

TOWARDS AN *ECCLESIAL* SYNODALITY

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Abstract

This article explores the theological and ecclesiological foundations of synodality as the defining paradigm for the Church in the third millennium. Drawing from the Second Vatican Council, particularly *Lumen Gentium*, it situates the Church's identity in the People of God as the central hermeneutical criterion, over and above hierarchical structuring. The recovery of this conciliar vision emphasizes baptismal dignity, co-responsibility, and mutual reciprocity among all the faithful – *christifideles*. The article examines how synodality matures the ecclesiology of the People of God by reconfiguring ecclesial life through practices of reciprocal listening, communal discernment, and cultural integration, fruit of the theology of the *sensus fidei* of all the People of God. It further reframes episcopal collegiality within a broader ecclesial synodality that recognizes the active subjectivity of all the baptized. The emergence of new synodal institutions in Latin America, such as the first Ecclesial Assembly and the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazonia, exemplifies this transition towards an ecclesial synodality. Therefore, synodality is calling for renewed mentalities and relationships, communicative dynamics, and institutional reforms proper to a constitutively synodal Church in mission.

Keywords: Collegiality; Local Churches; *Lumen Gentium*; People of God; Second Vatican Council; Synodality; Synodal Ecclesiality

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1. The Church as *People of God*

In 2013, we entered a new phase in the reception of the Second Vatican Council that recovered the Church as *the people of God*¹ as the central hermeneutical criterion and normative character of the Council's ecclesiology. This image had been proposed by Card. Suenens and was incorporated in *Lumen Gentium* by placing the chapter on the People of God (*De Populo Dei*) before the chapter on the hierarchy. The ecclesiological turn of the Council is based on the normative character of this sequence. As Congar explained,

in the schema *De Ecclesia* the sequence might have been: the Mystery of the Church, Hierarchy, the People of God in general. This would have meant a failure to honor the third aim expressed above: to discuss what affects the quality that is shared by all the members of the Church, before examining how they are differentiated by their function or state of life. This would also have suggested the idea that the hierarchical organization represents the first value in the Church, that is, the distribution of members according to an order of superiority or subordination. But the sequence adopted was: Mystery of the Church, People of God, Hierarchy. Thus, the highest value was given to the quality of disciple, the dignity attached to Christian existence as such or the reality of an ontology of grace, and then, to the interior of this reality, a hierarchical structure of social organization.²

The Council Fathers had chosen to recognize the participation of all the members of the messianic People of God (LG 9) in the *tria munera* (LG 10-13.31; AA 2) of Christ—priest, prophet, and king—thus establishing the equality of *all* by means of baptismal dignity as a structuring criterion for the configuration of the identity of all ecclesial subjects. This ecclesiological model made “possible to affirm both the equality of all the faithful in the dignity of Christian existence and the organic or functional inequality of the members.”³ In this way, the pre-conciliar ecclesiology that considered the relationships between the different ecclesial subjectivities—pope, bishops, clergy, religious, laity—in the light of the model of an *unequal society* that understood the identity and place of all the faithful in regards to the hierarchy by virtue of an ontological deficit in essence was overcome. However, the debates around this shift were not easy. The words of Bishop De

¹Cf. Serena Noceti, “Popolo di Dio: un incompiuto riconoscimento di identità,” *Concilium* 54 (2018) 397–412; Giovanni Mazzillo, “L’eclissi della categoria popolo di Dio,” *Rassegna di Teologia* 36 (1995) 553–587; Dario Vitali, *Popolo di Dio* (Assisi: Cittadella, 2013); Rafael Luciani, “The Centrality of the People in the Socio-Cultural Theology of Pope Francis,” *Concilium* 376 (2018) 387–400.

²Yves Congar, “The Church. The People of God,” *Concilium* 1 (1965) 12–13.

³Congar, “The Church. The People of God,” 24.

Smedt, of Bruges, in the Council were clear: “we must be careful when speaking about the Church so as not to fall into a certain hierarchism, clericalism, and bishopolatry or papolatry. *What comes first is the People of God.*”⁴ Consequently, he affirms that “the hierarchical power is only transitory (...). What is permanent is the people of God” (AS, 1/4, 143) whose condition is historical-temporal because *pertinet ad statum viae*. This ecclesiological framework understands hierarchy in terms of its transitory service, rather than as an ontological, eschatological, or self-referential reality.

The recovery of the notion of People of God allowed for an understanding of the ecclesial subjects in light of the hermeneutical circularity and therefore of the Church itself as a *collective subject*⁵ that constitutes an *ecclesial we*. Cardinal Suenens, architect of *Lumen Gentium*, emphasized this perspective when he stated:

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 whole*, as a single reality; and then by way of consequence, the co-responsibility thus implied for every member of the church.⁶

Since the beginning of his pontificate, Francis has spoken about the reception of the Council through this hermeneutical lens. He referred to “the Church as people of God, pastors and people *together*. [Hence] The Church is the totality of the people of God.”⁷ His pontificate opens the path for a new alignment of Chapters II and III of *Lumen Gentium*, making it clear that both papal primacy and collegiality require reform, that ordained ministry needs to be reconfigured in order to address the real issues on how power and authority are exercised and by whom in the Church. The document on *Synodality in the Life and in the Mission of the Church* by the International Theological Commission also recovers this today and sustains that,

the sequence – the Mystery of the Church (chapter 1), the People of God (chapter 2), the Hierarchical Constitution of the Church (chapter 3) – stresses that the ecclesiastical hierarchy is at the service of the People of

⁴*Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, 32 volumes (Vatican: City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970-1999), 1/4, 143.

⁵Cf. Serena Noceti, “*Sensus fidelium e dinamiche ecclesiali*,” *Marriage Family and Spirituality* 23 (2017) 86–98. Esp. 89-91.

⁶Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, *La corresponsabilidad en la Iglesia de hoy* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969), 27.

⁷ At http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html

God in order that the Church may carry out her mission in conformity with God's plan of salvation, in the logic of the priority of the whole over its parts and of the end over the means.⁸

It is because of this hermeneutical ecclesiological framework that we can talk about *synodality*. In light of this, *synodality* embodies a maturation and deepening in the reception of this understanding of the *Church as People of God walking together* according to which "the Pastors and the other faithful are bound to one another by *mutual necessity*" (LG 32). This produces a *constitutive reciprocity* among all ecclesial subjects, by which all called to *walk together* in order to become a Church People of God or a Synodal Church. But what does *walking together* mean? The *Preparatory Document* (PD) for the *Synod on Synodality* explains that "journeying together" can be understood from two different, strongly interconnected perspectives. The first looks at the internal life of the particular Churches, at the relationships between the subjects that constitute them (in the first place, the relationship between the faithful and their pastors, also through the participatory bodies provided for by canonical discipline, including the diocesan synod) and at the communities in which they are articulated (in particular parishes)" (PD 28). "The second perspective considers how the People of God walks together with the entire human family" (PD 29). Therefore, discerning synodality means discerning the whole the Church, its life and mission, because "synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church People of God" (ITC, Syn 6). This understanding requires a process of *conversion of mentalities* and *reform of structures*, and overall, a change of most of the current *ecclesial culture* being transmitted and lived today. More specifically, synodality implies reviewing "relationships and mentalities" (being) and "communicative dynamics and structures" (operating) at the same time. It invites us to a re-learning through processes of conversion.

2. *People of God in a Particular Place*

To recognize the centrality of *Lumen Gentium's* chapter II further reveals another dimension of the *ecclesial reconfiguration* in light of Synodality. The affirmation that "in and from the particular Churches there exists the one Catholic Church" (LG 23). This reference is essential to understand the current phase in the reception of the Council. Pope Paul VI had reminded that, "the Church spread throughout the world would become an abstraction if it did not take

⁸International Theological Commission (ITC), *Synodality in the Life and the Mission of the Church*, no. 54.

on body and life precisely through the particular Churches" (EN 62). Though, while the local Church is not the *whole* Church, it is a *complete* church. Card. Grech reminds us today that "there is no other People of God but that which lives in every *portio Populi Dei* (..) The principle that founds and governs this understanding of the People of God was established by the Council: this People exists 'in and from' the particular Churches (..). There is no Church outside of this principle" (EC 6).

That the People of God exists in "the variety of local churches is splendid evidence of the Catholicity of the undivided Church" (ITC, *Syn* 61). This vision challenges us today to embrace a fuller reception of *Ad Gentes*, which urges us to recognize in each local church "the genius and the dispositions of each culture" (AG 22. *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*). Consequently, "the first level of synodality" lies precisely in conceiving the church as a *Church of churches*, existing in a variety of ecclesial identities with all their theological, liturgical, spiritual, pastoral, and canonical particularities (LG 23, UR 4, AG 19). This is a clear reception of the Council's ecclesiology which recognizes that "in and from [the local] churches come into being the one and only Catholic Church" and that "this variety of local Churches with one common aspiration is splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church" (LG 23). The call to recover the centrality of the ecclesiology of local churches is perhaps one of the most important ongoing contributions of the current phase in the reception of the Council. And it is providing the hermeneutical framework for understanding the ecclesiological shift that synodality represents today.

The reception and practical implementation of this model by Francis can be described with the use of a *communicative dynamic*, "that of listening." The Pope says that "a synodal Church is a Church that listens." The implications of such an act of listening go beyond a personal conversion, because listening shapes the relations among ecclesial subjects and reconfigures the Church organization and structures. The act of listening to the people and their cultures enables a process of reconfiguration of the theological-cultural model of the ecclesial organization. Francis explains that the people of God must be listened to, in their particular place and time, "in order to know what the Spirit is saying to the Churches" (Rev 2:7). By listening to the people in their own places, each Church can find ways of proceeding that respond to the particular reality where ecclesial life and mission evolves. As Vatican II insisted, listening

should lead to discerning “in what way the customs, meaning of life and social order can be reconciled with the customs manifested by divine revelation” (AG 22). This is what the Synod for the Pan-Amazon Region claimed when it said that “[the Church] reconfigures her own identity through listening and dialoguing with the people, realities and stories of a [sociocultural] territory” (QA 66). Therefore, the Church listens not simply to acquire more information, but to discern her mission and reach “a deeper accommodation in the whole sphere of Christian life” (AG 22). The exercise of Synodality is the most appropriate way to generate processes of identity and theological-cultural reconfiguration of the Church under the model of the Church as *Church of Churches* presided over by the Bishop of the Church of Rome and in communion with all of them, thus fulfilling the catholicity of local churches.

3. New challenges in light of Synodality

While developing this ecclesiological framework, the Council left open two *juxtapositions*. First, between *collegiality and primacy*; second, between *collegiality and synodality*. In order to advance in the reception of Vatican II, these issues need to be addressed in light of Synodality.

Collegiality and Primacy

Lumen Gentium 22 and *Christus Dominus* 4 explain collegiality in the context of differences of power between the episcopal college and the primate. Therefore, emerging ecclesial institutions will be defined by the exercise of *potestas*. This is the case of the *Synod of Bishops*, created by Paul VI, which reinforced the idea of a hierarchical episcopal collegiality exercised strictly *with* and *among* some (bishops) and *for* one (Pope).⁹ A problem arises when understanding the nature and operability of collegiality without understanding that the *Synod of Bishops* is only one particular instance of the exercise of power between the episcopate and the primate, but not its full realization. Even more, it was created with a juxtaposition of two entities that give the impression of being endowed with autonomy with respect to the rest of the People of God.¹⁰ According to John O'Malley, “the Synod would

⁹Cf. Hervé Legrand, “Lo sviluppo di chiese-soggetto: un'istanza del Vaticano II,” *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 2 (1981) 152–153.

¹⁰In an attempt to overcome this juxtaposition, Rahner mentioned “two procedural forms of the same subject,” “two aspects of the same power or two concepts that formally include one another.” Cf. Karl Rahner, “On the *Ius Divinum* of the

be subject (...) to the power of the Pope (...). *Apostolica Sollicitudo* was, with all its merits, an expression of papal primacy, and not of collegiality, a word that was not even mentioned in the text.”¹¹ Indelicato agrees that this is an unfinished debate on “the exercise of deliberative power exercised *ex sese* as a college, with and under the pope, but not delegated.”¹² Ángel Anton confirms that in the drafting history of CD 5 appears the proposal to create “a council of bishops with full and effective stability, both in its configuration and in its activity, through which the episcopal college could act with the fullness of its collegial power.”¹³ A desire that was not answered.

Aiming at resolving this impasse, the practice of an *affectus collegialis* within the hierarchical communion with the papacy was privileged, rather than an effective, horizontal, binding collegiality. This vision was finally institutionalized and extended to all ecclesial subjects with the *hermeneutical turn* introduced by the Extraordinary Synod of 1985. There, the notions of participation and co-responsibility were interpreted through the lens of *hierarchical communio*¹⁴ as a principle of vertical and auxiliary relationships among all ecclesial subjects. This implied a return to a pyramidal way of understanding the *process of configuring ecclesial identities*. The shift was reinforced through several Synods about ecclesial subjects during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. Through this shift, the *All* and the *One* could act practically autonomous with respect to the rest of the faithful in the People of God. *Synodality* offers a *reciprocal identity-building dynamic* between the *All*, the *Many* and the *One* that can overcome this juxtaposition. But the unresolved juxtaposition will remain if the *hierarchica communio* is exercised without being bound to the normative character of *communio fidelium et ecclesiarum*.

Collegiality and Synodality

It is possible to say that we are in *the early moments of an emergent* and more inclusive solution. *Episcopalis Communio* (2018) conceives the

Episcopate,” in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Episcopado y primado* (Barcelona: Herder, 1965) (Orig. 1961), 104, 108.

¹¹John O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 252.

¹²Antonino Indelicato, *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi. La collegialità sospesa 1965-1985*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 365.

¹³Ángel Anton, *Sinodo e collegialità extraconciliare dei vescovi*, in Gino Concetti and Vincenzo Fagiolo, *La collegialità episcopale per il futuro della chiesa* (Firenze Vallecchi, 1969), 74.

¹⁴Cf. Gianfranco Ghirlanda, *Hierarchica communio. Significato della formula nella LG*, (Roma: PUG, 1980).

Synod as a circular and polyhedric process with the purpose of building ecclesial consensus throughout different phases, starting with the local churches, involving the totality of the faithful in a dynamic of reciprocity and necessity. By this means, Francis has enabled a broadening of the exercise of *episcopal collegiality* in the light of synodality, although it continues to have as *the enabling referent* an episcopal structure—the *Synod of Bishops*—and not an ecclesial one. Hence, under Francis, Synodality is understood as a *synodal collegiality*¹⁵ that “manifests the *collegialitas affectiva*, which can become effective only in some circumstances,¹⁶ but not in a permanent way.¹⁷ In light of this vision, synodality offers a greater interaction between the hierarchy and the rest of the faithful through the *Synod*, which articulates “the ministry of the personal and collegial exercise of apostolic authority with the synodal exercise of discernment by the community” (ITC, *Syn* 69). Francis explains this by saying that, “although in its composition it is essentially an episcopal body, the *Synod* does not live apart from the rest of the faithful. On the contrary, it is a suitable instrument for giving voice to the whole People of God” (EC 6).

Nevertheless, we can find here an initial recovery of *the exercise of episcopal collegiality in light of an ecclesiology of local churches*, moving from the model of *hierarchica communio* to that of *communio fidelium et ecclesiarum* by deepening the reception of LG 23. In doing so, the bishop should attend a synodal assembly not simply to give his individual opinion but as voice and witness of the sentiments of the faithful (*sensus fidei*) of his particular church—diocese—, deepening the reception of LG 12. If Bishops do not participate personally in synodal processes with the rest of the faithful, we will continue to experience an “insufficient consideration of the *sensus fidelium*, the concentration of power and the isolated exercise of authority, a centralized and discretionary style of

¹⁵Francis, *Letter to Card. Baldisseri on the Occasion of the Elevation to the Episcopal Dignity of Bishop Fabio Fabene*, at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140401_cardinale-baldisseri.html. Also in International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2018), 99.

¹⁶Francis, *Address at the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops* (October 17, 2015).

¹⁷Paul VI also privileged the spiritual and affective dimension, rather than the juridical and effective one. Cf. Edmond Farhat, “La collegialità episcopale nei discorsi di Paolo VI al Sinodo dei Vescovi,” in *Paolo VI e la collegialità episcopale. Colloquium Internazionale di Studio. Brescia 25-27 September 1992* (Ed. Studium, 1995), 244.

governance, and the opacity of regulatory procedures.”¹⁸ If they do not do so, how can “the unique consensus of all the faithful” be achieved (DV 10)?¹⁹ 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, shares in a subordinate way in his fiduciary relationship with and accountability to this portion of the people of God.²⁰

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 lives and exercises his pastorship, binds and obliges him.²¹ Certainly, with Francis there has been an expansion of the exercise of episcopal collegiality recovering this normative bond that should exist between the identity of the hierarchical ministry and the life of the diocese where he lives as pastor. By means of this model of *synodal collegiality*, the current phase in the reception of the Council advances: (a) by creating a link between

¹⁸ Alphonse Borras, “Sinodalità ecclesiale, processi partecipati e modalità decisionali,” Carlos María Galli—Antonio Spadaro, ed., *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2016), 208.

¹⁹ “In assenza di questa dimensione la riflessione sulla collegialità sembra ridursi ad una dignità funzionale, con un risvolto di natura quasi corporativa che trascura del tutto l’altra grande questione del ruolo dei laici”. Antonino Indelicato, *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi. La collegialità sospesa 1965-1985*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 359.

²⁰ John P. Beal, “The Consultation in Church Governance,” *Canon Law Society of America Proceedings* 68 (2006) 38.

²¹ “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,” *The Jurist* 68 (2008) 342.

“the entire People of God, ... the exercise of the episcopal ministry and the primatial ministry of the Bishop of Rome”; (b) by promoting the principle of co-responsibility in mission that “expresses the active subject character of all the Baptized”; (c) and by fostering a collaborative dynamic “at various levels and in various ways, at the level of the particular Churches, at that of their regional groupings and at that of the universal Church.”²² (CTI *Sin* 64). According to Francis, the aim of this model is “that the anointing of the People of God may find concrete means to manifest itself.”²³

4. Towards an *ecclesial synodality*

The Vatican II Council offered the model of an *episcopal collegiality* and the current phase in its reception—inaugurated in 2013 by Pope Francis—deepened it through the praxis of a *synodal collegiality*. However, the ongoing experience of the *Synod on Synodality* has introduced what can be called an *ecclesial synodality* that finds its foundations in a new approach to the ecclesiology of the People of God through the lens of the notion of *christifideles* and the co-responsible dimension of each faithful in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

Complementarity and Completeness amongst all the Christifideles

This *ecclesial synodality* is grounded in the equal participation of *all* in the common priesthood, which offers the hermeneutical framework for thinking about *communal dynamics* based on an *essential co-responsibility* that springs from baptism. This is based on the principle of *identity complementarity and completeness* amongst all the *christifideles*. This can generate a process of *effective synodalization* of the Church as *People of God walking together* according to the principle by which “all that has been said about the People of God is addressed equally to laity, religious and clergy” (LG 30). The novelty lies in the fact that all ecclesial subjects are defined by relationships of *completeness* realized through a co-responsible exercise of each one’s own identity and vocation, within an *organic totality* of the *universitas fidelium*, by which each ecclesial subject is needed for the realization of the other(s). The Council offers the theological basis for this in *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

²²ITC, *Synodality*, no. 64.

²³Francis, *Letter to all the People of God in Chile* (May 2018), at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180531_lettera-popolodidio-cile.html

(*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*). For example, being a lay person is not a delegated or deficient condition.²⁴

By virtue of Baptism, the laity is a *subject* on equal footing with the hierarchy (LG 31) to accomplish the shared mission of the Church (SC 14) *suo modo et pro sua parte* (AA 29). Even more, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* reaffirms that “the apostolate of the laity and the pastoral ministry are *mutually completed*” (AA 6: *mutuo se complent*). This new perspective is the fruit of a fresh understanding of the ecclesiology of the People of God that we have presented here. It is a perspective that fully recognizes the principle of the *essential co-responsibility* in mission of all the faithful, the *christifideles*,²⁵ and thus bringing about an initial emergence of processes of effective *synodalization* of the Church in light of an ecclesial identity reconfiguration of all ecclesial subjects — *faithful*.

However, this also opens new challenges to advance in the current reception of the Council, because for many people the understanding of Synodality has been limited to the institution of the Synod of Bishops, which is still conceived and grounded on the power of orders, rather than that of baptism. We can, then, ask ourselves if instead of solely reforming structures that respond to an episcopal nature, what is needed is to create new ones based on an *ecclesial synodality* in which the exercise of the co-responsibility of all the faithful—including bishops—is essential and binding, while offering a better articulation of *all* (synodality), *many* (collegiality) and *one* (primacy). In this regards Congar’s words are illuminating by reminding us that

we must ask ourselves whether *aggiornamento* is enough or whether something else will not be necessary. The question becomes urgent to the extent that the Church’s institutions are rooted in a cultural world that no longer has a place in the new cultural world. Our epoch requires a revision of traditional forms that goes beyond the plans for adaptation or *aggiornamento*; it requires a new creation. It is not enough simply to maintain and adapt what has existed until now; it is necessary to create something new. Christianity is essential transmission, *traditio*. The only things that can be reinvented are the *forms* of what has been received. To make the transmission—the *paradosis*—effective and authentic, we must

²⁴Cf. Peter De May, “Sharing in the Threefold Office of Christ. A Different Matter for Laity and Priests? The *tria munera* in *Lumen gentium*, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, *Apostolicam actuositatem* and *Ad gentes*,” in Anne M. Mayer, ed., *The Letter and the Spirit on the forgotten Documents of Vatican II* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 155–179.

²⁵ This logic of identities is developed further in Rafael Luciani, “Hacia una eclesialidad sinodal. Una nueva comprensión de la Iglesia *Pueblo de Dios*?” *Horizonte* 59 (2021).

revise and renew the forms that served well for transmission in other times but that now prove to be obstacles to genuine transmission.

The Emergence of New Structures

This consciousness is initially emerging in the Latin American Church with the creation of what we can call two new synodal institutions: The *Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean*, and the *Ecclesial Conference of the Amazonia*.²⁶ Both inspired by St Cyprian's golden rule: "no decree can be established that is not ratified by the consent of the plurality"; and in the classic principle: "what affects all must be dealt with and approved by all." As *Dei Verbum* 10 expresses, the deposit of the Word of God has been entrusted to "the whole People of God, united to their pastors," who must "constitute a singular consensus" (*fidelium conspiratio*). In these models, it is not the People of God that must be integrated into the hierarchy by participating in episcopal structures—Synods or episcopal conferences—but the hierarchy that must situate itself as one more *christifideles* within an *ecclesial synodality*, because "renewal in the ecclesial hierarchy alone does not bring about the transformation to which the Holy Spirit urges us."

These new synodal structures or institutions follow the principle according to which "a synodal Church is a Church of listening" to the People of God. By doing so, the act of listening defines the process of the whole ecclesial life. But it is "a *reciprocal listening* in which each one has something to learn," that is, "faithful people, episcopal college, Bishop of Rome: one in listening to the others; and all in listening to the Holy Spirit (*Jn* 14:17) in order to know what he says to the Churches (*Rev* 2:7)." We can then sustain that this new phase in the reception of the Council deepens *Lumen Gentium* 12 (*sensus fidei*) and inserts it in *Lumen Gentium* 23 (local Churches) offering the base for the emergence of *synodalization* processes of the whole Church.

This scenario places us before a moment of *ecclesiogenesis* that stimulates us to take a new ecclesiological turn: to go from the "collegial we of the episcopate gathered in unity *cum Petro et sub Petro*" to the "ecclesial we, in which each 'I', being clothed with Christ (cf. *Gal* 2:20), lives and walks with the brothers and sisters as a responsible and active subject in the one mission of the People of God" (ITC *Syn* 60). Therefore, the revision of *episcopal collegiality* in the perspective of a

²⁶I have developed this in Rafael Luciani, "Reconfigurar la identidad y la estructura eclesial a la luz de las Iglesias locales. *Querida Amazonia y el estatuto teológico de las realidades socioculturales*," *Revista Medellín* (CELAM) 179 (2020) 487–515.

synodal collegiality must still advance towards a *synodal ecclesiality*, enabling a new synodal way of being and proceeding in the Church that “has its point of departure but also its point of arrival in the People of God” (*Episcopalis Communio* 7), because “synodality is a constitutive dimension of the Church, and through synodality the Church reveals and configures herself as the pilgrim People of God.” More than ever, we are required, as a Church, “to jointly promote an ecclesial transformation that involves all of us”²⁷ because “in that faithful and silent People resides the immune system of the Church.”²⁸

Conclusion

We are facing in the Church a structural problem.²⁹ We would have to say today that “a clerical institutional [model is] one of the great structural obstacles to the discovery of the gospel.”³⁰ Reforming the current ecclesial institutional model in light of Synodality will require to discern new ways of proceeding that need to be translated into new *relations, communicative dynamics and structures* in a model of a Church as People of God walking together. It is necessary to touch the very heart of ecclesiology and not just reorganize structures superficially. This involves not only creative reception of the Council but also theologico-cultural re-creation of the foundational spirit that led to the Church’s original foundations. It is necessary to renew the identities and good practices of institutions and the mentalities of the ecclesial subjects for a *Synodal Church*. In addition, it is essential to reflect on the actors that sustain ecclesial structures. The type of people – diversity of gender, experience, formation, origin, culture – is decisive because it shapes the practices of relationship and communication in which listening, discernment and consensus building take place.³¹

²⁷Francis, *Letter to all the People of God in Chile* (May 2018).

²⁸ Francis, *Letter to the Bishops in Chile* <https://www.reflexionyliberacion.cl/ryl/2018/05/18/carta-del-papa-francisco-a-los-obispos-de-chile/>

²⁹Fundamental is the analysis of Carlos Schickendantz: “Institutional Failure of a Theological-Cultural Model of Church. Systemic Factors in the Abuse Crisis,” *Theology and Life* 60 (2019) 9–40.

³⁰ Ronaldo Muñoz, *Nueva conciencia de la Iglesia en América Latina* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974), 361.

³¹“It does not depend simply and above all on a good functioning of the various organizations or on simple criteria of democratic participation, such as the criterion of majority, but requires from its members an ecclesial awareness, a style of fraternal communication, which translates communion and common convergence on a project of the Church.” Antonio Lanfranchi, “Prassi spirituale del discernimento comunitario,” in Riccardo Battocchio—Serena Noceti, *Chiesa e sinodalità* (Milano: Glossa, 2007), 194.

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.”³² In this new phase of the Council’s reception that began with the pontificate of Francis, 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 a Pilgrim people of God through a *synodal ecclesiality*. This can be objectified in an *effective synodalization* of all ecclesial life and not only in a mere formal or isolated procedural modification. 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, September 18, 2021).³³

This is what synodality represents today.

³²Pope Paul VI, *Opening speech of the second session of the Second Vatican Council*, September 29, 1963, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1963/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19630929_concilio-vaticano-ii.html

³³Cf. Pope Francis, *Address to the Faithful of the Diocese of Rome*, September 18, 2021 <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/september/documents/20210918-fedeli-diocesiroma.html>