

## TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE SYNODAL CHURCH

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### Abstract

Hopes for a synodal Church are enormously rising all over the world. One expected characteristic of such a synodal Church is greater transparency and accountability. Reasons are many for the faithful to argue that the present Church is not sufficiently transparent and accountable. Given this general experience and the increasing call for transparency, this article begins exposing the concept of transparency and accountability. After having placed them in proper theological context, this article argues further that transparency is not anymore an option but a moral obligation for the Church. It is argued that transparency cannot be ensured by legal mechanisms alone, for it is based more on trust built up in the Church by participation and co-responsibility of all its members. In other words, as the Church evolves more and more synodal, it would become more and more transparent. The expected areas of transparency are pointed out in the next section. The means to ensure greater transparency are proposed in the final section.

**Keywords:** Accountability; Servant Leadership; Synodality; Transparency

### Introduction

Pope Francis holds synodality as his ambitious ecclesial project and as what God expects of the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Discussions

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<sup>1</sup>Pope Francis, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17th October 2015).

on synodal church for the past few years have evoked enthusiastic expectations, dreams for a Church that walks together and of late also certain frustrations about the challenged hopes about the synodal Church.<sup>2</sup> Some, including bishops and priests are, however, suspicious of the process, reluctant to act and some of the laity seem indifferent. In spite of the mixed feelings about the outcome of discussions on synodality, many people in and outside the Church do believe that the Church, in its various manifestations, should become more transparent and accountable to its members.

Even beyond the purview of synodality, the world is now convinced that good governance in any organization is impossible without transparency. In 2005 India passed the Right to Information Act, ensuring citizens of their right to claim information from 'public authority.' It is the statutory means to establish transparency in bodies owned, controlled or substantially funded by the government or non-government organizations. Given the gradual democratization of information, particularly through mass media, institutions neglecting transparency in policymaking and communication have fallen under scathing social criticism. Recent scandals in some Churches about handling sexual abuse cases or finances have added to the call for transparency in the Church. Without corporate transparency business organizations may fare well for some time; without transparency a political party may remain in power for some time. But as regards the Church, whose mission is mainly evangelical and spiritual, without transparency, the Church loses her moral authority to legitimize her actions within the Church and in the public square.

The call for transparency and accountability weighs down on the Church very much. The Church is a body which owns assets, runs institutions, involved in media, employs people, holds trusts, invests in business, possesses publishing houses, elects its own leaders, manages human resources, does temporal and spiritual administration including excommunication, makes prophetic call on values and issues social teachings for all people of goodwill including the nonbelievers. This multifarious ministry of global proportions presupposes transparency and accountability in the contemporary

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<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/texts-speeches-homilies/4/849/pope-francis-address-at-commemorative-ceremony-for-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-synod-of-bishops-17-october-2015>, (Accessed on 01 November 2022).

<sup>2</sup>Walking together presupposes finding a way to walk together which may not be easy. Bradford Hinze, "Can we Find a Way Together? The Challenge of Synodality in a Wounded and Wounding Church," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 85, 3 (2020) 215–229.

world. For in all these activities, money, people's rights, lives, fortunes, etc., are involved which shall not be handled behind the curtains.

In this paper, we shall first explain the nature of transparency and accountability and its theological scope within the Church. Subsequently, we shall discuss whether transparency is just a desirable option or a moral obligation. We shall then move to mention the value conflicts implied in demanding transparency. Further, we shall suggest the areas where transparency and accountability are expected in the Church. Finally, we shall conclude with a few suggestions to make the Church more transparent and accountable.

### 1. Understanding Transparency and Accountability

Ironically the concept of transparency does not always appear very transparent. It is a flexible concept that is used differently in different fields.<sup>3</sup> Researchers Schnackenberg and Tomlinson hold that "the state of the existent literature on transparency suggests that it is not clear exactly how the construct should be conceptualized, how it relates to managing trust in the organization-stakeholder relationship, or how organizations manage it."<sup>4</sup> Discussion of transparency has entered the manuals of social and political ethics in the context of freedom of information and participatory democracy.<sup>5</sup> Leaving behind managerial categories like clients, employees, corporate responsibility, volunteers, etc., we place transparency in the context of the life of the Church.

Transparency means sharing information in demands of justice and truthfulness and in the synodal spirit of walking together. Granted, this understanding of transparency is somewhat problematic. For, one has to consider whether in a particular context sharing of information with certain people is a demand of justice or not. Accountability means the obligation to give explanation for one's actions and responsibilities. It is also a matter of sharing information regarding one's responsibility. There are four core dimensions of accountability as per the Global Accountability project of 2005. They

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<sup>3</sup> In sociology transparency has come to the fore in fighting corruption in organizations. Fran Osreck, "Fighting Corruption with Transparent Organizations: Anti-corruption and Functional Deviance in Organizational Behavior," *Ephemera* 5, 2 (2015) 337-364.

<sup>4</sup> A.K. Schnackenberg and E.C. Tomlinson. "Organizational Transparency: A New Perspective on Managing Trust in Organization-Stakeholder Relationships," *Journal of Management* 42, 7 (2014) 1784-1810.

<sup>5</sup> Micah Sifry, *Wikileaks and the Age of Transparency*, New York: OR Books, 2011, 187.

are transparency (openness about activities), participation (in decision making at tactical and strategic levels), evaluation (making the organization accountable for its operations), complaint and response mechanism (ways to address complaints).<sup>6</sup> The questions of accountability have already been raised seriously towards Church life from different angles.<sup>7</sup> In this paper, we shall focus rather on transparency as the demands of both transparency and accountability often crisscross.

## 2. Theological Locus of Transparency

Transparency and accountability remain endangered in a predominantly hierarchical church as understood in the Pre-Vatican II period. But when Church is understood as the people of God (LG 9), there is scope and of course need for transparency. Transparency and accountability are the characteristics of the people of God.

As part of walking together and listening to others, transparency and accountability come to play in a synodal Church. It is not merely a legal demand. Sharing of information means communication among those who take the *syn-hodos* (same path). As the International Theological Commission explained in its 2018 document, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, the term synodality indicates the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the people of God. Transparency and accountability come precisely under the *modus operandi* of the synodal Church. It is a structural antidote to many of the burning perils of the contemporary Church such as clericalism, hierarchicalism, sexual abuses, corruption, and abuse of power in the Church.<sup>8</sup> Transparency and accountability are the natural offshoot of a synodal Church. In such a Church, sharing information shall be a bond-building force within the communities. But in a clericalist Church, exclusive possession of information by some shall be a tool to exercise control and domination over the rest of the members. Thus sharing information would equal to cessation of privileged powers.

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<sup>6</sup>Benjamin Chuka Osisioma, "Accountability in the Church," Paper presented at Conference of Chancellors, Registrars, and Legal Officers, Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), At Basilica of Grace, Diocese of Abuja, Apo, Abuja. (August 6, 2013), 6. [https://www.academia.edu/4221114/Accountability\\_in\\_the\\_Church](https://www.academia.edu/4221114/Accountability_in_the_Church). (Accessed on 10 November 2022).

<sup>7</sup>For a survey of accountability in the Church supported by careful historical scholarship, see Francis Oakley, Bruce Russett, ed., *Governance, Accountability, and the Future of the Catholic Church*, New York, Continuum, 2004.

<sup>8</sup>For a theological review of hierarchicalism, see James Keenan, "Hierarchicalism," *Theological Studies* 83, 1 (2022) 84-108.

Transparency and accountability are the operational mode of all Church members, certainly of the leaders, when they function as stewards. Demands of stewardship go beyond looking after the financial functions of the Church. It goes well to the heart of the Church's mission. Pope Benedict XVI held that "the Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity."<sup>9</sup> It is to serve these cardinal missions, all other functions, including material administration, come into play. St Peter sheds light on the notion of stewardship when he writes: 'As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace' (1 Pt 4:10). Stewardship means the commitment of the faithful towards the total mission of the Church: evangelization, service to the needy, faith formation of her members, etc. If transparency is not placed within this framework, it becomes just a legal demand or a trendy rhetoric. But transparency in the Church cannot be ensured simply through any legal instrument. It has to take place by the spirit of effective inclusion, dialogue, and participation of people as equal members in a community. In turn, it also means decentralization of power, diversification of leadership, repudiation of clericalism, popularization of theology, etc. Transparency therefore occurs in the Church only in an organic manner.<sup>10</sup> This exactly exposes the link between synodality and transparency.

Natural it is that transparency and accountability fall predominantly on people in leadership positions. Servant-leadership is therefore a prerequisite for transparency to prevail. However, the terms in which servant leadership is conceived are very important. Because at the ground level, it boils down to the legitimate exercise of power.<sup>11</sup> Collective leadership of elders found in the New Testament suggests a model for Church leadership. Such shared leadership offers strict accountability, genuine partnership, and peer relationships. Accountability feeds on servant leadership and servant leadership in turn produces accountability.

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<sup>9</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 25.

<sup>10</sup>How Chile and the Chilean church went through a period of awakening is a case in point in the wake of abuse crisis and cover ups. It has evolved as locus theologicus for a synodal church which in turn seems to insure greater transparency in society and church. For details, Sandra Arenas, "The Awakening of Chile: Demands for Participation and the Synodal Church," *Louvain Studies* 45 (2022) 97-111.

<sup>11</sup>The empowering and creative use of power is best exemplified in the Trinity, characterized by mutual dependence co-inherence. This anyway opens further vistas of sophisticated interpretation of the Trinity, represented by Jürgen Moltmann and others. Karl Tangen, "Servant Leadership and Power," *Scandinavian Journal for Leadership & Theology* 6 (2019) 1-30.

### 3. Option or Obligation?

Transparency has become much discussed in the Church in the wake of the synodal process initiated by Pope Francis about synodality. It has become one of the buzz-words in print and electronic media. Transparency seems to have entered ecclesial vocabulary through business ethics. One may ask, is transparency only a desirable option in the Church, or is it a moral obligation to follow unfailingly.

The fact is that currently transparency is widely discussed in ethical, social and philosophical circles. Democratization of knowledge and information, forced by the widespread use of media, calls traditional institutions to transform themselves from secrecy to candour, from hierarchies to networks, from one-man leadership to collective leadership, from one-to-many to many-to-many communication, from distribution to participation, from surveillance to sousveillance and so on. This transformation of social relationships emphasizes values like candour, integrity, honesty, ethics, clarity, full disclosure, legal compliance, etc. In the current social situation, the Church cannot ignore the looming call for transparency. The Church is bound to read the signs of the times. A Church that opts against the currents of transparency is letting itself become outdated. Lack of transparency is one of the root causes of abuses in the Church. Regarding the topic of Church abuses, the synod of bishops pointed out that, "The desire to dominate, the lack of dialogue and transparency, forms of double life, spiritual emptiness, as well as psychological weaknesses are the ground on which corruption thrives."<sup>12</sup>

From an ethical point of view, transparency is an aspect of the virtue of truthfulness. Thus, it is part of the demands of justice. To the extent others (members) have a claim on information, the Church is bound in justice to reveal it. The Church claims to be a truthful institution. Pope Benedict XVI taught, "...the Church searches for truth, proclaims it tirelessly and recognizes it wherever it is manifested. This mission of truth is something that the Church can never renounce."<sup>13</sup> This brings upon the Church the obligation to speak the truth about herself, even when that is unpleasant. It

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<sup>12</sup>Synod of Bishops on Young People, "Young People, The Faith and Vocational Discernment," Final Document of the XV Ordinary General Assembly, October 27 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rcsynod\\_doc\\_20181027\\_doc-final-instrumentum-xvassemblea-giovani\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rcsynod_doc_20181027_doc-final-instrumentum-xvassemblea-giovani_en.html). (Accessed on 13 October 2022).

<sup>13</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 9.

concerns the present and also the past events where the Church is accountable. The act of public forgiveness made by Pope John Paul II on behalf of the Church in the year 2000 comes under this category.

The Church's own declared policy regarding demands of transparency binds herself. Pope Benedict XVI demanded transparency from international organizations.

Hence it is to be hoped that all international agencies and non-governmental organizations will commit themselves to complete transparency, informing donors and the public of the percentage of their income allocated to programs of cooperation, the actual content of those programs and, finally, the detailed expenditure of the institution itself.<sup>14</sup>

What the Church demands from other international organizations worldwide cannot be excused for herself.

#### 4. Value Conflicts in Transparency

Transparency and accountability, viewed as an obligation, may raise some questions. From an ethical perspective, transparency is placed within the purview of truthfulness in communication. To the extent others are entitled to a piece of information, the Church is bound in justice to reveal that. But who or which grounds will decide the rights to get the information? For instance, who all will have an entitlement to the financial accounts of a diocese? Answering this question squarely also means in effect recognizing the limitations of transparency claims.

Every person and institution do enjoy the right to privacy. Does transparency defy right to privacy? Does it open the domain of total surveillance? The right to know and the right to privacy are two conflicting issues which need sustained consideration to strike a balance in Church life.

Transparency in the Church is at times restricted on the ground that information shared could be misused, misfired and misunderstood for various reasons. This argument cannot be overruled outright. Greater transparency would of course require greater level of trust in others. When Leo XIII opened the Vatican Archive to researchers in 1881, it was an "act of faith." Because the Vatican "doesn't have confidence that it will be treated fairly by outside observers."<sup>15</sup> These reservations do not repudiate the claim for transparency.

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<sup>14</sup>Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 47.

<sup>15</sup>Owen Chadwick, *Catholicism and History: The Opening of the Vatican Archives*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978, 4.

In fact, we do not have to juxtapose transparency with secrecy in an exaggerated manner. Transparency does not mean that everything in the Church should be exposed to everyone. Transparency ultimately is a matter of trust. Reinhard Cardinal Marx said that in the Church “administration should take place in such a way that people feel accepted in administrative procedures, that they feel appreciated, that they can trust the system of administration, that they feel secure and fairly treated, that they are listened to and their legitimate criticism is accepted.”<sup>16</sup>

The trust established between Church leaders and members ensures basic transparency in the Church. It means a lot. Such trust can be established only when all members of the Church are convinced that those who hold offices are trustworthy. They take decisions in a collective and consultative manner. They listen to the members of the Church at the grassroots level, etc. Thus transparency ultimately becomes another name for well-placed trust.<sup>17</sup>

To demand transparency from an overwhelmingly hierarchical Church is similar to expecting oranges from an apple tree. Developing transparency is concomitant to transforming the Church into a synodal reality. In the hierarchical structure of the Church, it is to be admitted, there is indeed upward transparency and accountability and little scope for downward transparency. The inferior in rank shall report to the superior.

Since all lines of accountability point upward in canon law, only hierarchical superiors are competent to judge whether subordinates have adequately fulfilled the obligations of their offices or abuse their powers. Bishops, pastors, and other officeholders are accountable for their stewardship to those who accompanied them, not to those they serve. The faithful may express disgruntlement about the shoddy performance, nonfeasance, and malfeasance of their pastors and even bishops to their hierarchical superiors, but superiors are free to give these complaints as much or as little weight as their discretion dictates when deciding whether to retain, remove, or discipline their subordinates.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Reinhard Cardinal Marx, “Transparency as a Community of Believers.” (Paper presented at the meeting on the protection of minors in Vatican, 23 February 2019). [http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources\\_card-marx-protezioneminori\\_20190223\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_card-marx-protezioneminori_20190223_en.html). (Accessed on 10 November 2022).

<sup>17</sup>Brang Mai Lazing, “The Call of the Digital Age for Lay Participation: An Answer to Transparency of the Church,” *Religion and Social Communication* 18, 1 (2020) 15.

<sup>18</sup>John P. Beal, “Something There Is that Doesn’t Love a Law: Canon Law and Its Discontents,” *The Crisis of Authority in Catholic Modernity*, ed. Michael J. Lacey & Francis Oakley, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, 150.



Only when the Church becomes synodal, the scope for dialogical communication or inward transparency shall develop adequately. Else, it may look like a fraternity that holds secrecy as its prerogative.

## 5. Areas of Transparency and Accountability

Given the very broad scope of transparency in the Church, in practice we may lose hold of its focus. Therefore, without pretending to be exhaustive, a few areas where transparency is exigent, are suggested below.

### 5.1. Interpretation of Texts

The Church needs transparency and accountability in the interpretation of texts. It applies to interpretation of the Bible, use of the teachings of the church, theologisation particularly in pastoral contexts, etc. Unless an intellectually transparent approach is taken, the Church may run into unfounded theological or pastoral conclusions. Transparency requires us to avoid blanket expressions unless they are self-evident. For instance, the expression 'as the Church has always taught' is legitimate only if a particular point has been taught by the Church in history without exception. Selective use of the Bible, without taking the integral Biblical sense, to arrive at a theological conclusion violates transparency. Quoting a Biblical text defying its context to establish a claim shuns transparency of that theological attempt.

In 2016, Pope Francis issued the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, in the wake of two synods of bishops on the family: the extraordinary general assembly of the synod of bishops in 2014 and the ordinary general assembly the synod of bishops in 2015. As part of the preparatory phase of the synod, Pope Francis had asked to circulate a questionnaire to the whole Church on family and make assessments of the findings of the survey. But how transparently this process was carried out is a case to be studied at the global level. In addition, the pastoral response to this apostolic exhortation in different parts of the world sadly was not always transparent.<sup>19</sup>

### 5.2. Financial Management

One of the most wanted areas of transparency is financial. Lack of it often leads to corruption or allegations of it. Before the code of canon law of 1983, a pastor's obligation was to report only to the authority (typically the Bishop) but not to the lay faithful. Today every pastor has the obligation to report to the faithful as to how he uses the Church's temporal goods (CIC 1287, 2). Admittedly with

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<sup>19</sup>For example, Rhoderick John S. Abellanosa, "Amoris Laetitia in A Clericalist Culture: A Case of Philippine Church," *Asian Horizons* 11, 1 (March 2017) 183-196.

varying levels of effectiveness, there are financial councils, auditing practices, and different control systems in Churches. However, generally what is required is more transparency in financial decision making and genuine financial reporting.

### **5.3. Canonical Processes**

In certain cases where Church members are subjected to canonical process, it is held, transparency is not well maintained. For instance, Catholic theologians and philosophers under scrutiny of alleged doctrinal errors. The relevant processes often do not permit the accused to know of what s/he is accused, to participate in his/her own defence or to see the case against him/her until the last phase. In the past there have been instances where clerics accused of child abuse were subjected to canonical process without the backing of solid evidence. On the ground of being accused, when the accusation carried 'semblance of truth,' some have been sent into seclusion. In 2010 Pope Benedict XVI reminded the Irish bishops that the credibility of the Church can be regained only if they would handle abuse cases with transparency.<sup>20</sup> Real transparency shall ensure justice to both parties, the victims and the offenders/accused.

### **5.4. Decision Making Process**

Decision making processes vary in the Church based on different modalities such as consultation, deliberation, conciliarism, synodal discussions, etc.<sup>21</sup> Transparency-avoidance, if there is, within various processes and phases, may give the impression of manipulation of the process. Sometimes decision-making bodies may turn out to become endorsing bodies of decisions already taken elsewhere.

As we know, Pope Francis has enunciated a process within the Church to make the Church more synodal. It would be a great case study to inquire how this process has been carried out recently in various local churches.

## **6. For Greater Transparency**

Better transparency and accountability cannot easily be guaranteed by way of legislation. Some people may ask the question, in order to sustain transparency and accountability whether we need new institutions. Synodal church is not a finished product; rather, it is a

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<sup>20</sup>Benedict XVI, "Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Catholics of Ireland," March 19 2010, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20100319\\_church-ireland.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20100319_church-ireland.html). (Accessed on 28 October 2022).

<sup>21</sup>Paul Valliere, *Conciliarism: A History of Decision-Making in the Church*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 49-403.

process. Fine tuning of ecclesial characteristics in local churches evolve over time.<sup>22</sup> We need to allow time for transparency and accountability to become the order of the day. After all, it is not merely a structural issue. Sharing information equals to sharing powers. Many people do find it hard to share their power. As Pope Francis said in 2016, "It should be noted that the reform will be effective if and only if it is carried out with 'renewed' men and women and not simply with 'new' men and women. It is not enough just to change personnel; people must be (...) renewed spiritually, personally, and professionally."<sup>23</sup> With this brief opening remark, let me make some suggestions towards greater transparency in the Church.

### **6.1. Listen to People and Understand their Social Expectations**

One of the signs of our times is the deep distrust of institutions, including the ecclesiastical ones. Scandals related to sex abuse, and various scams in different parts of the world have eroded trust in the Church.<sup>24</sup> Lost credibility has to be replaced only by trustworthy means like transparency and accountability. Church without credibility is salt without saltiness; people will trample on it (Mt 5:13). Listening to people, first of all, means understanding social expectations regarding the Church. It also means taking expert opinion of others about matters under deliberation.

### **6.2. Recognize the Church also as an Organization**

Unfortunately many tend to count the Church as a spiritual communion, pliable to be managed in an arbitrary way. That is not the case anymore. Church administration is in need of managerial skills, business ethics, proper human resource management, ethical auditing, etc. It calls for professionalism demanding appropriate kind of institutional communication system within the Church.<sup>25</sup> Regarding these demands we cannot plead ignorance anymore.

### **6.3. Believe in the Power of Truth**

Lack of transparency, evident for instance in the notorious 'cover ups,' is intended in good faith to save the reputation of the Church.

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<sup>22</sup>Massimo Faggioli, "From Collegiality to Synodality: Promise and Limits of Francis's 'Listening Primacy,'" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 85, 4 (2020) 1–18.

<sup>23</sup>Pope Francis, Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia (22 December 2016) [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/december/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161222\\_curia-romana.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/december/documents/papa-francesco_20161222_curia-romana.html). (Accessed on 02 November 2022).

<sup>24</sup>Patrick M. O'Brien, "Transparency as a means to rebuild trust within the Church: a case study in how Catholic dioceses and eparchies in the United States have responded to the clergy sex abuse crisis," *Church, Communication, and Culture* 5, 3 (2020) 456–483.

<sup>25</sup>Cristian Mendoza Ovando, "What kind of Transparency for the Church? Proposing Operational Transparency for Processes, Solutions and Decisions in the Catholic Church," *Church, Communication, and Culture* 5, 2 (2020) 210–234.

Admission of wrong doings, many believe, shall tarnish the fame and good will of the Church. But credibility of the Church is enhanced when mistakes are admitted, rather than when they are covered up. Because the Church is now examined in society as a public actor.<sup>26</sup> Admitting its own vulnerability is more salvaging than pretending innocence where it is not possible. The Church need not be triumphalist in order to become convincing; rather, it needs to be on its knees whenever required. It is not open confessions but a “culture of cover-up” that has done bigger harm to the credibility of the Church.

Since the Church believes in the power of truth, not only individuals but the Church itself is subject to correction in its beliefs and practices. When a Council is found to be not right, a succeeding Council would correct it. For example, the Council of Hieria of 754 was corrected and rejected by the second Council of Nicaea of 787 (seventh ecumenical council) regarding the use of icons in the Church. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, initially transparency was not thought to be the ideal way to protect the Church when faced with abuse cases.<sup>27</sup> But that is not the case anymore.

### **6.3.1. Establish Adequate Transparency Standards**

In certain areas the involved people may not know how far and to which directions transparency should be maintained. Therefore, just as many corporates stipulate standard operating procedures, it is good for the Church to establish standard transparency procedures. For instance, in issues like clerical abuse of the minor such standard procedures will reduce scandal and embarrassment.<sup>28</sup>

### **6.3.2. Foster Gospel Views of Leadership and Authority**

Clamour for transparency would sound like a nuisance when the Church is led by ‘messianic’ leaders. Such leaders think they are God’s gift to the Church; they enjoy unique talents to do the job and they have no need of discerning or using the gifts of others. They

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<sup>26</sup>Thomas O’Loughlin, “The Credibility of the Catholic Church as Public Actor,” *New Blackfriars* 94 (2013) 129.

<sup>27</sup>The Holy Office under Pope Pius XI issued in 1922 *Crimens Sollicitationis* which was revised in 1962 during the pontificate of Pope John XXIII regarding sexual abuses reported during the context of the sacrament of confession. It also dealt with homosexuality, bestiality and abuse of children committed by clerics. It was in effect till 2001. *Crimens Sollicitationis* enjoined strict confidentiality about the offence from all who come to know of it within and outside the canonical process. Divulging it ensured excommunication. Kieran Tapsell, *Potiphar’s Wife: The Vatican’s Secret and Child Sexual Abuse*, Hindmarsh, SA., ATF Press, 2014, 100.

<sup>28</sup>Stephen Pope, “Accountability and Sexual Abuse in the United States: Lessons for the Universal Church,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004) 73-88.

assume that they are uniquely empowered and they are irreplaceable.<sup>29</sup> Such pathological or toxic forms of leadership shall dismantle transparency in the Church. Granted, not all leaders in the Church have been delusional in this manner. A synodal Church expects leadership characterized by humility, wisdom, prayerful discernment, tact, care for individuals, commitment to follow the gospel values, etc. Only such leadership shall be open to transparency; to that extent, it will become accountable or answerable. Such leaders will honestly share the sentiments of St Paul: "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish" (Rom 1:14).

### **Conclusion**

It is a mistake to conceive the quest for transparency in the synodal Church as a duel between the power (information) holders and power (information) seekers. Overtly it is a pursuit for an inclusive and open church. But it is not merely a matter of cleaning up an institution or making it more people friendly. Rather, transparency and accountability in the Church are meant to better prepare the Church for its mission which is evangelization of the world and re-evangelization within the Church. That is why the preparatory document for the Synod on Synodality focused on communion, participation and mission. Bereft of this overarching goal, attempts to make the Church more transparent and accountable are destined to fail or discarded on the way after the pontificate of Pope Francis.

The efforts to make the Church more transparent means making it more a communion where the Holy Spirit can blow as S/he likes. The Holy Spirit gets space and time in the communion to act as the supreme principle of the Church. Thus, the Holy Spirit transforms the Church towards the pattern of intra-trinitarian relationships, characterized by transparency and accountability among the three persons of the Trinity. The Church does not exist for itself but for accomplishing the mission of Christ. In the same manner, the Church does not become transparent for its own sake but for effectively accomplishing its mission in the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>29</sup>Paul Avis, "Authority and Leadership in the Church (especially diocese and cathedral)," *Theology* 123, 2 (2020) 119.