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SYNODALITY IN THE CHURCH
A Question of Yesterday and of Today

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Abstract

The theme of synodality finds in the memory of Carlo Maria Martini's European action as President of the CCEE (Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae) from 1986 to 1993, that complex framework that is indispensable if we want to go beyond easy rhetoric and pursue the inculturation of faith in a culture such as the European one, to which modernity has opened up dialogue with science and democracy. The author criticizes the current ambiguous "inflation" of the term "synodality" and shows how the defeat of Martini's project is that of a vision of the Church and a hope for Europe, and for this reason it serves as a warning: giving up the pursuit of 'effective' ecclesial synodality and settling for forms of 'affective' synodality represents the great challenge that the Catholic Church is called upon to face today. In Europe, but not only there.

Keywords: A**uxiliary Bishops; Authority; Ecclesiology; Reform; Vatican II**

The tenth anniversary of the death of Carlo Maria Martini was marked by a number of events. The present text was a lecture delivered at one of those events, organized by the "C.M. Martini" Center of the Bicocca University of Milan under the title *Il sogno europeo di un*

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Note: This article was written on the tenth anniversary of Carlo Maria Martini's death (2012) to reflect on Pope Francis' project of synodality in light of the "defeat of Martini's dream" of a church that is finally ecumenical and finally European.

English translation from Italian by Brian McNeil.

cardinale. Carlo Maria Martini, l'Europa e la Chiesa ["The European dream of a cardinal. Carlo Maria Martini, Europe and the Church"]. It was in this connection that I read a fine book by Dr Francesca Perugi, *Storia di una sconfitta. Carlo Maria Martini e la Chiesa in Europa (1986–1993)* ["The history of a defeat. Carlo Maria Martini and the Church in Europe (1986–1993)"]. This book has the dramatic pace of a detective novel, and the reader never loses interest, despite knowing from the very first page the identity of the killer.[1]

Martini's defeat has, in fact, a much more serious significance than simply the personal fate of one man of the Church. This is why it puts a question to us—and today more so than ever, when the European project is in grave trouble thanks both to the old and new nationalistic prisons that have made it hard for the various states to achieve a genuine federative configuration, and to the hostility on the part of superpowers that aim at a new dividing-up of the world. And the incompetence that has characterized the presence of the Churches over these decades has not exactly lent support to the European project. Martini believed in it and hoped in it, and he made available to this project the resources of his intelligence and culture, in addition to the resources of his faith and spirituality, "to construct a European Union according to the correct principles of federalism."[2] The lack of far-sightedness on the part of other superpowers of that time—in this case, the ecclesiastical superpowers—condemned the project to defeat. Today, with great pain, we are paying the price of the consequences of this defeat.

It is precisely in the remembrance of Carlo Maria Martini's European activity that the theme of synodality, which so much preoccupies the Catholic Church today on every level of ecclesial participation, finds the complex framework that is needed, if we are to go beyond the dominant rhetoric—a rhetoric that (in my view) weakens the theme of synodality in the institutional dimension and replenishes the energy needed for reform. Many of us are becoming aware that what could signal a decisive step forward on the path opened up by the Second Vatican Council risks turning out to be yet another proof of the inability to resolve the problem of the overlapping between tradition and continuity, an inability that has been paralyzing the life of the Church for a long time now. I should therefore like to take as my

[1]Rome: Carocci, 2022. Dr. Perugi is an associate of the Fondazione Carlo Maria Martini.

[2]Martini, quoted by Perugi, 92f.

starting point some of the reasons for this malaise. As we recall the enormous labours undertaken by Carlo Maria Martini (and not only in the decades immediately after the Council), these reflections bring us back to the reasons for his defeat and, even more, to the consequences of that defeat for the life of Europe.

1. The Reasons for a Malaise

It may appear pedantic, but I want to begin by saying that there is not a perfect overlapping between synodality and Synod, nor between "synodal path," Synod, and synodality. It is more than obvious that these terms share a semantic field; but it is equally obvious that many of the public statements made in the past year have given the impression that we are witnessing a "three-card trick" that uses three cards: an event, the Synod; an adjective, "synodal"; and a concept, "synodality." This, accordingly, will be my starting point.

1.1. The Inflation of Synodality

I am neither a church historian nor a canon lawyer, so I am speaking as a simple Catholic layperson who has been hearing this term employed in the last months more or less by everybody and in an almost obsessive manner. The more this word is used, the more it seems that it is emptied of its own specific meanings and filled up with many other things. A dimension? An attitude? A method? An atmosphere? And we must also ask: Why has it generated preoccupation and a refusal, or at least scepticism, in some people, while at the same time kindling so much enthusiasm?

In order at all costs to preserve the Roman centralism, Ratzinger proposed the ultimately useless solution of drawing a distinction between "affective collegiality" (which belonged to the episcopal conferences and lacked ministerial power) and "effective collegiality" (which belonged to the Councils). If this proposal had won the day this time too, it would have propelled the Catholic Church even further along the path of its own dissolution, at least in the western countries. The modern age had opened the door to a dialogue with science and with democracy, and it is, of course, true that we do not know where the path of an inculturation of the faith in a culture like that of Europe would have led; Martini and the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CBCE), together with all those who worked for a reception of Vatican II that would respect its spirit and its orientations, had devoted much energy to this task of inculturation. But do know what the obstinate rejection of the modern age—unilaterally judged to be materialistic, hedonistic, individualistic, and consumerist—and hence

of every democratic exercise of power (including within the Church) led to. And we likewise know about the wound inflicted on ecumenism in Europe by the confusion between evangelization and proselytism that was integral to the choices made by John Paul II. These choices were inspired by the doctrinaire vision of his Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Ratzinger, and were implemented vigorously by Camillo Ruini, who was to become president of the Italian Bishops' Conference. And we know that some of the motivations of the present-day conflict between Russia and Ukraine are to be found in the conflicts between the various Christian Churches that are present in this territory. In this regard, Perugi's book is a precious treasury of information that helps us to reconstruct how the clash between two different visions of the world, of the Council, and of the function of the Church in the world, namely, the visions of Wojtyła and Martini, sums up the parable that lies behind the Church of Pope Francis.[3]

However, I believe it is important to ask quite frankly whether, and to what extent, Francis himself is conscious of the fact that to ask the entire Church to reflect on synodality, in the context of the preparation for a Synod of Bishops with precisely this as its theme, inevitably means calling into question the effective power of the individual episcopal conferences to take decisions, as well as the delicate relationship of each conference with the individual bishops who are its members. Above all, it means calling into question the Roman centralism that was strongly consolidated during the pontificates of his two predecessors, in obedience to the first antidemocratic rule, which consists of eliminating the value and the function of the intermediary bodies. I do in fact wonder whether this is the project that Francis himself is pursuing. It is he who wanted to inaugurate a universal brainstorming in the Church. But what was his aim?

There can be no doubt that he has put a match to the powder kegs. The past months have seen an endless number of courses, seminars, and specialized initiatives that have taken synodality as their theme, studying, discussing, and analyzing it as a systemic element of the life of the Church of yesterday, today, and (perhaps even more so) of tomorrow. Many bishops asked parishes, associations, groups, and movements to get involved in a collective process of in-depth study and asking questions, and the response has been extremely generous. I find the title of a recent article illuminating in this respect: "Dal

[3]See especially the final chapter on "The Synod in Europe: the litmus test," 123–165.

Sinodo sulla sinodalità alla synodalizzazione di tutta la Chiesa."[4] Its author is Rafael Luciani, a Venezuelan theologian who assists the Secretariat of the Synod as an expert and who has been devoting much time in these past months to the examination, clarification, explanation, and discussion of the complex web of meanings indicated by the root "synod-." I cannot go into detail here; I simply recommend that one read it, while always remembering that the logic of the diptych, "effective" and "affective," is one of the preferential strategies for guaranteeing the concentration of powers.

At any rate, it is beyond doubt that the term "synodality" has opened up a fault line along which there is a confrontation and a clash between the "two Churches" that have always coexisted, albeit in various ways depending on the various epochs, within the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" Church, and that have also fought each other.[5] I know that Pope Francis would at once rebuke me, because he categorically refuses to understand the ecclesial community in keeping with the logic of the confrontation and the tension between conservatism and progressivism. Indeed, this is a point that he makes repeatedly.

We do not know whether the vitality of the Church will be inexhaustible. But we certainly do know that it has a strength that has lasted for two millennia, down to the present day. And I continue to think that this vitality is linked precisely to this confrontation and to this tension, which involve both winners and losers. I reflect on what it meant for some bishops (Europeans, but not exclusively), for the St Gallen group, and in particular for Carlo Maria Martini to see the shipwreck of their hopes when the Roman curia, after first snatching from the CBCE the organization of a first special Synod of Bishops for Europe, then surreptitiously deleted from the Pope's speech at the close of this Synod (December 13, 1991) the paragraph that had reaffirmed his support for the role of the two pastoral structures of the CBCE and the Commission of the Episcopates of the European Union (COMECE).[6]

What must this have meant for them! But not only for them: when the ecclesiological rethinking that the Council had hoped for, and that

[4]"From the Synod on synodality to the synodalization of the entire Church": *Iglesia Viva* 287 (July–September 2021) 97–121.

[5]For the clash between the vision of the Church held by the CBCE and the vision of Wojtyła–Ratzinger, see Perugi, 80–90.

[6]See especially Perugi, 123–129 and 160.

had been carried out in a serious and intellectually rigorous manner by churchmen of the very highest intellectual and moral stature, was reduced to a clash between two ideological camps, this had painful consequences for the future of the Church in Europe. And the historiography of the Catholic Church in Europe has already begun to investigate the reason for this.

1.2. The "Synodal Path" and the Power to Take Decisions

On October 16, 2022, at the close of the Sunday Angelus prayer, Pope Francis recalled that the first phase of the sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, with the theme "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission," had opened on October 10 of the previous year. He underlined the importance of the fact that the synodal path should not proceed hastily, and that for this reason, he had decided to promote a period of "broader discernment." This meant that the synodal assembly would have two sessions, the first from October 4–29, 2023, and the second in October 2024. He then concluded: "I trust that this decision can promote the understanding of synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church and can help everyone to live synodality on a path taken by brothers and sisters who bear witness to the joy of the Gospel."

This was not a novelty, since Francis had already decided that the discussion at the Synod on the family should take place in two stages, one "extraordinary" (October 5–19, 2014) and one "ordinary" (October 4–25, 2015). Nor is this surprising. We know that he wished his pontificate to be oriented precisely to the launching of processes, rather than to the occupying of spaces. And this will have seemed to him all the more necessary in the case of synodality, which is not merely a topic of discussion, but is a reality with decisive implications for the Church's life. It is not by chance that Francis wanted to involve all the local Churches in the preparation of the Synod on their various levels, from the parochial and diocesan to the national and continental. And despite the rebelliousness of some episcopal conferences and some undeniable contradictions, it is a fact that the complex machinery of the synodal consultations have already succeeded, in the case of Europe, in producing the working paper for the continental phase, entitled "Enlarge the Space of your Tent" (Isa 54:2). This was meant to present an initial synthesis of what had previously been reflected upon, discussed, and elaborated on the intermediate levels, from the parochial level, or that of groups and associations, to the national level. From the perspective of Pope Francis, all this work of participation can be considered a "synodal path."

The expression "synodal path" was, however, coined in a different context, less generalized and more specific, namely, in the German Catholic Church, which gave this name (*Der synodale Weg*) to the three years of synodal assemblies (2021–2023) involving delegates who represent the entire German Church.[7] The starting point of this process of serious and radical rethinking was the realization of the dramatic character of the sexual abuses in the Catholic Church and the conviction that special methods and adequate reforms were the only appropriate response to events of such a traumatic nature. The words of Cardinal Reinhard Marx, at that time president of the German episcopal conference, made it obvious that the synodal path aimed, not only to work for a revision of the mechanisms of authority and of the exercise of power within the Church, but also to look at the various aspects connected with sexuality and sexual morality: "What needs to be done to redimension the exercise of power, and to construct an order of things that is more just and legally binding, will be clarified along the synodal path. The institution of administrative tribunals is a part of this process." He continued:

> The meaning of sexuality for the person has not been given sufficient attention. The result is that sex education gives the great majority of the baptized no orientation. It leads a niche existence. We see how often we find it difficult to speak of matters related to today's sexual behavior.

While it was the scandal of the sexual abuses that shook the German Catholic Church to its foundations, it soon became evident that to hide behind moralistic evaluations was completely inadequate. What was necessary was a legal response. Above all, it was now indispensable to confront directly the question of the impact on human behavior—including that of priests and religious—of the relationship between sex and power. In other words, it was necessary to make a concrete response to the problem of the abuses, but also to investigate their anthropological and ecclesiological roots.

The reaction on the part of Rome came swiftly. After various ups and downs, a head-on collision came in a text published on July 21, 2022 by the Press Office of the Holy See that issued a warning to the members of the German synodal path. From the outset, in fact, Rome had reacted with disquiet, for three reasons. First of all, the German "synodal path" wants to have a deliberative character, while the

[7]After the first, second, and third synodal assemblies (January 30–February 1, 2021; September 30–October 2, 21; February 3–5, 2022), the fourth and fifth assemblies are to be held in Frankfurt am Main (September 8–10, 2022; February 9–11, 2023).

questions under discussion—power in the Church, the formation and the life of the clergy, sexual morality, and the roles accorded to women—concern the universal Church and hence cannot be made the object of deliberations by one local Church. Secondly, there was clearly a fundamental ambiguity, since the aim was to hold a Council, that is, to exercise a form of collegiality that took decisions, without however declaring this openly. And finally, the composition of the assembly was illegal, since there were equal numbers of clergy and laity, something forbidden by a canon regarding local Councils. Faced with the initial reservations presented by Rome, Cardinal Marx extricated himself by stating that the synodal path was a "*sui generis* process." But the problem was, and remains, whether what is determined during the synodal assemblies has the character of a decision and would thus be binding on the entire German Church, including the bishops. And quite apart from their occasional reluctance to interfere, the bishops do not enjoy being caught in the crossfire between Rome and Berlin.

It is hard to deny that all this skirts the edges of ambiguity. And precisely this ought to make us reflect that here is a knot that asks, or indeed demands, to be untied: How do the processes of decision-making in the Catholic Church function? What are the fault lines between Rome and the episcopal conferences, as well as within the episcopal conferences themselves and between the laity and their own bishops?

To what extent is the *Synodaler Weg* a Council disguised as a synod, and what is its autonomy from Rome? Up to now, in reality, the German synodal assemblies have been places of discussion and confrontation, but there is inevitably a growing need to arrive at decisions—and the Roman disquiet grows, in a directly proportional manner. Besides this, the hope of the traditionalist wings grows: they want to augment their collection of accusations against Pope Francis by reproaching him with a new "German schism."

1.3. The Ambiguities of Francis

I am convinced that the German ecclesial experience, with all its ambivalence (indeed, precisely thanks to these ambivalences), ought to be regarded as paradigmatic because it demands that we call things by their proper names, and because it has unmasked the inevitable ambiguities entailed by the top-down system of power in the Catholic Church. The synodal path is not a synod; yet in the Catholic Church, the synod (even the Synod of Bishops) can only have a consultative power. This means that the synodality that finds expression in a synod

is not the distinctive collegiality of a Council – which, however, is always tied to the monarchical and centralist character of the Catholic hierarchical organization, which has the task of guaranteeing unity. The experience of the German Church has shed light on the ambiguity that nestles under all the rhetoric. It also reveals the idealization of synodality, because it has compelled us to grasp clearly that, in order to be genuinely synodal, a Church ought to launch processes that involve all the faithful—and above all, processes that would not be merely consultative, but would arrive at resolutions that are shared. But how can one then safeguard the Catholic unity? And in the local Churches, in which exactly the same top-down mechanism is reproduced, how can one practice any form of synodality that will not be perceived as an attack on the authority of the individual bishop?

This is a radical question, because it involves the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. But what is the point of talking so much about synodality, if we know perfectly well that it has nothing to do with collegiality? And what forms of collegiality could be appropriate to an institution that makes universality its mark of identity, and centralism its rule? We can draw on the principles and the rules that gave their form to the Roman Empire, and to all imperialisms, to help us reflect on this with the seriousness that is born of a secure historical competence. If we do not locate very clearly the term "synodality" in the nexus between collegiality and centralism, we risk creating a great confusion, with all its consequences—also bearing in mind that it would take very little to empty the churches today—unless the intention is to activate a real and genuine process of transforming the system and the structure. First of all, therefore, we need to know what Francis means when he declares synodality to be a "constitutive dimension of the Church." What is the point of inviting everybody to speak, if what they say has no hope of influencing the lives of everyone?

It has become completely clear in the years of the present pontificate that when Pope Francis speaks of reform or reforms, he apparently has no intention of intervening primarily on the institutional levels of the ecclesial body. He himself has emphasized this on November 10, 2015, in his address to the fifth Convention of the Italian Church at Florence, when he said that "The reform of the Church does not consist solely of the umpteenth plan to change the structures. What is means is becoming grafted onto Christ and rooted in him, letting oneself be led by the Spirit. In that case, everything will be possible, with inventive genius and creativity."

Francis is convinced that the processes of transformation must be rooted in the interior life of all who belong to the people of God. They must be the fruit of conversion and of a shared conviction; they must not come from higher up in the system. Here too, Jorge Mario Bergoglio is basically expressing the Ignatian spirit of his Jesuit formation.

Nevertheless, it is true that it was Pope Francis himself, with a considerable investment of time and work, who promoted the emergence on September 28, 2013, a few months after his election, of the famous G7, the Council of Cardinals for the reform of the curia, and it is equally true that roughly nine years later, on March 19, 2022, he signed the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium* on the reform of the Roman curia. This came into force, although it is not yet functioning, on Pentecost this year (June 5, 2022).[8]

The principle of evangelization and of the Church's missionary character inspire the reform and influence its articulation. But, as the fate of Martini in Europe clearly shows, these two terms are never neutral or innocent, because they acquire their meaning from the ecclesiological framework in which they are located. In the last analysis, even the Spanish *Reconquista* against the Arabs or the colonization of the Americas can be seen as vivid examples of evangelization and the missionary character.

Apart from the reorganization and the new names of the various dicasteries, the text of the curial reform promulgated by Francis displays a number of changes of perspective, because it insists on the fact that the centralism of the Roman curia is at the service of the various episcopal conferences. However, it also insists, after reaffirming the vicarious character of the Roman curia, that the power is no longer linked exclusively to the hierarchical-clerical structure, but depends solely on the pope:

> Each curial institution carries out its proper mission by virtue of the power it has received from the Roman Pontiff, in whose name it operates with vicarious power in the exercise of his primatial *munus*. For this reason, any member of the faithful can preside over a Dicastery or Office, depending on the power of governance and the specific competence and function of the Dicastery or Office in question (Preamble, nr. 5).

[8] The two earlier great reforms were that of 1967 under Paul VI (with the Constitution *Regimini ecclesiae universae*) and that of 1998 under John Paul II (with the Constitution *Pastor bonus*).

The Jesuit canon lawyer Gianfranco Ghirlanda has commented: "The one who is put at the head of a dicastery or another organism of the curia has authority, not because of the hierarchical rank bestowed on him, but because of the power that one receives from the Roman Pontiff and that one exercises in his name." This abolishes the stipulation in nr. 7 of in John Paul II's Constitution on the reform of the curia, *Pastor bonus,* which states the "proviso" that: "matters requiring the exercise of power of governance be reserved to those in holy orders."

Ghirlanda continues that the pope is now free to appoint to a role in the curia a bishop, a priest, a male or female religious, or a layman or laywoman. This is a very significant pint, because it signals the reversal of a trend. It accords with a clear declericalization and a recognition of the "fundamental equality of all the baptized, which, albeit in differentiation and complementarity, is the basis of synodality."[9]

In my opinion, however, the question still remains open: What kind of synodality is involved here? Is it only functional? Or is it only a question of attitudes—that is to say, something sublimated within an ideal moral vision, included in the virtuous attitudes of listening, reciprocity, participation, and collaboration? This, in fact, is what we read in nr. 4 of the preamble to the Constitution *Praedicate evangelium* (italics original):

> This life of communion makes the Church *synodal*; a Church marked by reciprocal listening, 'whereby everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth (cf. *Jn* 14:17), in order to know what he says to the Churches (cf. *Rev* 2:7).' This synodal nature of the Church is to be understood as 'the journeying together of God's flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord'.

An invitation, an aspiration, a value to be pursued: an affective synodality? The next question: can one claim to be declericalizing power by simply increasing the number of laypersons and giving them responsible roles, but without at the same time undermining the basic system of the Church's hierarchical-clerical structure? I sometimes have the impression—may my metaphor be forgiven—that Pope Francis risks throwing the goldfish (that is, the laity) into the aquarium

[9]Address by Professor Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ, at the press conference for the presentation of the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate evangelium* on the Roman curia and its ministry to the Church in the world, March 21, 2022: https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bolletino/pubblico/2022/03/21/0192/00417.html.

in which the other fish are swimming. And those other fish include the sharks.

I believe it is not by chance that Francis speaks of synodality in terms of a style and a dimension, and that he always categorically refuses to allow the present-day ecclesiastical organization to be called into question. Nor is it by chance that this leads him into an enormous inconsistency, when he maintains that to rethink the form of the Church as a democracy would mean yielding to forces of secularization that would seriously alter the divine character of the Church, which was established by Jesus himself. All the spasmodic debate about the presence and the role of women makes this ambiguity perfectly obvious. On the one hand, Francis consistently gives women managerial roles, but on the other hand, he has no intention of challenging the hierarchy of the sexes, which is one of the pillars of the entire hierarchical-clerical structure. And what are we to say of the phantasm that the democratic form of government is a sign of secularization, when compared with the monarchical form that came into being on the basis of the testimony of scripture? It goes without saying that it is necessary to overcome the tremendous deficit in the use made of scripture and in the ecclesiological thinking that the Catholic Church has accumulated over the centuries; Vatican II brought this deficit to light, and the great theologians of the twentieth century had begun to repair it. But there were many victims of the reception of the Council; Carlo Maria Martini was not alone.

For Francis, therefore, the Church assumed the monarchical form in the course of the centuries in obedience to its divine constitution; and it would be impossible to say the same with regard to the democratic model. To consecrate the monarchical system as of divine right at the dawn of the third millennium is highly embarrassing, even if it is true that even in the Catholic Church, the institution of the papacy, although normally held for life, remains elective, and that the Roman centralism, thanks above all to the sophisticated circuits of its exercise of power, functions better as a guarantee that a people consisting of 1,200,000 believers will have a form of unity. But in that case, what is the point of kindling expectations of radical reforms under the banner of synodality?

The numerous questions that I have posed above are not purely rhetorical, and they demand answers that are definitely not rhetorical. But since the topic I was asked to discuss concerns not only the present, but also the past, I should now like to do something rather acrobatic

before presenting my conclusion. I now take a leap backwards, because this will bring us back to the only New Testament testimony to synodality—even earlier than the later institution of synods.[10] At the close of the Second Vatican Council, with the Motu proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo* (September 15, 1965), Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops,

> whereby bishops chosen from various parts of the world are to offer more effective assistance to the supreme Shepherd. [It] is to be constituted in such a way that it is: a) a central ecclesiastical institution; b) representing the whole Catholic episcopate; c) of its nature perpetual; and d) as for structure, carrying out its function for a time and when called upon (I).

As Pope Francis declared, therefore, the Synod of Bishops, "new as an institution but ancient in inspiration," is "one of the most precious fruits of the Second Vatican Council."[11] What does the New Testament have to do with all this?

2. A Leap Backwards

It is absolutely incorrect to apply the term "council" or "synod" to the apostolic meeting that took place in Jerusalem in the first years of the Christian mission. We have a kind of detailed protocol of it in ch. 15 of the Acts of the Apostles. Although Paul was a protagonist, and although the question discussed was of decisive importance for him, he makes only a reference to it, in an occasionally contemptuous tone, in his Letter to the Galatians (2:1–10). We cannot go into the details here. But I believe that this event, and especially the two diverging narratives that we have, ought to be given more consideration. This is because we have here the attestation of the fact that those forms of synodality (or of collegiality) that are indispensable to the Church's life precisely because of its missionary character—that is to say, because of problems and questions intrinsic to the Church's tendency towards the universality to which it feels called—cannot and must not leave victors and defeated on the field. Any other outcome would be the denial of these very same forms.

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[10]These arose between the fourth and the fifth centuries and led to the Ecumenical Councils that mark important points in the history of the Church in the first millennium. The Ecumenical Councils were affected by the subsequent separation between the Eastern and the Western Churches. From the time of the Council of Trent onwards, they are the patrimony of the Roman Catholic Church, whereas the praxis of synodality remains the patrimony of the Reformed Churches.

[11]Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* (September 18, 2018), nr. 1.

Permit me an aside before we briefly examine the two texts. A few days after announcing his resignation, before he left the Apostolic Palace, Benedict XVI had a final meeting with the parish priests of Rome. Inevitably, one of the questions he was asked concerned the laborious reception of Vatican II during his own pontificate and that of his predecessor, John Paul II. Ratzinger proposed the following analysis. The Council had been accompanied step by step, for the first time in history, by the media, and their information had given an incorrect image of the Council. If they had complied with the official communiqués, no false expectations would have been generated. It makes me smile to think that two thousand years before this, two diverging versions of the apostolic assembly in Jerusalem were made, one by Paul and the other by the author of Acts (whom, for the sake of convenience, we shall call "Luke"). This demonstrates that, from the very beginning, even long before what the ecclesiastical authority considers the unfortunate interference of the media, every account of the facts passes through the filter of narratives that (fortunately) are numerous and various, because they are not held captive in the official communiqués. What, then, do the two New Testament testimonies tell us about the apostolic encounter in Jerusalem?

It is not for nothing that some critics at one time defined "Luke" as *frühkatholisch* ("early Catholic") because of the attention he pays to the processes whereby early Christianity was institutionalized, and because of his tendency to write a markedly apologetic history of the first Christian mission. It appears that "Luke" could draw on some kind of protocol of the Jerusalem meeting. These are the salient points: the community in Jerusalem, headed by Cephas, James, and John, had suffered under the polemic from some observant Jews who maintained that it was necessary to circumcise the pagans who came to faith in Jesus thanks to the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. This was a question of radical importance, because it determined whether or not there was continuity between Judaism and faith in Jesus. And this is why the apostles summoned the two missionaries who had already had so much success with their preaching to the pagans, and paid their travel expenses. The speeches of Peter and then of James formalized the boundary between continuity and discontinuity. These two discourses are masterpieces of the art of compromise on a theological basis. At the end, in order not completely to lose face in view of the intransigence of the Pharisees, they decreed in writing that, to guarantee the continuity between the new form of faith in Jesus and Judaism, all were invited to observe certain dietary regulations. Paul

and Barnabas returned to Antioch, accompanied by Judas and Silas, who had the task of explaining to the religious authorities of that community the decision that had been taken and approved with a typically Lukan formula: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us …" (v. 27).

Paul's rough version of the event is a first-hand account, and Gal 2:1–10 is made even more plausible by "Luke's" well known tendency to smooth over conflicts. At the same time, however, the polemical exasperation precisely with regard to the problem of circumcision, which pervades the Letter to the Galatians as a whole, invites us to be cautious here. At any rate, the apostle is highly contemptuous of the apostolic authorities in Jerusalem, whom he does not even name, since "who they were is of no account to me, since God is not a respecter of persons." His description of the discussion is much less ironical than that by "Luke," and he insists emphatically that neither he nor Barnabas and Titus, who accompanied him, accepted for even one moment to submit to the requests; nor does he mention the letter about the observance of some dietary prescriptions. He is content to note that the only thing asked of him was "to remember the poor." In his eyes, the first apostolic assembly arrives at the great compromise that lays down the theological foundations of the missionary pluralism, because "to me the Gospel for the uncircumcised was entrusted, just as the Gospel for the circumcised was entrusted to Peter. For he who had acted in Peter to make him an apostle of the circumcised had acted in me too for the Gentiles." This extraordinary solution is ratified by a gentlemen's agreement when they shake hands as a sign of communion. No matter what the exact course of events were, what is involved here is a compromise that is given a theological rationalization, and a compromise subsequently supported by history. This compromise inscribes pluralism on the DNA of Christian missionary activity. And this means that pluralism is inscribed on Christian synodality too.

Much water has indeed flowed under the bridge since then. And when Pope Francis fails to mention Paul at the beginning of his Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio,* but instead takes up the classical formula affirming that episcopal communion is "with Peter and under Peter," this tells us that history has seen many compromises that have been given a theological foundation, and that they were not always accompanied by handshakes that approved the pluralism of solutions. But it also tells us that there have been many breaches and exclusions.

I have suggested this leap backwards to the very earliest apostolic testimonies to the necessity of a collegial conduct of authority because I am convinced, as a biblical scholar, that every Christian generation must experience the origins as a question directly addressed to us. Above all, I am convinced that (as Francesca Perugi's researches bear witness[12]) the reference to the tension between Peter and Paul and the wounds inflicted on the Church by the inability, in the name of the truth, to open oneself to compromise choices, was nothing other than the intention to enforce one ecclesiological vision as the only legitimate vision. This was the moment of no return in the history of Carlo Maria Martini the European.

I move quickly to my conclusion, with a look at that passage of the life and of the biblical and pastoral magisterium of the archbishop who was at the head of the largest diocese in Europe. This passage saw the defeat of his ecumenical action, which aimed at the collaboration of the Christian Churches in order to realize the European project.

3. Not at all a Conclusion

Obviously, I do not claim to arrive at any sort of conclusion. I should simply like to take once more my starting point in the title of Rafael Luciani's article, which I have mentioned above: "From the Synod on synodality to the synodalization of the entire Church." I fully grasp that this preparation for the coming Synod of Bishops on synodality, broadened to include the participation of all the components of the Church, has kindled expectations in all those who hope that a full reception of the ecclesiology of Vatican II is beginning at last. I also attempt to see what happened at the Synod on Amazonia and the conflicts around the *Synodaler Weg* of the German Church as "bumps in the road" that, precisely as such, nevertheless show that there is movement in this direction everywhere in the Catholic Church.

I am also convinced that a synodalization of the entire Church is an ambitious project, but not impossible. It is ambitious, because it will have to overcome historical and ideological difficulties that are very deeply rooted in the living fabric of the Catholic Church; and it may be possible, because the profound sorrow caused by the division between the Churches and by the fatal repercussions of this division (and not only in the missionary sphere) will not permit any conflict or any clash to lead to new divisions. And I believe that, as the Book of Qohelet says, "there is a time for everything, and every event has its time under heaven." The time

[12]See p. 90.

of Martini and of the CBCE, the time of bishops and theologians who aspired to a model of the Church that would finally face modernity, may have been the time in which obedience demanded silence. But perhaps the same obedience *sub Petro et cum Petro* calls us instead to speak with *parrhêsia,* with the boldness of the Gospel. We know well that four centuries were needed for the Church to get over its obstinate aversion to physical science. Perhaps another four centuries will be needed for its reconciliation with sociology and the human sciences. But what is more important is what the believers think and believe, say and live, in that lengthy space of time.

In view of the defeat, not so much of one man (important as he was), but of a vision of the Church and of a hope for Europe, we must continue to ask our questions. The case of Martini must be regarded as the diamond point of a ruinous confrontation that has contaminated the process of the reception of the Second Vatican Council. This means that it slowed down the opportunity for the Catholic Church to renew itself in faithfulness to the Gospel and in communion with the other Churches. The confrontation between a Church that wants to change the world in order to assimilate it to itself, and a Church that wants to live its own identity in the world, remains completely open, *inter alia* because it is now common knowledge that the regimes of Christendom can help to instigate crusades, exalt wars, and bless weapons.

Doubtless, Europe is not the world. But it certainly has a vocation vis-à-vis the world, thanks to its history. And it is the history of the world that will demand a reckoning with regard to this vocation. It is possible that Christian Europe will disappear like the Christian Africa of Saint Augustine, and it is possible that other centers of gravity will impel the Churches to accept completely different perspectives on evangelization and missionary activity. However, the root from which the only genuine evangelization grew will always put a question to us. This root is defined by Paul when he declares that "he who had acted in Peter to make him an apostle of the circumcised had acted in me too for the Gentiles." And my generation will be able to rejoice if all this commotion about synodality will have taught us that a Church "with Peter and under Peter," but with Paul excluded, will no longer be possible. Perhaps one authentic fruit of the synodal conversion will be precisely this ability to hold together the apostolic horizon of the one and of the other.[13]

[13][English translation from Italian by Brian McNeil]