogan, or a new term to be used and exploited in our meetings. No! Synodality expresses the nature of the Church, its form, its style, and its mission. Thus, when we speak of a *Synodal Church*, we should not consider that title to be one among others or a way of conceiving the Church with a view to alternatives (...). I am following what we may consider the first and most important manual of ecclesiology, the book of the Acts of the Apostles” (Rome, 18-9-2021).⁴⁸ We are therefore facing the great challenge of the *synodalization* of the whole Church at the level of relationships, communicative dynamics, and ecclesial structures. The *restitutio* is a step forward in giving institutional form to this challenge that the Spirit is asking of us for the Church of the third millennium.

⁴⁸ <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2021/september/documents/20210918-fedeli-diocesiroma.html>