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Synodality as the Listening Church: Pope Francis Continues and Expands Vatican II's Teaching on Collegiality

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**SYNODALITY AS THE LISTENING CHURCH:
POPE FRANCIS CONTINUES AND EXPANDS VATICAN II'S TEACHING ON
COLLEGIALITY**

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Abstract

At the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015, Pope Francis affirmed that synodality is an essential dimension of the Church, and it is what the Lord asks the Church in the third millennium. The goal of this thesis is to investigate the origins and history of the concept of synodality in the life and mission of the Church in the light of theology and doctrine. The theoretical intention is to study what is old and what is new in Pope Francis's idea of synodality and how the old is made new in his vision of the synodal way. In completing the analysis, I want to raise some issues about the limits of his theology: what are to be the parameters and practices of synodality in the global Catholic Church of today?

Keywords

Francis, Vatican II, collegiality, synod of Bishop, listening, synodality, people of God, *sensus fidelium*, episcopal conference

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Synodality As the Listening Church
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Introduction

“The Roman pontiff alone can with right be called universal. ... For him alone is it lawful, according to the needs of the time, to make new laws, to assemble together new congregations.... Of the pope alone all princes shall kiss the feet. ... No synod shall be called a general one without his order. ... He himself may be judged by no one. ... He may depose and reinstate bishops without assembling a synod”.¹

These words were dictated by Pope Gregory in 1075, and Luigi Gioia² comments that Gregory’s words “were destined to shape the history of Christianity (and one might add of the world) during the second millennium.”³ And he predicts

In one thousand years, future generations might well find that the address delivered by Pope Francis during the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishop on the 17th of October 2015 in the Paul VI Audience Hall will have set the tone for the history of Christianity –and hopefully of the world- in the third millennium just as Gregory the VII’s *Dictatus Papae* did for the second millennium.⁴

Of what did Pope Francis speak during the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops on the 17th of October 2015? What is so significant that it will shape the Church in the third millennium? He states that the concept of the Synod is “a constitutive element of the Church” ... “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” ... The Church is a pilgrim people, we walk together on the way and follow the Way toward the Kingdom. Along this journey, “the faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listen to each other, and all listening to the Holy

¹ Gregory VII, *Dictatus Papae*. Quoted from Luigi Gioia, “The Recent Practice of Synodality and Its Ecclesiological Significance in the Light of Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium*,” 1; https://www.academia.edu/25532592/The_Recent_Practice_of_Synodality_and_its_Ecclesiological_Significance_in_the_Light_of_Pope_Francis_Evangelii_Gaudium.

² Luigi Gioia was Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the Pontifical University of S. Anselmo in Rome and has lectured on Ecclesiology, Trinity, Theology of History, Anthropology and Spirituality, Liturgy and Ecclesiology and Justification both at graduate and undergraduate level. He was the Academic Director of a project on *Leadership and the Rule of Saint Benedict* resulting from a cooperation between the University of S. Anselmo in Rome and the Faculty of Business and Management of the University of S. Gallen in Switzerland.

³ Gioia, “The Recent Practice of synodality,” 1.

⁴ Gioia, “The Recent Practice of synodality,” 1.

Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17); “in order to know what he says to the Churches (Rev 2:7).” That “the whole body of the faithful, who have an anointing which comes from the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn 2:20,27), cannot err in matters of faith” ... that “the people of God are holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible in *credendo*.” Pope Francis even emphasized that “what the Lord is asking us is already in some sense present in the very word ‘synod’”. Is everything that Christ wants from his Church contained in the concept of synod and synodality? Is synodality a novel idea of Pope Francis? Where does it come from? These are questions that require some investigation. To explore these questions, we must explore how synodality has its roots in the Church’s tradition including Scripture, the early Church and Vatican II, but also has something new to offer.

This thesis will examine what is old and what is new in Pope Francis’s idea of synodality. It will also explore how the old is made new in Francis’s vision of the synodal way. There are several aspects of the church’s tradition and core doctrines of the church that are central to Pope Francis’ vision of synodality: the Church as the People of God; all baptized participate in the threefold office of Christ as priest, prophet, and king; the sense of the faithful (*sensus fidei fidelium*); the collegiality of bishops - with its the relationship to the primacy of the pope. The Holy Father does not change any these doctrines, but he places them in the new context of the modern world with the explicit concern of serving modern people. As Myriam Wijlens⁵ notes, “Pope Francis did not change any of these doctrines of Vatican II in themselves, but by placing each one of them into a new relationship with each other he was able to transform the totality.”⁶

⁵ Dr Myriam Wijlens STL JCL JCD PhD is Professor of Canon Law at the University of Erfurt, Germany and Honorary Professor of Ecclesiology and Ecumenism at Durham University, England.

⁶ Myriam Wijlens, “Reforming the Church by Hitting the Reset Button: Reconfiguring Collegiality within Synodality because of *sensus fidei fidelium*,” *The Canonist* 8 (2017): 236 (=M. Wijlens, “Reforming the Church”) <https://www.catholicsforrenewal.org/MWijlens%20-%20CLSANZ-2016-%20Canonist%202017%20Reform%20->

Francis is faithful to the traditions of the Church; he seeks to expand upon something that is in the same spirit as his predecessors. He forces the issue that must acknowledge that the Church's tradition is a living tradition. This obviously requires the church to read the signs of the time so that the church can know how to serve people at a particular time. Like Pope John XXIII, Pope Francis wants "the church brought up-to-date in order to meet the new challenges of the modern world."⁷ He understands synodality as the best 'form', or 'medium' that can help the Church advance her goal. With this intention in mind, we must explore what is new and old in the concept of synod; but first by examining the meaning and definitions of this term. It is logical to proceed to analyze Vatican II's teaching on collegiality; episcopal conferences and the perennial synod of bishops stand out as two implementations of the council's teaching on collective governance. I will compare this to Pope Francis' idea of synodality: the association of the idea of a 'listening church'; and examine who must listen to whom. Finally, I seek to indicate some of the promises and challenges for Francis' new understanding.

I. The meaning of Synodality

1. Etymology and biblical foundation of Synodality

The word "Synod" (σύνοδος) has its root in Greek. Composed of a preposition συν (with) and the noun ὁδός (path), it is about a path taken together."⁸ Alphonse Borras⁹ wrote: "Etymologically, the Church is *synodal* not only in the sense of walking, or making the way

Hitting%20Reset%20Button%20(002)-1.pdf (hereafter Wijlens, "Reforming the Church by Hitting the Reset Button,")

⁷ Edward P. Hahnenberg. *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*. Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007, 5.

⁸ Walter Kasper. *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*. Translated by William Madges. (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 49.

⁹ Alphonse Borras was vicar-general of the diocese of Liege (Belgium) and professor of canon law at the Université Catholique de Louvain and at the Faculty of Canon Law of the Institute Catholique in Paris.

together and each at one's own pace, but also in the sense of crossing the same threshold, to dwell together, thus to reunite."¹⁰ In her very earliest days, the church was synodal. This soon became the "primordial and fundamental model" as Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio of the United States of America, wrote:

Biblically, the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) is the 'primordial and fundamental model' of synod. There the primitive Church wrestled with the influx of Gentiles and the dictates of the law. The apostles and elders met to consider, discuss, and debate matters. After consulting with one another and the Holy Spirit, a consensus was reached. Peter presided over the assembly. James presided over the local Church. Others, like Paul and Barnabas, participated. Here was a demonstration of reciprocity of charisms, a mutual interdependence between the ministerial priesthood and the royal priesthood of the baptized, which produced a solution for the People of God.¹¹

In the early days of the Church, when there were difficult issues that arose in the communities, leaders did not solve them by themselves, but they gathered together under strong leadership to find the solution. This was necessary so that a consensus would sustain the understanding that every member of the Church would be walking together in the same direction, toward the same end. That is the Kingdom of God. For John A. Renken,¹² synodality in the context of the life and mission of the Church

focuses on the living *journey* of disciples following Jesus (the 'Way' – John 14:6) through this world to an eternal Kingdom, a Kingdom whose life is already reflected (albeit imperfectly) in the journey. It expresses that disciples "*accompany*" each other on the journey to the eternal Kingdom, even as we share in that Kingdom's life in time, here

¹⁰ Alphose Borrás. "Ecclesial synodality, participatory processes, and decision-making procedures: A Canonist's point of view" in Massimo Faggioli. *For a Missionary Reform of the Church: The Civiltà Cattolica Seminar*. Edited by Antonio Spadaro and Galli Carlos María. Translated by Demetrio S. Yocum. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2017, 221.

¹¹ Christophe Pierre. "Synodality and Pope Francis: The Church that Walks Together." *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 77, no. 1 (2021): 3-23, at 4. doi:10.1353/jur.2021.0020.

¹² John A. Renken, Dean, Faculty of Canon Law, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

and now: ‘To journey together is an activity – it is doing something. A Synod is not a static reality but the dynamic interaction of people on a journey together’.¹³

When walking together, people tend to interact, cooperate and exchange ideas with each other.

They can listen and learn from each other and together make decisions. Therefore, most broadly,

Jonathan Lewis¹⁴ notes:

Synod refers to the corporate life of communion that unites all the members of the body of Christ, each of whom has gifts and a role to play in the life and mission of the Church. More specifically, it refers to the Church’s corporate decision-making, especially by bishops in councils or synods, which is where the word comes from.¹⁵

So synodality has its root in the word synod, but it given broader context. According to Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl “the term synod refers to a structure, and the term synodality refers to a process.”¹⁶ Since it is a structure, synod suggests a conference of like-minded souls seeking a common direction. But synodality has no final goal; it is not about establishing a final document. Rather, it is about lived experience.

In short, synodality, whether from an etymological or biblical perspective, means coming together; journeying together in order to discern and make decisions together. For Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl, the concept “coming together-journeying together” seems to be central to Pope Francis’s understanding of the nature of the Church. How does the Church carry out her mission? And who is to be engaged in the understanding and articulation of that mission? He writes:

¹³ Renken J.A. “Synodality: A Constitutive Element of the Church Reflections on Pope Francis and Synodality.” *Studia Canonica* 52, no. 1 (2018): 5-11, at 6-7. <https://doi.org/10.2143/STC.52.1.3285212>. (hereafter Renken, “Synodality.”)

¹⁴ Jonathan Lewis is Assistant Secretary for Pastoral Ministry and Social Concerns at the Archdiocese of Washington. He served as an auditor at the Oct. 3-28 Synod of Bishops on Young People.

¹⁵ Jonathan Lewis. “Theologian says Church needs both synodality and primacy.” The text can be found at <https://cruxnow.com/interviews/2019/01/theologian-says-church-needs-both-synodality-and-primacy/>

¹⁶ D. W. Wuerl, “Pope Francis, Synodality, and *Amoris Laetitia*,” in *Origins*, 47 (2017-2018), 292. Quoted in Renken, “Synodality,” 6.

Just as Jesus said to his disciples as he prepared to return to his Father in glory, ‘you will be my witnesses,’ so Pope Francis is calling the whole body of disciples together in a process of discerning the richness of the proclamation of the faith, accompanying one another as we try to embrace and appropriate the faith, and to announce it to the world today as much by our actions as by our words. What Pope Francis is doing is helping us all understand that to be true witnesses to Jesus we need to walk together in witnessing and supporting one another. Only in this way can we truly accept the challenge - ‘you will be my witnesses.’¹⁷

To be witness of the Risen Lord is the mission of every Christian. In different times and circumstances, Christians have used different methods to fulfill their perceived mission. In this present moment, at least for Pope Francis, the synod is the best medium to help all Christians to become living witnesses to Christ in a fractured and confusing world.

2. Pope Francis on Solidarity

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has articulated a vision of the Church in the third millennium. He is convinced that she be the synodal Church: one in which both the bishop of Rome and God’s people are on an important journey together. On the first night of his papacy, Pope Francis asked the assembled crowd to pray both with him and for him before he gave papal blessing to them. In silent, he bowed his head to receive prayer and blessings from the people of God. That humble gesture from the new pope signaled a big change. After that, in various contexts and on multiple occasions, Pope Francis mentions that synodality is “an essential dimension of the church” and the synodal church is what “God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”¹⁸ Thus, undoubtedly, synodality has been an important feature in Pope Francis’s thinking. In October 2015, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment

¹⁷ D. W. Wuerl, “Pope Francis, Synodality, and *Amoris Laetitia*,” in *Origins*, 47 (2017-2018), 296.

¹⁸ Francis, “Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops”, 17 October 2015. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

of the Synod of Bishops by St Paul VI, Pope Francis said, “From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council... it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church in the third millennium”.¹⁹

More recently, speaking to the International Theological Commission in 2018, the Holy Father said the theme of synodality “is very close to my heart: synodality is a form, or a style. It is walking together, and it is what the Lord expects of the Church in the third millennium”.²⁰

With the certainty that synodal way is “what the Lord expects of the Church in the third millennium,” on March 07, 2020, Pope Francis announced his choice of “synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission” as the theme for the Synod 2022. In this specific sense, the pope, bishops and faithful will walk together; praying, listening and discerning to solve the problems which the Church is confronting in order to find the best way to proclaim the Gospel. The Synod on Synodality is a two-year process of listening and dialogue which began with a solemn opening in Rome on October 9 and 10, 2021. This included the expectation that each individual diocese would commence to focus on the following week of October 17. The final synodal process is set to conclude in 2023. After more than a year of preparation, on Sunday, October 26, 2021, Pope Francis celebrated the Mass of the opening of the synodal path. In this homily, the Holy Father said: “Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together.”²¹ No doubt then, for Pope Francis, synodality is a ‘constitutive element of the

¹⁹ Christopher Wells, “Synod of Bishops to take up theme of synodality in 2022,” <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/synod-of-bishops-to-take-up-theme-of-synodality-in-2022.html>

²⁰ Christopher Wells, “Synod of Bishops to take up theme of synodality in 2022,”

²¹ Francis, ‘Homily on opening of the synodal path,’ 26 October, 2021.

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/20211010-omelia-sinodo-vescovi.html>

Church'²², one in which everyone is on a 'journey together.'²³ Thus, for him, not only bishops, but all the people of God are involved in the process.²⁴ Since synodality somehow involves every member of the church, according to Archbishop Pierre, there are two criteria for the proper exercise of the synod: "first, a willingness 'to say all that, in the Lord, one feels one needs to say: without polite deference, without hesitation'; and *second*, to 'listen with humility and welcome, with an open heart, to what your brothers say.'"²⁵ But more importantly, the process entails the time for prayer and contemplative discernment.²⁶ All the faithful, the college of bishops, and the bishop of Rome must listen carefully to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth (John 14:17) to know what "he says to the Churches" (Revelation 2:7).²⁷ After that, it is the turn of each member of the church to listen to each other to understand and empathize, especially with those who are responsible for making decisions; "to make pastoral decisions that correspond as closely as possible to God's will."²⁸ Thus, for Pope Francis, a synod is not a parliament; it is not a parlor; it is not demonstrating who has more power in the media and who has more power on the web, in

²² Pope Francis explains the fundamental nature of the Church in *Evangelii gaudium*, 111: "The Church, as the agent of evangelization, is more than an organic and hierarchical institution; she is first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God."

Myriam Wijlens comments: "The Pope does not emphasize the hierarchical structure as constitutive, but rather synodality which is the framework for hierarchical authority as service." Wijlens, "Reforming the Church," 236.

²³ See Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 113. Pope Francis stresses that salvation involves being in communion (i.e., waling together with others) by the very design of God: "The salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone. God has found a way to unite himself to every human being in every age. He has chosen to call them together as a people and not as isolated individuals. No one is saved by himself or herself, individually, or by his or her own efforts. God attracts us by taking into account the complex interweaving of personal relationships entailed in the life of a human community."

²⁴ Joseph A. Komonchak comments: "A theology of synodality rests upon the conviction, which might be considered too obvious to need to be stated, that there is no Church except in Christian believers, no Church except in and out of assemblies of believers. To take synodality seriously requires one to think concretely about the Church." J.A. Komonchak, "Theological Perspectives on the Exercise of Synodality," 349, in L. Baldisseri (ed.), *A cinquant'anni dall'Apostolica sollicitudo*, 352-342 (see. Renken, "Synodality," 25, footnote 39).

²⁵ Pierre. "Synodality and Pope Francis", 6.

²⁶ Pope Francis, 'Lettera al Popolo di Dio che e in cammino in Germania', 29 June 2019, in Massimo Faggioli, "Synod and Synodality in Pope Francis's Words," *The Way*, 59/4 (October 2020), 97.

²⁷ Faggioli, "Synod and Synodality in Pope Francis's Words", 92.

²⁸ Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, "*Vademecum: For the Synod on Synodality*," September 2021, 1.3.

order to impose some idea or some plan.²⁹ Rather, it is a time and form by which the whole Church prays, listens to the Holy Spirit, and listens to each other. Then by patient and intentional discernment,³⁰ seeking what is the best for the Church, for her people and her missions.

In order to understand Pope Francis' ecclesiology on synodality, we need to put it in the broader context of the teaching of Vatican II on collegiality: the relationship between the pope and the college of bishops. The synod then reflects the theology of "the people of God."

Bradford E. Hinze, professor of Theology at Fordham University, New York, points out:

The cornerstone of his agenda, which builds on the teachings of Vatican II, has been to promote a fuller and more developed theology, policy, and praxis of synodality. This, Francis believes, is necessary if Vatican II's teachings on episcopal collegiality and the synod of bishops are to be realized. Beyond that, Francis's focus on the theology of the people of God rooted in the baptismal calling of all the faithful and their sense of faith provides necessary resources and incentives for promoting synodality at all levels of the church. He is clear that further developing Vatican II's theology of the people of God requires a more robust and concrete implementation of structures of participation for all the faithful at all levels of the church. We see here Francis recovering key elements in Vatican II's theology that were restricted during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.³¹

²⁹ Pope Francis, opening speech of the 2019 synod for the Amazon, 7 October 2019.

John D. Faris writes: "As a form of government, synodality 'rings true' to democratic sensibilities of the twenty-first century... Synodality presumes active collective involvement. However, synodality is not to be identified with democracy in consideration of significant divergences... Synodal governance... It must be the object of every participant and process to seek the truth under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The discernment process might take the form of voting or election, but... it must be the truth and not the majority that necessarily prevails." J. D. Faris, "Synods, Councils, and Assemblies: Hierarchical Structures as Expressions of Synodality," 191-192. (see. Renken, "Synodality," 28, footnote 46).

³⁰ Patrick Henry commands, "Discernment is not the same as voting, or surveying by questionnaire, or even consensus. It gives room to imagination, now and then turns up a complete surprise. Discernment requires patience far beyond what our culture, with its short attention span and its obsession with the quarterly report bottom line, is accustomed to. Discernment is not an activity of community building, but of community unfolding. The image of community building, so common in our speech these days, implies control, design, programs, as though people were a kind of inert bricks to be fitted into some architectural scheme... Communal discernment has a paradoxical consequence. Many people are convinced that unless I do my thing and you do your thing neither of us is ourselves. They are wary of community for fear it will obliterate individuality. But discernment, because everyone is heard, helps to preserve, even enhance, individuality." Patrick Henry, *Benedictine Options: Learning to Live from the Sons and Daughters of Benedict and Scholastica*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2021), 31.

³¹ Bradford E Hinze. "Can We Find A Way Together?: The Challenge of Synodality in a Wounded and Wounding Church." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (August 2020): 215-229, at 217. doi:10.1177/0021140020926595.

Pope Francis' teaching on synods is not something entirely new. He is well within the teaching tradition of the Church. And he has developed it in the context of modern circumstances in order to serve the needs of the present needs of modern humanity in the world. The next section will examine the purpose and methods of Vatican Council II; namely collegiality: episcopal conferences and synod of bishops as two implementations of the council's teaching on collegiality.

II. Vatican II's teaching on Collegiality

1. Vatican II: purpose and method

The Second Vatican Council was a process of “‘institutional memory’ of Church: memory of an event of the Church that has changed the Church.”³² An institutional attempt to address the reality of a Church “in its inner life (*ad intra*) and the church in its relationship to the outside world (*ad extra*).”³³ In this respect, Massimo Faggioli³⁴ notes:

³² Massimo Faggioli. *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2015, 38.

³³ Edward P. Hahnenberg. *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*. Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007, 57; Ormond Rush explains the meaning of *ad intra* and *ad extra* in this way: “The phrase *ecclesia ad intra* (literally, ‘the church within’) refers to ‘the internal life of the church’; the phrase *ecclesia ad extra* (literally, ‘the church beyond’) refers to ‘the relationship of the church to the religious and secular worlds beyond it,’ as well as to the created world of ‘the environment,’ the ‘cosmos.’ The *ad intra/ad extra* principle encapsulates two interrelated aspects of the renewal and reform agenda of the council: inner pastoral renewal and reform is to be undertaken for the sake of a more effective witness *ad extra* by the church; conversely, a new understanding of how the church should conduct itself in the world must lead to a renewed understanding of how its inner life should be conducted, if its witness *ad extra* is to be credible. Ormond Rush. *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019, 250.

On December 17, 1965-just days after Vatican II ended-*Time* magazine printed an insightful article intitled, “How Vatican II Turned the Church toward the World.” In its treatment of the church-world relationship before and after Vatican II, it quoted two men very close to the council's activities... With regard to the church before Vatican II, the English Benedictine Abbot, Dom Christopher Butler, claimed, ‘Before, the church looked like an immense, immovable colossus, the city set on a hill, the stable bulwark against the revolutionary change.’ Then, commenting on the enormous change brought about by Vatican II, specifically in *Gaudium et Spes*, India's Archbishop Eugene D'Souza remarked, ‘The church's whole approach to the world is one of sincere admiration, not of dominating it, but of serving it, not of despising it but of appreciating it, not of condemning it but of strengthening it and saving it.’ Sullivan. *The Road to Vatican II*, 45.

³⁴ Massimo Faggioli is director of the Institute for Catholicism and Citizenship, and associate professor at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Vatican II was not only a religious event, but also an institutional event; and the ‘political’ implications of the historiography on that event are not quite like other religious events that are less monopolized by the organizational dominance of one center of power that announces the event, manages it, and when it is ended, is in charge of the process of evaluating and concretizing the resolutions of the event.³⁵

Indeed, the “institutional memory” of the Council began with the event of the conclave to elect Pius XII’s successor. In the conclave of 1958, the College of Cardinals of the Catholic Church elected a seventy-seven-year-old man, Angelo Roncalli, to become a pope whom, “they believed, would serve as an interim, transitional pope.”³⁶ His name would be John XXIII.³⁷ But the world in general and the Catholic Church, in particular, was astonished³⁸ when the “transitional Pope”

³⁵ Massimo Faggioli. *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2015, 39.

³⁶ Sullivan. *The Road to Vatican II*, 37.

³⁷ Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the third of thirteen children, was born on November 25, 1881, at Sotto il Monte (Bergamo) of a family of sharecroppers. He was ordained in 1904. Continuing his studies in canon law he was appointed secretary to the new bishop of Bergamo, Giacomo Radini-Tedeschi. In 1921 he was called to Rome to reorganize the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. Nominated titular archbishop of Areopolis and apostolic visitor to Bulgaria (1925), he immediately concerned himself with the problems of the Eastern Churches. Transferred in 1934 to Turkey and Greece as apostolic delegate, he set up an office in Istanbul for locating prisoners of war. In 1944 he was appointed nuncio to Paris to assist in the Church's post-war efforts in France, and became the first permanent observer of the Holy See at UNESCO, addressing its sixth and seventh general assemblies in 1951 and 1952. In 1953 he became cardinal-patriarch of Venice, and expected to spend his last years there in pastoral work. He was correcting proofs of the synodal Acts of his first diocesan Synod (1958) when he was called to Rome to participate in the conclave that elected him pope. On October 20, 1958 the cardinals, assembled in conclave, elected Angelo Roncalli as pope. He took the name of John in honor of the precursor and the beloved disciple-but also because it was the name of a long line of popes whose pontificates had been short.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/biography/documents/hf_j-xxiii_bio_16071997_biography.html

³⁸ John R. Quinn, Archbishop Emeritus of San Francisco, comments “When John XXIII announced an ecumenical council, the whole world was astonished. The Roman cardinals were even more astonished. It seemed like an impulsive act lacking plan or forethought. But this was not the case. Some years before, on a visit to Padua, Cardinal Roncalli, the future John XXIII, had mentioned to the archbishop that he thought there should be a Council in the foreseeable future. As a papal nuncio during the 1940s, he was likely aware that Pope Pius XII gave some thought over a period of a year and a half to calling a Council, but then dropped the idea as premature. Another indication that he would likely have had some thoughts about a council is the fact that he was friends with some of the important theological leaders of the period such as Lambert Beauduin, and he had read the work of the French Dominican scholar Yves Congar entitled *True and False Reform in the Church*. In addition, Roncalli himself had a lifelong interest in history, had taught history in his local seminary, and he wrote a biography of one of the distinguished bishops who led the implementation of the Council of Trent, St. Charles Borromeo. All in all, then, a council was not a sudden impulse or a completely new idea for the newly elected Pope John XXIII.” John. R. Quinn, “Vatican Council II Collegiality and Structures of Communion” in Crowley, Paul G. *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Charting a Catholic Future*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014, 57; see John W. O’Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, 15-17; Kristin Colberg. *Vatican I and Vatican II: Councils in the Living Tradition*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2016,

John XXIII, on January 25, 1959, only three months after election, at the Basilica of St. Paul-Outside-the-Walls, announced his decision to convene an ecumenical council, the first in ninety years.³⁹ Historians point out that “in the early part of 1920 Pius XI, and again in the early 1950, Pius XII seriously considered calling a council, which they intended as a resumption and completion of Vatican I, interrupted by the seizure of Rome by Italian troops in 1870 and never officially closed.”⁴⁰ Interesting to note, Pope John XXIII did not know the intention of Pope Pius XI and Pius XII until after he made his announcement. He did know that Vatican Council I did not officially close. In any case, John XXIII described the decision of calling the council as an inspiration:⁴¹ “I do not like to appeal to special inspirations. I am satisfied with the orthodox teaching that everything is from God. In light of that teaching, I regarded the idea of a Council as likewise an inspiration from heaven.”⁴² John XXIII’s announcement of opening an ecumenical council did not receive strong support from cardinals of the Curia, nor the laity.⁴³ They thought that the Church did not need the council. Because, as Richard R. Gaillardetz⁴⁴ remarks:

The Catholic Church before the council certainly continued to enrich the lives of many believers. The Catholic faith was still handed on in parishes and schools, and the sacraments were celebrated. Countless Catholics were led by God’s grace and the practice of their faith to a life of holiness. Many Catholics had a robust sense of their own religious identity; being Catholic offered a distinctive way of being in the world. Indeed, Catholics dwelled in an enchanted world sustained by a sensual religious imagination. Sacramentals, stained-glass windows, statuary, and the plethora of devotional practices

89-91; For an account of Pious XI’s brief consideration of a council, see Robin Anderson, *Between Two Wars: The Story of Pope Pius XI* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977).

³⁹ See. Richard R. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2012), 29.

⁴⁰ O’Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 17.

⁴¹ O’Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 17.

⁴² *Discorsi Messaggi Colloqui del Santo Padre Giovanni XXIII* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1963), 4:609, quoted in Faggioli. *A Council for the Global Church*, 67.

⁴³ O’Malley remarks: “The announcement took everybody else by surprise, including of the other cardinals of the Curia, and it left most people stunned.” O’Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 15.

⁴⁴ Richard R. Gaillardetz holds the Joseph Chair of Catholic Systematic Theology at Boston College. Dr. Gaillardetz has been a delegate on the US Catholic-Methodist Ecumenical Dialogue and served as president of the Catholic Theological Society of America between 2013-2014.

further enriched this religious imagination. The clergy were viewed as exemplars of holiness, sacramental ‘dispensers,’ and keepers of ecclesiastical order and stability. The papacy provided a strong symbol of Catholic identity and Church unity.⁴⁵

These outward appearances of the Church make Catholics feel that the Church is safe and that their lives are fine. They don't need to change. They don't want to leave their comfort zone to go out into the world to live their Christian lives as witnesses of the gospel. Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, they reacted against John XXIII's idea of calling the council. Maureen Sullivan⁴⁶ has summed up the reaction of the people in this way:

His announcement provoked a broad range of responses. But it is fair to say that, overall, the response of most people could be summed up in one word: why? After all, Catholicism looked to be in pretty good shape at the time. Catholic schools were filled, vocations to the seminary and religious life were plentiful, and thanks to their catechism, most Catholics ‘knew’ the faith. So why a council?⁴⁷

However, things were not all well with the Church. By calling the ecumenical council, Pope John wanted to open “the doors of the Church to the Holy Spirit, promoting a model witness and proclamation of the Church.”⁴⁸ There was no doubt that his primary intent was so that the Church might proclaim the Gospel to the modern world. He expressed his intention for the council clearly through the speech which opened the council. In this address, he expressed adamantly that the Second Vatican Council must be a pastoral council. And he invited the

⁴⁵ Richard R. Gaillardetz. *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015), 1; see. Maureen Sullivan. *The Road to Vatican II: Key Changes in Theology*, New York: Paulist Press, 2007, 37.

⁴⁶ Maureen Sullivan, who holds a doctorate in theology from Fordham University, is associate professor of theology at St. Anselm College, Manchester, NH, and is a national theological consultant for Sadlier, Inc. She gives workshops and keynote speeches across the country on contemporary theological issues, especially those concerning the Vatican II.

⁴⁷ Maureen Sullivan. *The Road to Vatican II*, 37.

⁴⁸ Alberigo points out that “the pope wants a council that would mark the end of an era; a council, that is, that would usher the Church out of the post-Tridentine era, and to a certain extent out of the centuries-old Constantinian phase, and into a new phase of witness and proclamation.” cf. Alberigo, Giuseppe, and Matthew Sherry. *A Brief History of Vatican II*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006,10.

council to look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life...⁴⁹ He wanted the Church to bring “herself up to date where required, and by the wise organization of mutual co-operation, the Church will make men, families, and people really turn their minds to heavenly things.”⁵⁰ In doing so, he did not mean for the council to disdain defending the doctrines of the Church. But for him, Church doctrine must be interpreted within a framework that considers the contemporary pastoral context.

In order, however, that this doctrine may influence that numerous fields of human activity, with reference to individual, to families, and to social life, it is necessary first of all that the Church should never depart from the sacred patrimony of truth received from the Fathers. But at the same time, she must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world, which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate.⁵¹

In other words, the doctrines of the Church are permanent. These cannot be changed. But the methods that the Church has used to teach can and must be changed. So that the Church is able to proclaim the Gospel to the modern people effectively. And the method or style that the Pope insisted upon during the council was a distinctly pastoral style. He explained: “because the church, through the council, ‘desire to show herself to be the loving mother of all, benign,

⁴⁹ John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesie: Pope John's Opening Speech to the Council*, n. 12. The English translation of the pope's speech opening the council can be accessed online at https://vatican2voice.org/91docs/opening_speech.htm

⁵⁰ John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*; Edward P. Hahnenberg commands: “Two words have come to symbolize the twofold movement of the Council: *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement*. *Aggiornamento* (the Italian word for ‘updating’) was adopted by John XXIII to describe his vision of church renewal. He wanted the church brought up-to-date in order to meet the new challenges of the modern world. *Ressourcement* (French for ‘return to the sources’) had come to describe the work of historical theologians who were studying Scripture, early liturgies and the great theologians of the past in the decades leading up to Vatican II. What Vatican II discovered was how well these two movements go together. The best way for the church to engage the problems of the present is to return to the rich resources of its tradition. The most radical response is to recover our roots. The change that came with Vatican II was not a major rupture from the great Christian tradition, but it was a significant shift in the church's sense of itself and its mission in the world.” Edward P. Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 5-6. To know more about two these important words in the context of the Vatican II see O'Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 36-43; O'Malley. “‘The Hermeneutic of Reform’: A Historical Analysis” in Stephen Schloesser. *50 Years on: Probing the Riches of Vatican II*. Edited by David G Schultenover. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015, 24-34. Ormond Rush. *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019, 17-21.

⁵¹ John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*.

patient, full of mercy and goodness toward the children separated from her.”⁵² He made a fundamental option for compassion: to heal the wounds of people is mercy. History has shown that proper healing does not take place through condemnation or excommunication.

This surprisingly creative and energetic pope wanted to bring the Church up to date, so that the Church might “respond positively to the challenges facing the modern world, to update those aspects of the church that could be updated and to reach out to other Christians in a spirit of reconciliation.”⁵³ In this very spirit, he wanted the council sessions be times of mutual dialogue and listening. At the very outset, instead of sending the questionnaire to the bishops and superiors general of the male religious orders who are eligible to participate as voting members, Cardinal Tardine, head of the Commission Ante-Preparatory committee, with John's approval, sent an open letter to them, asking them to give their opinions and suggestions with complete freedom and honesty. Their responses proved extremely useful in preparing the topics to be discussed at the council. We can see the inspired leadership which set the goal of the council: listening and dialogue with the world and with the Church's members.

Vatican II was called not to defend the doctrine, but to find the best way to live the gospel, and to “speak to all men and women.”⁵⁴ Thus, the Council used a decidedly panegyric or (public) style of dialogue. John W. O'Malley, professor at Georgetown University, observes that Vatican II documents use more “horizontal” words, or even “equality”-words. The most widely invoked of such expressions and the one that remains the best known, despite its problematic implications, is ‘people of God.’ Others are ‘brothers and sisters’ and ‘the priesthood of all

⁵² O'Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 95.

⁵³ Edward P. Hahnenberg. *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 2.

⁵⁴ O'Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 36.

believers.”⁵⁵ It is expressive of the spirit of “solidarity” ... not using hierarchical language, but pastoral expressions. One of the deliberate goals of Vatican II “(was) the winning of the internal assent, not the imposition of conformity from outside.”⁵⁶ Interestingly enough, Vatican II was the first council which “issued no canons, no anathemas, no verdicts of ‘guilty as charged.’”⁵⁷ This is significant because the previous councils were convened to defend and clarify the doctrine of the Church. Invariably they ended with condemnation of faulty teaching or heresy. Thus, the Council Father’s sought to fulfill John’s wish that the Church should heal the wound by mercy not by condemnation.

After three and a half years of preparation, the Council was opened on October 11, 1962, with “the most solemn and visually impressive... procession into the basilica” of St. Peter. The Council engaged in four sessions, and it was closed on December 08, 1965,⁵⁸ resulting in sixteen important documents.⁵⁹ There’s no arguing that ‘collegiality’ is a primary topic. And it was situated and articulated mainly in chapter 3 of *Lumen Gentium*.

⁵⁵ O’Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 49.

⁵⁶ O’Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 47.

⁵⁷ O’Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 45.

⁵⁸ O’Malley wrote: “With that brief announcement, Pope John XXIII launched a process that would culminate in what was quite possibly the biggest meeting in the history of the world. Initially the pope and council planners had hoped that Vatican II could complete its business in one or at most two periods lasting several months, but the council actually extended over four years. True, it was formally in session only ten or so weeks a year, but the work of the leading figures at the council was so intense in the months that intervened between the formal periods that that time must also be counted as an integral part of the council.” O’Malley. *What Happened at Vatican II*, 18.

⁵⁹ Vatican II’s sixteen documents included Four Constitutions: *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation); *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy); *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). Nine Decrees: *Inter Mirifica* (Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication); *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (Decree on the Eastern Catholic Church). *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism); *Christus Dominus* (Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church); *Optatam Totius* (Decree on Priestly Formation); *Perfectae Caritatis* (Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life); *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity); *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests); *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity). Three Declarations: *Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education); *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christians); *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom).

O’Malley notes: “These sixteen documents differ not only in rank but also, more palpably, in impact and importance. The constitutions have managed to consolidate their theoretical importance by the attention, scrutiny,

2. Vatican II on Collegiality

Collegiality was a “new” word. Interestingly enough, it “does not actually occur in the Vatican II documents.”⁶⁰ However, according to O’Malley, although collegiality was never defined by the Church officially as part of its constitution, but “for centuries it had taken it for granted as its normal mode of operation.” He writes, “The church of the first millennium functioned collegially, as no one at the council proclaimed more effectively than Maximos. And in local councils and other ways the collegial mode continued to function in the West well into the modern period.”⁶¹

In the early sessions of the Council, the concept of collegiality was brought to debate. And “it was the most hotly debated issue.”⁶² The majority of council Fathers supported the idea of collegiality. Meanwhile, a minority group “worried that the teaching on episcopal collegiality would undermine Vatican I’s assertions regarding papal authority.”⁶³ The rhetorical challenge brought for the basic question: what, then, is collegiality? Why was the minority group of the conciliar Fathers worried it might undermine Vatican I’s teaching on papal authority? What is that teaching? And finally, what was proposed by Vatican II’s teaching on collegiality?

a. What is Collegiality?

Historically, according to Alphonse Borras,

and, for the most part, positive appreciation they have consistently received from scholars. But the distinction between decrees and declarations, no matter what it originally meant, has become meaningless, with the decrees On the Mass Media, for instance, and On the Catholic Eastern Churches virtually forgotten, whereas the declarations On Religious Liberty and On Non-Christian Religions are just as important as they were during the council. Even granted this difference in authority and impact, all sixteen documents are interconnected in many ways. They form a coherent corpus, and they must be interpreted accordingly.” (What happen at Vatican II, 3).

⁶⁰ Susan K. Wood. “The Church as Communion.” in Granfield, Patrick, and Peter C Phan. *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield*, O.S.B. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000, 168.

⁶¹ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 302.

⁶² Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 46.

⁶³ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 125.

the notion of *collegium*, as indeed those of *ordo*, *corpus*, and *fraternitas*, have traditionally designated ‘both the union of all the bishops and particular unions within the episcopate’. The notion of “collegiality” has in fact imposed itself gradually to designate the communion of service and responsibility belonging to the ministry of bishops, who are what they should be *together*, as successors of the apostles: following in their footsteps. This notion, however, has been restricted, if not limited completely, to the extent that, since the fifth century, the *collegium Episcoporum* ‘already settled and legally secured’ lost sight of the ecclesial fellowship of the local churches, each of which realizes the only Church of God.⁶⁴

In the light of Vatican II’s teaching, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, defines ‘collegiality’ as the principle that ...

all the bishops of the church with the Pope at their Head form a single ‘college,’ which succeeds in every generation the ‘college’ of the twelve apostles, with Peter at their Head, which Christ instituted as the foundation for the church. This college of bishops together with, but never without, the Pope, has supreme and full authority over the universal church.⁶⁵

Episcopal collegiality at Vatican II meant that the pope and bishops form a “college” with the pope as the head of that college. Therefore, it follows the assumption that the Vicar of Christ and the college of bishops need to work horizontally to govern the church. However, throughout the history of the Church, we see this relationship has been a matter of temporal negotiation.

Historians point out that although Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops to give advice to the Pope on governing the Church, he then, through *motu proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo*, placed restrictions on the exercise of episcopal collegiality.⁶⁶ The ambiguity was made worse by post-conciliar practices. Faggioli comments: “The incompleteness of Vatican II about collegiality and synodality has been made worse by postconciliar practices. The college of bishops has been

⁶⁴ Alphonse Borras, “Ecclesial Synodality,” 232.

⁶⁵ Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2nd ed. /ed. Publication (United States Catholic Conference), No. 5-109. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000.

⁶⁶ See. Bradford E. Hinze. “Synodality in the Catholic Church.” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 192, no. 2 (2012): 121–30, at 123. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001911072&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

largely seen as the rubber stamp of papal primacy. Episcopal collegiality has meant (until Francis) something ‘affective’ without being ‘effective’”.⁶⁷

The primacy of the pope has been an issue of controversy. Since the criticisms of the Reformation, it has been problematic in internal Church dialog and more poignantly in the interests of Protestant Christian opinion. No wonder then that at the Second Vatican Council, collegiality was one of the most controversial issues discussed between the majority and minority groups of the Council Fathers. According to Hahnenberg: “The majority of council participants wanted to move away from a monarchical vision in which all authority and power flowed downward from the pope. They favored greater collaboration and wanted to affirm that the pope and bishops together hold supreme authority in the church.”⁶⁸ A strong and vocal minority opposed this shift. For them

every form of jurisdiction comes from one source, the papacy, which alone has been willed by Christ to perform a function of universal scope in the Church. Bishops indeed succeed to the apostles but not in the extraordinary powers that accrued to the latter as founders of the Church, and certainly not in the form of a college of equals who co-govern with their head. There is no permanently existing episcopal college which exercises full jurisdiction over the Universal Church by divine right.⁶⁹

In short, the minority’s concern is the papal jurisdiction over the Universal Church. They “worried that the teaching on episcopal collegiality would undermine Vatican I’s assertions regarding papal authority.”⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the majority’s concern is not “jurisdiction but the

⁶⁷ Massimo Faggioli, “For a Reform of the Central Government of a Collegial and Synodal Church Fifty Years After Vatican II,” in in Faggioli, Massimo. *For a Missionary Reform of the Church: The Civiltà Cattolica Seminar*. Edited by Antonio Spadaro and Galli Carlos María. Translated by Demetrio S Yocum. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2017, 363-64.

⁶⁸ Hahnenberg. *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 46; ⁶⁸ Luis Antonio Tagle 1957-. "Episcopal Collegiality and the Ecclesiological Project of Vatican II." *Landas* 7, no. 2 (1993): 153.

⁶⁹ Tagle. "Episcopal Collegiality and the Ecclesiological Project of Vatican II." 152.

⁷⁰ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 125.

mission which Christ entrusted to the apostles and to their successors, for the fulfillment of which powers are given.”⁷¹

At this point, one might thus fairly ask, what did the first Vatican Council teach about the authority of the pope?

b. Vatican I on the papal primacy and infallibility.

The Second Vatican Council was not merely a continuing of the First Vatican Council which never officially was closed. Most all the issues which came forth in 1870 were of current importance in 1960. Yet, it was an entirely new council. In many aspects, especially on the topic of ecclesial authority in chapter three of *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II was “following in the steps of the First Vatican Council” (*Lumen Gentium* 18, hereafter *LG*). Kristin Colberg⁷² points out that

In this chapter, previous councils are cited twenty-four times and, of those, nine are appeals to Vatican I. The reliance on Vatican I becomes even more pronounced if one notes that in addition to those nine references to the council’s documents, there are also seven references to commentaries on the council written by Gasser, Bishop Federico Maria Zinelli, and Bishop Josef Wilhelm Karl Kluetgen.⁷³

As for *Lumen Gentium's* reliance on *Pastor Aeternus*, I think it is appropriate here to refer to what Vatican I taught about papal primacy and infallibility. Thus, we can understand the concern of the minority group of conciliar Fathers and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on collegiality.

⁷¹ Tagle, "Episcopal Collegiality and the Ecclesiological Project of Vatican II." 153.

⁷² Kristin M. Colberg is assistant professor of theology at Saint John’s University and the College of Saint Benedict. She received her doctorate at the University of Notre Dame in systematic theology.

⁷³ Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 118.

The First Vatican Council⁷⁴ proclaimed the importance of papal authority in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Pastor Aeternus*.⁷⁵ The power and nature of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff were treated in the third chapter of the constitution. The doctrine of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff is summed up in the canon:

And so, if anyone says that the Roman Pontiff has only the office of inspection and direction, but not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church, not only in matters that pertain to faith and morals, but also in matters that pertain to the discipline and government of the Church throughout the whole world; or if anyone says that he has only a more important part and not the complete fulness of this supreme power; or if anyone says that the power is not ordinary and immediate either over each and every Church or over each and every shepherd and faithful, *anathema sit*.⁷⁶

Hermann J. Pottmeyer⁷⁷ observes: “here and in the corresponding chapter, the primacy of jurisdiction of the pope is defined as a supreme and full, universal, ordinary, immediate, and truly episcopal power of ruling, judging, and teaching in the church with the consequent obligation of obedience.”⁷⁸ If we exclusively rely on this definition for interpretation of Vatican I, we can very easily come to the conclusion that “the council made a dogma of the absolute

⁷⁴ The first Vatican Council was called by Pope Pius IX through his pastoral letter, *Aeterni Patris*, issued on June 29, 1868. And it was opened on December 8, 1869. Through Pius’s Opening Allocution at the first session of the council we see the urgency of the church’s situation was again reiterated. The Allocution reads, in part, “You behold, venerable brothers, the fury with which the ancient enemy of the human race has attacked and still attacks the house of God, where holiness is befitting. He is the promoter of that widespread conspiracy of evil men, which is closely united, richly endowed and supported by institutions. Using freedom as a cloak for malice, this conspiracy wages unceasingly against Christ’s holy Church fierce warfare, tainted with crimes of all sorts. You are not unaware of this manner of warfare, its force, its arms, its progress, and its aims. Continually before your eyes are disorder and confusion concerning the sound doctrines on which depends the proper ordering of human affairs; lamentable perversion of every law; and the manifold artifices of audacious lying and corruption, which break the salutary bonds of justice, integrity, and authority; inflame the basest desires; and root out completely from souls their Christian faith.” See “Opening Allocution of Pope Pius IX at the first session of Vatican Council I,” in Broderick, Document of Vatican I, 28. Quoted from Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 41 footnote 2.

⁷⁵ Vatican I’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Pastor Aeternus*, consists of four chapters that treat the following topics: (1) Christ’s institution of the primacy in Peter; (2) the perpetuity of that primacy in the ongoing life of the church; (3) the character of this primacy as the highest juridical authority; and (4) the infallibility of the papal magisterium. To know more what and how *Pastor Aeternus* teaches, see Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 58-67.

⁷⁶ Quoted from Hermann J. Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I and II. Ut Unum Sint*. New York: Crossroad Pub, 1998, 70.

⁷⁷ Hermann J. Pottmeyer is professor of Fundamental Theology at the Ruhr-Universitat Bochum and a member of the International Theological Commission.

⁷⁸ Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 71.

sovereignty and monarchy of the pope. However, an examination of the conciliar debates has shown that this was not the council's intention."⁷⁹ The evidence is in the introduction. *Pastor Aeternus* speaks of the mission of all the apostles to be shepherds and teachers in the church (*The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 18, hereafter *ND*). It also speaks of the significance of the unity of the episcopate and the communion of believers. But more importantly, Pottmeyer notes:

The council repeatedly appeals to the ancient and universal tradition of the church: 'according to the ancient and constant belief of the universal church' (*ND* 818); 'relying on the clear testimony of the Holy Scripture and following the express and definite decrees of our predecessors, the Roman Pontiff of the Church... and the ecumenical Councils, especially those in which the Western and Eastern Churches were united in faith and love' (*ND* 831).⁸⁰

Although the third chapter of *Pastor Aeternus* emphasized the primacy of jurisdiction of the pope, it also included an assurance that papal primacy was not meant to detract from the jurisdiction of the bishops in their dioceses. The bishops are described as "true shepherds" of their dioceses:

This power of the Supreme Pontiff is far from standing in the way of the power of ordinary and immediate episcopal jurisdiction by which the bishops who, under appointment of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 20:28), succeeded in the place of the apostles, feed and rule individually, as true shepherds, the particular flock assigned to them. Rather this latter power is asserted, confirmed and vindicated by this same supreme and universal shepherd, as in the words of St. Gregory the Great: 'My honor is the honor of the whole Church. My honor is the firm strength of my brothers. I am truly honored when due honor is paid to each and everyone.' (*ND* 827)⁸¹

Pastor Aeternus recognized the authority of governing "the particular flock assigned to them," from the earliest days of Church growth the place of the apostles, was granted to bishops by the Holy Spirit, not by the power of the pope. "However," Pottmeyer points out: "valuable and

⁷⁹ Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 71.

⁸⁰ Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 71.

⁸¹ Quoted from Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 72.

important as these indications are, the fact remains that the constitution defined the primacy of jurisdiction in a consciously one-sided way.”⁸²

The one-sided emphasis on the supreme power of the pope is clearer in the First Vatican Council’s definition of papal infallibility. The definition of the infallibility of the papal magisterium reads as follows:

It is a divinely revealed dogma that the Roman Pontiff when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, acting in the office of shepherd and teacher of all Christians, he defined, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, possesses through the divine assistance promised to him in the person of Blessed Peter, the infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to be endowed in defining the doctrine concerning faith and morals, and that such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are therefore irreformable of themselves, not because of the consent of the Church [*ex sese, non autem ex consensu ecclesiae*] (ND 839).⁸³

For Vatican I, dogmatic infallibility is the privilege of the Roman Pontiff, and it was granted to him because he is the successor of Peter. With the divine assent, once the pope, even on *ex cathedra*, proclaimed the doctrine concerning faith and morals, it is a definite teaching, and irreformable. However, people often misunderstand that inherent in the definition of papal infallibility, the pope does not teach without error on all subjects and matters. His epistemological scope has limits. According to Colberg, “this misunderstanding fosters the impression that Vatican I conflicts with modern sensibilities and, as such, contributes in a powerful way to the marginalization of its voice.”⁸⁴ Indeed, the infallibility of the pope has its limitations.⁸⁵ That is, only when the pope acts *ex cathedra* in the matters of faith and morals, is

⁸² Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 72.

⁸³ Quoted from Hermann J. Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 94.

⁸⁴ Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 68.

⁸⁵ Colberg points out three distinct ways in which the pope’s infallibility is limited according to Gasser: in relation to its *object*, its *active subject*, and its *act*. See Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 63.

his action considered infallible.⁸⁶ Few people know that since 1870, when the First Vatican Council defined papal infallibility until now, the infallibility of the pope has been officially invoked only when Pius XII defined the Assumption of Mary in 1950. Besides that, the pope's infallibility is neither absolute⁸⁷ nor "personal."⁸⁸ Colberg wrote:

The pope's authority is not presented as *separate* insofar as it is rooted in a gift whose recipient is the entire church; it is not *personal* in that the pontiff exercises it only 'in the discharge of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians' (PA 4); and it is not *absolute* because it is only in force when the pope defines that a doctrine concerning faith and morals must be held by the whole church. Furthermore, it is not the case that this expression of the pope's authority is exclusive of other forms of ecclesial authority or that it competes with episcopal power.⁸⁹ (emphasis original)

The pope, it must be asserted, has the privilege of infallibility only because he is a member and the head of the Church. And this privilege relates to the matter of faith and morals only. Thus, the infallibility of the pope is not "primarily about the use of a power but about the character of a relationship."⁹⁰ Moreover, since "the pope is the center of ecclesiastical unity, and it is his task to preserve this unity and, if it is disrupted, to restore it."⁹¹ We see these two characters of the pope in *Pastor Aeternus*. For Colberg, *Pastor Aeternus* is clear that the unity which papal infallibility promotes is twofold. She writes:

On one level, the pope's infallibility strengthens the bonds of communion among the episcopates. The text rejects any sense that this power given to Peter's successor

⁸⁶ To know more about the limit of the pope's infallibility see Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 96; Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 63.

⁸⁷ Bishop Gasser's, the spokesman for the Deputation on the Faith, explained: Absolute infallibility belongs only to God, the first and essential truth who can never deceive or be deceived in any way. All other infallibility, by the fact that it is communicated for a certain end, has limits and conditions by which it is judged to be present. This is true also of the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff. [*Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio*, vols. 1-53, ed. G. D. Mansi and others (1759-1927), 52, 1214 A] see Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 95.

⁸⁸ For Pottmeyer, infallibility "is given to the pope neither as a private person nor as his habitual property. It can be called "personal" only in the sense that it is promised to the pope by virtue of his office, for specific acts, and not to the Roman church or the Apostolic See, as the Gallicans claimed." Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 97.

⁸⁹ Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 68.

⁹⁰ Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 69.

⁹¹ Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 97.

diminishes or competes with the bishops' power. Instead, it takes great care in insisting that this gift is a means of strengthening and supporting the episcopate in their ministry⁹²...

On a second level, by building communion among the bishops, papal infallibility also promotes union among all the faithful. *Pastor Aeternus* argues that the pope's ability to teach without error unites the bishops in love and truth; this unity among the episcopate, in turn, fosters authentic faith and communion among the faithful. It is ultimately through their union with the Roman pontiff and in profession of the same faith, that "the Church of Christ becomes one flock under one supreme shepherd" (PA 3). By emphasizing the Petrine ministry as a service of unity and papal infallibility as an instrument of this service—*Pastor Aeternus* roots its teachings on the pope's authority not in a notion of power but in the pope's fundamental responsibility to promote unity and build relationships within the body of Christ.⁹³

Although *Pastor Aeternus* does not deny the power of the bishops, it primarily emphasized the universal authority of the pope. Thus, the Holy Father, in relationship with the bishops, as the "protector" rather than as a witness among the witnesses. Because of *Pastor Aeternus*'s teaching on the primacy and infallibility of the Roman pontiff, we can picture the Church as a pyramid with the pope at the summit, with bishops at the upper reaches, with priests at midlevel, and with the laity at the base.⁹⁴ Having emphasized the supreme power of the pope, Vatican I was relatively silent on the role of the bishop, and the relationship between episcopal and papal authority. The Vatican II Fathers inherited what Vatican I was silent about. As Yves Congar pointed out:

The new aspects of Vatican II were frequently stressed during and after the council. That there were such aspects is undeniable, but it is equally necessary to emphasize the conscious reality of continuity... One clear example of this continuity is that the teaching of Vatican II about the episcopate and its collegiality is thought to have restored

⁹² The text of *Pastor Aeternus* states: This power of the supreme pontiff by no means detracts from that ordinary and immediate power of episcopal jurisdiction, by which bishops, who have succeeded to the place of the apostles by appointment of the holy Spirit, tend and govern individually the particular flocks which have been assigned to them. On the contrary, this power of theirs is asserted, supported and defended by the supreme and universal pastor; for St. Gregory the Great says: "My honour is the honour of the whole church. My honour is the steadfast strength of my brethren. Then do I receive true honour, when it is denied to none of those to whom honour is due." (PA 3) (quoted from Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 61.)

⁹³ Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 61.

⁹⁴ See John Ford. "Ministries in the Church" in Granfield, Patrick, and Peter C Phan. *The Gift of the Church*, 299.

equilibrium to the purely papal emphasis of Vatican I, as Paul VI declared on two occasions (29 November and 21 December 1963) that it ought to do. The continuity between the two councils was demonstrated by the evidence that the teaching of Vatican II had already been sketched out in the plans of Vatican I.⁹⁵

The ecclesiology of Vatican I calls to mind the image of a pyramid; one in which the pope is characterized as supreme judge, who definitively decides all cases brought to him from lower levels; bishops were often viewed as vicars or delegates of the pope, who implemented his decisions in their dioceses. Priests in turn were considered representatives of their bishop who were responsible for carrying out his decisions in their parishes. The laity in such a schema were often assigned a passive role, expected to receive the sacraments and support the Church, but accorded little voice in its operation.⁹⁶ This model of the Church will be decisively changed in the Second Vatican Council.

c. Vatican II on the relationship between the pope and the college of bishops

The “pyramidal” model of Church has predominated over the centuries. It is in this context, that Vatican II entertained the argument: “many bishops and *periti* were convinced of the need to take up anew the question of the pope’s relationship to the bishop.”⁹⁷ They appeared to attempt to diminish Vatican centralization by means of the new teaching on collegiality. As previously indicated, “the Minority among the council bishops worried that the teaching on collegiality would undermine Vatican I’s assertions regarding papal authority.”⁹⁸ The concern of these two

⁹⁵ Yves Congar, “A Last Look at the Council,” in *Vatican II Revisited by Those Who Were There*, ed. Albert Stacpool (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1986), 337-58 at 341; quoted Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 115.

⁹⁶ John Ford. “Ministries in the Church” 299-300.

⁹⁷ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *The Keys to the Council*, 123.

⁹⁸ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *The Keys to the Council*, 125; One of the objectors is Cardinal Browne, a member of the Holy Office. He said that “collegiality was against the teaching of Vatican Council I on the primacy and infallibility of the pope.” For John R. Quinn: “A fair number of objectors were canon lawyers, and they got their idea of college from classical Roman law. For Roman law a college was a body of equals all having equal authority. These objectors had little grasp of the history of the church and particularly of the synodal structures of antiquity.”

parties became more intense as they prepared to discuss the preparatory draft on the Church. After a long debate, discussing, rewriting and compromise,⁹⁹ the final text of the document of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, was promulgated on November 21, 1964, during the third session of the Council. In this section, I do not attempt to present the debate between the minority and majority group on this issue, but on what the council presented in the relevant texts only.

The issue of collegiality was treated in the third chapter of *Lumen Gentium*.¹⁰⁰ And paragraph 22 serves as the key paragraph on the character of the episcopal college.¹⁰¹ The Fathers of the council follow the steps of the tradition and the doctrine of previous councils to teach that “Jesus Christ, the eternal pastor, established the holy church by sending the apostles as he himself had been sent by the Father (cf. Jn. 20:21)” (*LG* 18). And these same fathers once again affirmed that “the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ and as pastor of the entire church, has full, supreme and universal power over the whole church, a power which he can exercise freely” (*LG* 22). We start to see then how opinions concerning the origin and nature of episcopal authority and its relationship to papal authority, during council proceedings Vatican II drifted away from the positions of Vatican I by affirming that bishops, who are successors of apostles, have “supreme and full authority over the universal church” (*LG* 22). The question will inevitably be: where does the bishop receive his authority: from Christ or the Pope? The answer

John R. Quinn, “Vatican Council II Collegiality and Structures of Communion,” in Paul G. Crowley. *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Charting a Catholic Future*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014, 58.

⁹⁹ John O’Malley provides clear process of preparing, debating and creating the text of *Lumen Gentium* in his book “What happened at Vatican II” at pages 162-164; 173-189; 201-203; 207-210; 244-245.

¹⁰⁰ *Lumen Gentium* has eight chapters: chapters one and two treat the church’s divine origin and historical existence, chapters three and four treat different roles in the church, chapter five and six treat holiness and religious life, and chapters seven and eight treat the saints and Mary. Hahnenberg. *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 42.

¹⁰¹ Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 130.

will turn out to be - from Christ! - through the sacrament of episcopal consecration. It is worthwhile to quote here a long passage from *Lumen Gentium*:

The Sacred Council teaches that by Episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred, that fullness of power, namely, which both in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry. But Episcopal consecration, together with the office of sanctifying, also confers the office of teaching and of governing, which, however, of its very nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college. For from the tradition, which is expressed especially in liturgical rites and in the practice of both the Church of the East and of the West, it is clear that, by means of the imposition of hands and the words of consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is so conferred, and the sacred character so impressed, that bishops in an eminent and visible way sustain the roles of Christ Himself as Teacher, Shepherd and High Priest, and that they act in His person. Therefore, it pertains to the bishops to admit newly elected members into the Episcopal body by means of the sacrament of Orders (*LG 21*).¹⁰²

The council affirmed that the bishop receives the authority of teaching, governing and teaching through the sacrament of episcopal consecration, not through the pope. Of course, the bishop can exercise these authorities only in communion with the pope and other bishops. Commenting on this teaching, Colberg notes:

Lumen Gentium's teaching about the sacramental character of the bishops' powers is critical in that, in addition to resolving an issue that has been considered an open question for several hundred years, it reflects a shift from viewing the character of episcopal authority; predominately in juridical terms- to considering it fundamentally in its sacramental, ontological reality. The importance and distinction of this development was highlighted by Congar, who remarked that 'the only passage of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church which could be considered as a true and proper dogmatic declaration is that which concerns the sacramentality of the episcopacy.'¹⁰³

By emphasizing the sacrament of episcopal consecration, Vatican II restored the "dignity" of the role of bishop. A bishop then is no longer considered merely as "vicar of the Roman Pontiff," but he is true "Vicar and legate of Christ." *Lumen Gentium* explicitly states:

¹⁰² The text can be found at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

¹⁰³ Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 128.

The pastoral office [*munus pastorale*], that is, the permanent and daily care of their sheep, is entrusted to [the bishops] fully; nor are they to be regarded as vicars of the Roman Pontiff; for they exercise a power which they possess in their own right, and are most truly said to be at the head of the people whom they govern (*LG 27*).¹⁰⁴

Through the imposition of hands and the words of consecration, the bishop receives the Holy Spirit in order to “take the place of Christ himself, *teacher, shepherd and priest*, and act in his person” (*LG 21*).¹⁰⁵ Thus, we see that the sacramental dimension of the episcopal consecration puts the pope and bishops at the same basic level. As Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford note: “A pope is, above all, a bishop among bishops. It is as a member of the college of bishops that the pope is head of that college. Every exercise of papal primacy is at the same time an exercise of the pope’s episcopal office as a member and the head of the college.”¹⁰⁶ Vatican II’s unilateral dimensional shape of ecclesiological authority reverses Vatican I’s shape of a pyramid... as Jean-Marie Tillard rightly remarks: “The scheme no longer has the shape of a pyramid. The line no longer travels from the pope to the bishops, with the weight on the former at the expense of the latter; but from the bishops to the pope.”¹⁰⁷ Rush concluded: “Thus papal primacy is now set within the context of episcopal collegiality, and not vice versa.”¹⁰⁸

Lumen Gentium also emphasizes the proper understanding of the particular church¹⁰⁹ (the diocese). On one hand, each particular church is a true and full Church of Christ.

This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament. For

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 315.

¹⁰⁵ Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁶ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 126.

¹⁰⁷ Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome*, 36. Quoted in Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 315.

¹⁰⁸ Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 315.

¹⁰⁹ H. de Lubac defines the particular Church as “the coming together of baptized people around the bishop who teaches the faith and celebrates the Eucharist.” (“The Particular Churches in the Universal Church,” in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, 82 (1982), p. 12.; quoted from Wood, Susan K. 1947-. “The Theological Foundation of Episcopal Conferences and Collegiality.” *Studia Canonica* 22, no. 2 (1988): 330, footnote 5.

in their locality these are the new People called by God, in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness. In them the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated, that by the food and blood of the Lord's body the whole brotherhood may be joined together. In any community of the altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, there is exhibited a symbol of that charity and "unity of the mystical Body, without which there can be no salvation." In these communities, though frequently small and poor, or living in the Diaspora, Christ is present, and in virtue of His presence there is brought together one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. For "the partaking of the body and blood of Christ does nothing other than make us be transformed into that which we consume" (*LG* 26).

And the bishop of this particular Church, just as the pope serves as the visible principle of unity for the whole Church, serves visible principles of unity for each local Church. *Lumen Gentium*

23 states:

Individual bishops are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches comes into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason the individual bishops represent each his own church, but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love and unity (*LG* 23).¹¹⁰

On the other hand, each particular church is "wholly Church, but not the whole Church."¹¹¹

Thus, it cannot stand by itself in the sense that it separates from other local churches and from the universal church.¹¹² In the same manner, its leader, the bishop cannot exercise his authority separately and personally, but he acts as a member of the episcopal college and in communion with the pope as head of the college of bishops. As *Lumen Gentium* states:

¹¹⁰ The text from https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

¹¹¹ Hahnenberg. *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 47.

¹¹² For Wood, "The universal Church is not a diffuse, generalized entity, and idealized concept, or simply the sum total of particular Churches. It is defined in terms of the Eucharist, which transcends the localized particularity of the eucharistic presence in a specific community. The universal Church subsists in, but is not limited to, each particular Church in an analogous way to which Christ is entirely present in, but is not limited to, each eucharistic celebration." Susan K. Wood, 1947-. "The Theological Foundation of Episcopal Conferences and Collegiality." *Studia Canonica* 22, no. 2 (1988): 330.

Individual bishops ... exercise their pastoral government over the portion of the People of God committed to their care, and not over other churches nor over the universal Church. But each of them, as a member of the episcopal college and legitimate successor of the apostles, is obliged by Christ's institution and command to be solicitous for the whole Church, and this solicitude, though it is not exercised by an act of jurisdiction, contributes greatly to the advantage of the universal Church... Individual bishops, insofar as their own discharge of their duty permits, are obliged to enter into a community of work among themselves and with the successor of Peter, upon whom was imposed in a special way the great duty of spreading the Christian name (*LG 23*).

Sacramental grace makes a person who receives the sacrament of episcopal consecration to be the apostles' successor and has "supreme and full authority over the universal church" (*LG 22*), but the controlling sacrament is the idea of the 'sacrament of the Church'. He received the sacrament of episcopal consecration in the context of the people of God gathered together, around their bishop to celebrate the Eucharist. Thus, he is bound to the other bishops by the sacrament of episcopal consecration. He cannot act alone; only in communion with his brother bishops. As Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford further comment:

No bishop was a law unto himself. Every bishop was a member of the communion of the bishops. Collegiality in the Church, then, is based on the truth that the Church is a communion and that the bishops are a college made by sharing episcopal ordination. Collegiality is also based on the historical fact that collegial structures have been the normal way of church government from the most ancient times.¹¹³

Although recognizing the right and dignity of individual bishops based on the sacramental consecration, the council always emphasizes a hierarchical communion of bishops with the head and the body – 'members of the college' as we see it was repeated in many conciliar texts. Especially in the third chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, when placing the pope within the college of bishops as its head, Vatican II retrieved the most ancient practice of the Church in the first and second centuries. From the outset, the Church understood herself as a communion; meaning that the particular church is a community of believers who gather around their bishop to celebrate the

¹¹³ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 59-60.

Eucharist. It is also a community of faith uniting the churches with one another,¹¹⁴ with its duty “to preserve the apostolic tradition and hand it on unadulterated.”¹¹⁵ In this vein Pottmeyer notes that: “The paradigm of the Church of the first millennium may best be described in this way: The Church understood itself to be witness to the apostolic tradition.”¹¹⁶ As things evolved, the Church of Rome and her bishop was also understood as first among equals in witness. The Pope was Pope only because he was a bishop, the bishop of the local Church of Rome. This line of reasoning continues:

Insofar as a bishop heads an individual Church as a successor of the apostles, he is also a member of the College consisting of the other successors of the apostles. The Pope does not simply happen to be also the bishop of Rome; on the contrary, it is precisely because he is the bishop of the Church of Rome, (which preserves the heritage of Peter) -and whose bishop is the successor of Peter, that he is a member and head of the College of Bishops and visible head of the Church.¹¹⁷

The Church of Rome received an honor from other churches not because its bishop was Peter’s successor, but because it was the seat of the first apostles, Peter and Paul; who, though they did not found and govern that particular community, were martyred and buried there. Because they bore witness to Christ by their martyrdom the Church of Rome became more important than the

¹¹⁴ Schatz points out that part of this communion of local churches in themselves and with one another was that when bishops were elected the choice by the local church and the final decision of the neighboring bishops were coordinated elements. Another expression of this communion was the “communion letters” or “peace letters” bishops wrote for travelers or Christians moving from place to place. Anyone who could present such a communion letter was accepted into the new community as a Christian and a member of the *catholica*; he or she could participate in the Eucharistic celebration and had a claim to Christian hospitality, which meant being housed and cared for at community expense. Only bishops could write such communion letters valid for the entire Church; presbyters could address them only to the churches in their immediate vicinity. For this purpose, the bishops kept lists of all, or most, of the orthodox bishops with whom they were in communion. (see. Klaus Schatz. *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present*, trans. Otto, John A and Maloney, Linda M. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1996),17.

¹¹⁵ Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 25.

¹¹⁷ Pottmeyer. *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 118.

other churches and there were “no individual churches that could compete with Rome”¹¹⁸ in this regard. Klaus Schatz¹¹⁹ notes:

In the definitive testimony of faith of their martyrdom, the two [heads, leaders], Peter and Paul, had simultaneously handed on their faith as an enduring heritage for the Roman Church (*paradosis*) - and endowed it with that faith forever. Their witness to the faith, made perfect in the shedding of their blood, was handed on in the *paradosis*; their martyrdom remained present in the witness of the Roman Church.¹²⁰

Of course, even these factors do not automatically grant to the Church of Rome a superior authority over all other local churches, “but whenever explicit reasons were given, it was Rome’s apostolic rank that mattered most.”¹²¹ Thus it becomes clear that because he is the bishop of Rome, a pope receives honor from his brother bishops as the head of the college.

Although *Lumen Gentium* provides many aspects of collegiality, the concept “was of historic importance.”¹²² However, for Colberg, it “does not provide clear juridical parameters to deal with critical issues related to the relationship between the pope and the bishops.”¹²³

Nevertheless, “The council did encourage the formation of regional associations of bishops, referred to as episcopal conferences as limited ways of exercising Episcopal Collegiality.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Klaus Schatz. *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996, 7.

¹¹⁹ Klaus Schatz, S. J. received his doctorate at Rome’s Gregorian University in 1974 and since 1975 has taught Church history at the St. Georgen School of Philosophy and Theology in Frankfurt, Germany.

¹²⁰ Schatz, *Papal Primacy*, 8.

¹²¹ Schatz, *Papal Primacy*, 19; Relating to the importance of Peter’s martyrdom with the church of Rome, Ratzinger wrote: “Having said all that, the site of Peter’s martyrdom nonetheless appears clearly as the chief bearer of his supreme authority and plays a preeminent role in the formation of tradition – which is constitutive of the Church – and thus in the genesis of the New Testament as Bible; Rome is one of the indispensable internal and external conditions of its possible.” Ratzinger, *ibid.*, 71.

¹²² Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 126.

¹²³ Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 133. Gaillardetz notes: “if the council’s teaching on collegiality was of historic importance, nevertheless, the council did not consider in any depth the detailed structures that would put collegiality into practice.” Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 126.

¹²⁴ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 126.

c.1. Episcopal Conferences¹²⁵

According to Massimo Faggioli,¹²⁶

the issue of episcopal conferences was not included in the list of *quaestiones*, topics given to the preparatory commissions in July 1960. But it became part of the conciliar debate through the activity of the commission on the bishops, chaired by Cardinal Marcello Mimmi and, after his death (March 1961), Cardinal Paolo Marella. The fathers in their *vota* made references to episcopal conferences not only directly, but, due to the differences between local situations and experiences, also indirectly, when they wrote about the relations between local bishops and papal nuncios, and between episcopal conferences and the Roman Curia. And when they proposed new laws about episcopal conferences to be inserted in the Code of Canon Law.¹²⁷

The Council acknowledged the important role of the episcopal conference in more than one conciliar document. *Lumen Gentium* espouses episcopal conferences as the concrete realization of the collegiate spirit: “The Episcopal conferences at the present time are in a position to contribute in many and fruitful ways, to the concrete realization of the collegiate spirit” (LG 23). Of course, like many other matters of the council, this recognition has its limitation - as Peter Hunermann wrote in his important commentary:

When episcopal conferences are considered merely as an expression of *collegialis affectus*, we refuse to see in them an expression of collegiality-of course, limited and temporal-and we show here and in the immediate post-conciliar discussion the difficulty to situate in a wider context the thought of collegiality as service in the Church.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Episcopal conference: A permanent ecclesiastical institution comprised of all the bishops of a given geographic region. These regional conferences are established in order to encourage and assist in the shared exercise of the bishops’ pastoral ministry over the local churches in their care. Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 126).

¹²⁶ Massimo Faggioli is full professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of Villanova University. He is a contributor to several journals, including *Il Regno*, *Jesus*, *Commonweal*, and *La Croix International*, and is cochair of the Vatican II Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion.

¹²⁷ Faggioli. *A Council for the Global Church*, 203; Wijlens notes: “Episcopal conferences have existed for almost 200 years, but it was not until Vatican II that they were formally recognized and recommended by the Church” (Wijlens M. “Representation and Witnessing in Synodal Structures: Rethinking the Munus Docendi of Episcopal Conferences in Light of Communio Fidelium, Communio Ecclesiarum and Communio Episcoporum.” *Studia Canonica* 53, no. 1 (2019): 75–105, at 78. <https://doi.org/10.2143/STC.53.1.3287023>).

¹²⁸ Quoted from Carlos Schickendantz, “The Episcopal Conferences.” in Faggioli. *For a Missionary Reform of the Church*, 378.

In the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishop in the Church (*Christus Dominus*), the council notes that the episcopal conferences “had their origins in the ancient tradition of regional bishops meeting in synods (CD 36).”¹²⁹ *Christus Dominus* states:

From the very first centuries of the Church bishops, as rulers of individual churches, were deeply moved by the communion of fraternal charity and zeal for the universal mission entrusted to the Apostles. They pooled their abilities and their wills for the common good and for the welfare of the individual churches. Thus, synods, provincial councils and plenary councils in which bishops established for various churches the way to be followed in teaching the truths of faith and ordering ecclesiastical discipline came into being (CD, 36).

However, Gaillardetz and Clifford note cautiously, “*Christus Dominus* avoided, by and large, the tricky question regarding the precise authority to be accorded to these episcopal conferences (CD 37-37).”¹³⁰ Elsewhere, the council affirmed the value of these episcopal conferences in the church’s mission in the world. In the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, episcopal conferences were offered as a valuable instrument in service of the Church’s catholicity. In article 22 of that decree, the council describes the process of allowing the Gospel to take root in different cultures, even while drawing on the gifts and customs of the region. Episcopal conferences were well equipped, the council insisted, to oversee this process.¹³¹ *Ad Gentes* states: “It is to be hoped that episcopal conferences, within the limits of each major socio-cultural territory, will so coordinate their efforts that they may be able to pursue this proposal of adaptation with one mind and with a common plan.” (*Ad gentes*, 22; hereafter *AG*). In like manner, the council granted authority to episcopal conferences regarding certain liturgical questions, including the approval of vernacular translations of liturgical texts (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 22, 36; hereafter *SC*). However, Rush points out that “What is not treated is whether

¹²⁹ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 126.

¹³⁰ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 126.

¹³¹ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 126.

any authority is to be accorded these conferences in the teaching of doctrine.”¹³² Rush quotes Avery Dulles to prove his point. Dulles notes: “Nether in these clauses nor elsewhere in the documents of Vatican II is there any explicit mention of the teaching function of the conferences... In all probability the commissions that drew up these texts did not consider the doctrinal function of the episcopal conference ripe for conciliar decision, and deliberately kept this question open.”¹³³ Even *Christus Dominus*, the decree on the pastoral office of bishops, recognized the ancient origins of the episcopal conferences, and “quite properly contains the longest statement on the authority inherent in the conferences,”¹³⁴ but as Faggioli pointed out:

Christus Dominus remains very ambiguous and vague about the legislative powers of episcopal conferences, limiting their decisions to a minimum and rejecting the proposal to ascribe to conferences and their decisions some measure of collegiality. *Christus Dominus* offered a framework law for conferences but left their future to their status and to the reform of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* that was then beginning.¹³⁵

Another limitation of Vatican II concerning to the episcopal conferences is it lacks theological foundation. As Myriam Wijlens points out:

Vatican II affirmed that, by divine law, the diocesan bishop is the vicar of Christ in his local church (*LG* 26). This raises the question of the extent to which a decision by an episcopal conference can overrule the authority and responsibility of the diocesan bishop in his diocese. When the full college of bishops acts, as in an ecumenical council, this is not problematic because the authority is exercised by the college of bishops with the pope which constitutes the supreme authority in the Church. On the contrary, it is problematic when only a part of the college acts, as in an episcopal conference. This, the conclusion is drawn that the episcopal conference would probably not have a strong theological foundation.¹³⁶

¹³² Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 330.

¹³³ Avery Dulles, “Doctrinal Authority of Episcopal Conferences,” in *Episcopal Conferences: Historical, Canonical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Thomas J. Reese (Washington, DC: George-town University Press, 1989), 207-31, at 208 and 213 (quoted in Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 330.)

¹³⁴ O’Malley, *What happened at Vatican II*, 304.

¹³⁵ Massimo Faggioli. *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015, 210.

¹³⁶ Wijlens M. “Representation and Witnessing in Synodal Structures: Rethinking the Munus Docendi of Episcopal Conferences in Light of *Communio Fidelium, Communio Ecclesiarum* and *Communio Episcoporum*.” *Studia Canonica* 53, no. 1 (2019): 75–105, at 90. <https://doi.org/10.2143/STC.53.1.3287023>.

The conciliar Fathers recognized that the theological foundations of the episcopal conferences were so complex that it proved prudent to agree to merely acknowledge their existence. The conciliar commission communicated clearly that it was left to the post-Vatican II church to attend to the matter.¹³⁷ Indeed, after Vatican II, the theological foundation of the conference was discussed at the synod in 1969 and 1985.¹³⁸ In 1998 John Paul II issued his *motu proprio Apostolos suos*. According to Faggioli, “the intent of the document is to lay down some firm points on the role of episcopal conferences and on the relationship between bishop and diocesan church and between bishop, episcopal college, and pope.” Faggioli remarked that paragraph 22 of the document is the most significant for our concern. It prescribes that doctrinal statements of episcopal conferences must be approved unanimously.

If this unanimity is lacking, a majority alone of the Bishops of a Conference cannot issue a declaration as authentic teaching of the Conference to which all the faithful of the territory would have to adhere, unless it obtains the *recognitio* of the Apostolic See, which will not give it if the majority requesting it is not substantial. The intervention of the Apostolic See is analogous to that required by the law, in order for the Episcopal Conference to issue general decrees. The *recognitio* of the Holy See serves furthermore to guarantee that, in dealing with new questions posed by the accelerated social and cultural changes characteristic of present times, the doctrinal response will favour communion and not harm it, and will rather prepare an eventual intervention of the universal magisterium (*Apostolos suos*, 22; hereafter *AS*).¹³⁹

Apostolos Suos clarifies the authoritative status of episcopal conferences. Within this document, the episcopal conferences have the authority to issue a doctrinal declaration with required conditions. Here are the required conditions: (a) it must be issued by a plenary meeting, not by conference committees; (b) it must be unanimously approved; (c) if approved by two-thirds of

¹³⁷ Wijlens M. “Representation and Witnessing in Synodal Structures” 91.

¹³⁸ To know more about these two synods, see Massimo Faggioli. *A Council for the Global Church*, 211-218. To know more about the theological and canonical issues related to episcopal conferences see Wijlens M. “Representation and Witnessing in Synodal Structures” 79-92.

¹³⁹ John Paul II, apostolic letter *Apostolos Suos*, May 21, 1998, n. 22, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_jp-ii_motu-proprio_22071998_apostolos-suos.html

the members but not unanimity, it cannot be published without review (*recognitio*) of the Apostolic See.¹⁴⁰

For Carlos Schickendantz,¹⁴¹ from a legislative point of view,

Apostolos Suos sheds light on the magisterial capacity of the episcopal conference. But on the other hand, “the document requires either unanimity or Rome’s recognition on a text approved by the two-thirds of the members of the conference.” These conditions “imply a theory.” “They presuppose that doctrinal authority resides properly only on two levels: at the universal level, of the pope and of the college of bishops, and, at the local level, of the diocesan bishop. As Sullivan notes, there is no historical precedent for the requirement that the conciliar decree must have unanimous support to be approved and published on behalf of a council. The councils have always sought moral unanimity, but unanimity was never a requirement. This means that the document clearly implies that the authority of the conference comes from that provided by each individual bishop.”¹⁴²

In the end, according to *Apostolos Suos*, the “source of full jurisdiction is the pope,” not the episcopal conferences. Schickendantz comments:

It is true that John Paul II’s *motu proprio* there is no explicit statement denying that the episcopal conferences have a *mandatum docendi*, but the solution adopted implies, strictly speaking, that authority rest only with the individual bishop and the college of bishops with the pope-or unanimity, or two-thirds with Rome’s *recognitio*. The activity of the conference would be endorsed by the sum of the action of each of its members.¹⁴³

Vatican II in different documents recognized the ancient origins of the episcopal conferences and considered it as limited way of exercising episcopal collegiality. However, the authority of teaching, and legislative power of episcopal conferences are very ambiguous and vague in these documents. *Motu proprio Apostolos suos* was the obvious attempt to solve these limitations of Vatican II on the episcopal conference. But in the end, the authority of teaching, and legislative

¹⁴⁰ Schickendantz, “The Episcopal Conferences.” 386.

¹⁴¹ Carlos Schickendantz holds a doctorate in theology from Eberhard-Karls University of Tübingen (Germany), and currently works as a researcher for the Manuel Larrain Theological Center of the Universidad Alberto Hurtado in Santiago, Chile.

¹⁴² Schickendantz, “The Episcopal Conferences.” 387.

¹⁴³ Schickendantz, “The Episcopal Conferences.” 388.

power of episcopal conferences are still limited by the pope. Yet another institutional way of implementing episcopal collegiality is the Synod of Bishops.

c.2. Synod of Bishops

According to Gaillardetz and Clifford,

even before the council began, Cardinal Bernard Alfrink of Utrecht had called for a creation of a permanent body of bishops to assist the pope in the government of the universal church... Various versions of this idea were proposed during council debates and many bishops made a formal quest for the creation of a permanent body of bishops to collaborate with the pope in shared pastoral ministry over the whole church.¹⁴⁴

Pope Paul VI responded to some of the requests from the council floor by establishing “the world synod of bishops” in his *motu proprio*, *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, the very day the fourth and last session of the council was opened. At the conclusion of discourse beginning the last session of the Council (14 September 1965), Pope Paul VI himself made public his intention to establish the Synod of Bishops in the following words:

The advanced information that we ourselves are happy to share with you is that we intend to give you some institution, called for by this Council, a “Synod of Bishops,” which will be made up of bishops nominated for the most part by the episcopal Conferences with our approval and called by the Pope according to the needs of the Church, for his consultation and collaboration, when for the well-being of the Church it might seem to him opportune. It goes without saying that this collaboration of the episcopate ought to bring the greatest joy to the Holy See and to the whole Church. In a particular way it will serve a useful purpose in the daily work of the Roman Curia, to which we owe so much recognition for its most valuable help, and for which, as bishops in their diocese, we also have permanent need in Our apostolic concerns. News and norms will be made known to this assembly as soon as possible. We did not wish to deprive Ourselves of the honor and pleasure of making you aware of this brief communication so as to personally bear witness once more to Our trust, esteem and fraternity. We place this beautiful and promising innovation under the protection of Mary, the Mother of God.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 127.

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/the-synod-of-bishops.html>. (Accessed on January 15th 2022)

The intention of Pope Paul VI when he established the synod of bishops was “not to be a standing synod with deliberative authority but an occasional gathering of representative bishops for a limited period of time with strictly consultative power.”¹⁴⁶ In other words, the synod of bishops has no actual power of authority. It possesses consultative power only. This brought about some palpable disappointment amongst some of the Council Fathers. Many felt they wanted to establish a real institution of sharing the power of governing the Church between the pope and the college of bishops. It was considered imperative to get rid of the monarchy model. The bishops represent something more than just a consultative body. However, as Pottmeyer succinctly comments: “Even though the concrete form which Pope Paul VI gave it did not meet the expectations of many council fathers, it is still a first and important step in the direction toward a greater participation of the episcopacy in the governing of the universal Church.”¹⁴⁷ As the synod of bishops has developed over the intervening five decades, three different synodal forms have emerged: Ordinary synods that meet every three or four years; extraordinary synods that are convened to address special topics, often at the behest of the pope; and special synods that address issues of concern to the particular regional church.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 127.

¹⁴⁷ Hermann J. Pottmeyer. “The Episcopacy.” In In Granfield, Patrick, and Peter C Phan. *The Gift of the Church*, 351.

¹⁴⁸ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 127.

Since 1967, there have been 16 ordinary synods, 3 extraordinary synods, and 11 special synods.

Ordinary Assemblies: These are synods that deal with universal topics that are pastoral in character and contemporary. Most synods that we can recall from recent years have been ordinary:

2001 "The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST for the hope of the world"

2005 "The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church"

2008 "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church"

2012 "New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith"

2018 "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment"

Extraordinary Assemblies: These deal with more urgent matters. For this reason, these are shorter and with fewer participants. The most recent extraordinary synod was the 2014 one dealing with the "pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization".

Special Assemblies: These deal with issues that are specific to a particular geographical area. There have been special synods for each continent of the world, Africa, America, Asia, Europe, Oceania, and the Middle East. The most recent one was on the Pan-Amazon Region in 2019.

To conclude then, the doctrine of papal primacy and infallibility of Vatican I “crystallizes” what the historian John O’Malley calls ‘the papalization of Catholicism.’”¹⁴⁹ At the Second Vatican Council, the majority of the Fathers “requested the renewal of this doctrine so as to bring centralized authority to an end, and to make it clear that the universal Church represents a communion of churches.”¹⁵⁰ Episcopal collegiality means the pope and the college of bishops need to work collaboratively in governing the Church. Which is the best way to serve this end? Because the origin of episcopal collegiality is grounded in the college of the apostles (*LG 22*), and it is “an expression of the structural character of the universal Church as communion of particular churches.”¹⁵¹ For this reason alone, “collegiality” figured prominently in chapter 3 of *Lumen Gentium*. For Colberg, “at the heart of *Lumen Gentium*’s discussion of ecclesial authority is an affirmation of a sacramental basis of the episcopal office.”¹⁵² For the first time in centuries it was discerned within the council that the sacrament of episcopal ordination makes the pope and bishops sacramental and pastorally equally. And they share equally the responsibility for the universal Church. All uniqueness of the Chair of Peter aside.

Pottmeyer comments:

The Council explains that the sacrament of episcopal consecration, together with the recognition by the other Bishops and the Pope, makes the bishops a member of the episcopal college. ‘One is constituted a member of the episcopal body in virtue of the sacramental consecration and by the hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college’ (*LG 22*). The collegial co-responsibility for the universal Church is therefore an essential and intrinsic element of the episcopacy. As members of the episcopal college, the Pope and the Bishops are bound together in their responsibility for the universal Church.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Rush. *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles*, 309.

¹⁵⁰ Pottmeyer, “The Episcopacy”, 350.

¹⁵¹ Pottmeyer, “The Episcopacy”, 351.

¹⁵² Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 127.

¹⁵³ Pottmeyer, “The Episcopacy”, 351.

The doctrine of episcopal collegiality rooted in the sacrament of episcopal ordination teaches that the bishops and the pope are one college “in which the bishops share with the pope, as bishop of Rome, the leadership of the universal church.”¹⁵⁴ Since Vatican II till now, the implementation of episcopal collegiality has had very little progress. Pope Francis remarks in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*:

We have made little progress in this regard. The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion. The **Second Vatican Council** stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position “to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit”. Yet this desire has not been fully realized, since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach (*EG* 32).¹⁵⁵

The Holy Father was obviously not satisfied with the process of collegiality in the Church. Now, when the Church has been confronted with so many crises, he expresses himself a bit more adamantly: “Perhaps it is time to change the methodology of the Synod, because the current one seems static.”¹⁵⁶

III. Pope Francis’s Ecclesiology: Synodality as the Listening Church

When Pope John XXIII decided to convene the Second Vatican Council, he wanted to open the doors of the Church for the Holy Spirit so that the Spirit would blow with a new breath to renew the face of the Church. This is the concept of *aggiornamento*. Edward Hahnenberg notes that “he wanted the Church to be brought up-to-date in order to meet the new challenges of

¹⁵⁴ Anne Hunt, “The Trinitarian Depths of Vatican II,” in Stephen Schloesser. *50 Years on: Probing the Riches of Vatican II*, 146.

¹⁵⁵ Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Joy of the Gospel, 24 November 2013, in AAS, 105 (2013), 1019-1137, no. 32; English trans. at

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#I.%E2%80%82A_Church_which_goes_forth

¹⁵⁶ Pope Francis, *L’Eglise que j’espere. Entretiens avec le Pere Spadaro sj* (Paris, Frammarion, 2013), 75; Alphonse Borras, *Ecclesial Synodality...*, 235

the modern world.”¹⁵⁷ In almost poetic terms he declares his purpose: so that “the Church serves as the sign and safeguard of the transcendence of the human person,”¹⁵⁸ and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to every man and woman. Faced with many difficult situations in the Church: scandals over the abuse of power, sexual abuse and its cover-up from the Church’s leaders, as well as many contradictions and difficulties quickly and constantly emerging in the world today, Pope Francis also chooses to bring the Church up-to-date. In his bull, *Misericordiae Vultus*, he calls us to “reconnect to the reform attempts of the Council and Paul VI”¹⁵⁹ through the ‘synodal way’ so that the Church can proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to “men and women of their time in a more accessible way.”¹⁶⁰

Francis’s vision connects to the work of Vatican II, which states the Church has only one mission: to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The opening article of *Lumen Gentium* proclaims the council’s keen and primary hope: “Christ is the light of the nations and as a natural consequence this holy synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit, ardently desires to bring to all humanity that light of Christ which is resplendent on the face of the church, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature” (*LG* 1). This is the nature of the Church as the council affirmed in *Ad Gentes*: “The pilgrim church [*ecclesia peregrinans*] is by its nature missionary [*natura sua missionaria*] (*AG* 2).”¹⁶¹ This is also the major concern of Pope Francis. On November 23, 2013, he promulgated Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in response to the 2012 Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on evangelization. *Evangelii Gaudium* is Pope Francis’s

¹⁵⁷ Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Hahnenberg, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Hermann J. Pottmeyer, “The Church on its pilgrim way to arise as the People of God,” in Faggioli, *For a Missionary Reform of the Church*, 65.

¹⁶⁰ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* (April 11, 2015, part. 4)

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html

¹⁶¹ Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 216.

vision and agenda for the Church in the third millennium. It all points to nothing more than a renewed agenda for the Church's ancient inspiration for evangelization. For Francis, this mission must be "at the heart of the church and should be central to the life of each Christian because all are called to share their joy with others."¹⁶² Judith Gruber, assistant professor of Systematic Theology at Loyola University New Orleans, points out: in *Evangelii Gaudium*,

Again and again, he drives his core message home: *it is the church's raison d'être to proclaim the gospel*. For Francis, this means that the church has to *live* the gospel—for him, the proclamation of the gospel takes its shape in the way we treat others, in the way we live with and, more particularly, for others: 'The kerygma has a clear social content: at the very heart of the gospel is life in community and engagement with others. The content of the first proclamation has an immediate moral implication centered on charity' (*EG* 117).¹⁶³ (emphasis original)

The Church from the beginning until now has been trying to fulfill Jesus's command: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). At different times and different places, the Church used different methods to proclaim the Gospel which were suitable for people in a particular time and place to proclaim the Gospel. The message of the Gospel is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But the method of proclaiming the Gospel must be constantly adapted. Instead of using the language of defending doctrine and proclaiming condemnation, Vatican II deliberately utilized the language of dialogue and mercy. We can see this remarkable change of tone in Pope John XXIII's opening address on October 11, 1962:

Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations... That being so, the Catholic Church, raising the torch of religious truth by means of this Ecumenical Council, desires to show herself to be the loving mother of all, benign, patient, full of mercy and goodness toward the brethren who are separated from her. To mankind,

¹⁶² Mary Doak "Evangelizing in an Economy Death," in Mannion, Gerard, ed. *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the Papal Agenda*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 179.

¹⁶³ Judith Gruber, "Evangelii Gaudium – Francis's Call for a Kenotic Theology" in Mannion, Gerard, ed. *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the Papal Agenda*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 60.

oppressed by so many difficulties, the Church says, as Peter said to the poor who begged alms from him: “I have neither gold nor silver, but what I have I give to you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk” (Acts 3:6).¹⁶⁴

Dialogue and mercy became the working motif. The Church in the third millennium continues Vatican II’s language. However, in a different way: through the use of the concept of synodality.¹⁶⁵ For Francis, synodality is the best way to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the modern world¹⁶⁶ because, this approach “may invite ‘a pastoral and missionary conversion’ of the entire Church.”¹⁶⁷ And it helps the Church reach people from all circumstances of life, in order to listen, pray, and discern with them so that she can capture the true realities and lived experience of the people. Therefore, Francis affirms: “it is precisely this path of synodality which the Lord expects of the Church of the third millennium.”¹⁶⁸

Pope Francis affirms that a synod does not necessarily require a new teaching. Instead, he continues the Church’s ancient teaching. But he puts his emphasis on the image of synodal Church in the context of the world of today as Faggioli points out:

Pope Francis did not introduce this path to synodality as an innovation, but in continuity with the tradition of the previous 50 years: from the institution of the Synod by Paul VI in 1965 during Vatican II, to the 2006 updates to the *Ordo Synodi* by his predecessor Benedict XVI. But Francis put his emphasis on the synodal Church in the context of the

¹⁶⁴ John XXIII, “Pope John’s Opening Speech,” quoted in Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 253.

¹⁶⁵ Archbishop Christophe Pierre notes: “Synodality, while leading to the conversion of structures, has a further end, namely, pastoral conversion and evangelization. Pope Francis is offering the Church a way, from her traditions and theology, to meet the pastoral challenges of the new millennium.” Pierre, “Synodality and Pope Francis”, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Gilles Routhier wrote: “The goal of synodality is the proclamation of the gospel. It initiates a particular kind of relationships: the collaboration and participation of all to a common work, and the interdependence between the ministry and all the baptized” Gilles Routhier, “The Renewal of Synodal Life in Local Churches,” in Faggioli, *For a Missionary Reform of the Church*, 258.

¹⁶⁷ Renken, “Synodality,” 7.

Gilles Routhier notes: The goal of synodality is the proclamation of the gospel... Synodality is realized through the exchange and the communion, under the guidance of the Spirit, in the framework of an assembly or council. It is supported by procedures and framed by shared information, communication, and decision-making processes. These processes, in turn, are linked to practices, particularly the practice of dialogue. Following Vatican II, this dialogue must take place between the bishop and his priests... Routhier, “The Renewal of Synodal Life in Local Churches,” 259.

¹⁶⁸ Pope Francis, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17th October 2015).

world of today: ‘We must continue along this path. The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.’¹⁶⁹

In this section, I explore Pope Francis’s ecclesiology: Synodality as the Listening Church. In this context the Holy Father advances and extends Vatican II’s inspiration and teaching.¹⁷⁰

At the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops by Pope Paul VI, Pope Francis speaks of “synodality” and of his desire for a “synodal church,” using the image of an inverted pyramid:

Synodality [is] a constitutive element of the Church ... In this Church, *as in an inverted pyramid*, the top is located beneath the base ... A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing’. It is a mutual listening in which 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’, in order to know what [the Spirit] ‘says to the Churches’.¹⁷¹

As I mention above, the Church in the Middle Ages has the shape of a pyramid, the pope with his jurisdiction power is at the top of the pyramid, but in the synodal church, the listening church,

¹⁶⁹ Massimo Faggioli. 2020. “From Collegiality to Synodality: Promise and Limits of Francis’s ‘Listening Primacy.’” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 85 (4): 352–69, at 357-58. doi:10.1177/0021140020916034.

¹⁷⁰ Faggioli comments Pope Francis’s first action of asking people to pray for him: “That first impromptu hint of Francis’s ecclesiology was just the announcement of one of the most important contributions of Pope Francis’s pontificate to the post-conciliar Catholic ecclesiological tradition: his emphasis on synodality connected with a renewed reliance on the Bishops’ Synods, the first of which he announced a few months after his election, in October 2013.² Francis has brought about a revival of synodality in the Catholic Church, by making of synodality a recurring term in papal teaching in an unprecedented way. Synodality is the key to understanding Francis’s ecclesiology also because this is an act of the papal reception of a theological debate that started in the early 1990s as a new phase in the debate on Vatican II.” Faggioli, “From Collegiality to Synodality,” 353.

¹⁷¹ Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis” (Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City, October 17, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papafrancesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html (hereafter cited as “October 17, 2015 Address”). The Pope is quoting here his own document *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171. See. Ormond Rush. “Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church.” *Theological Studies* 78, no. 2 (June 2017): 299–325, at 302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563917698561>. The image of the pyramid had become common for describing preconciliar ecclesiology. Bonaventure Kloppenburg summarizes the notion: “We have been used to thinking of the Church as a pyramid: at the top, the pope, bishops, and priests, who preside, teach sanctify, and govern, possessed of authority and power; at the base, the Christian, people, passive recipients who seem to occupy a clearly inferior and secondary place.” Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1974), 311. Cf. Rush, “Inverting the Pyramid,” 301, footnote 8.

the top is located beneath the base so that he can hear the cry of the people; see their needs and their wounds so as to provide pastoral care and remedy medicine accordant to their circumstances and needs. Pope Francis wants the Church to be a “field hospital” for the wounded. Cardinal Blase Cupich remarks:

By calling the church a ‘field hospital,’ Pope Francis calls us to radically rethink ecclesial life. He is challenging all of us to give priority to the wounded. That means placing the needs of others before our own. The ‘field hospital church’ is the antithesis of the ‘self-referential church.’ It is a term that triggers the imagination, forcing us to rethink our identity, mission, and our life together as disciples of Jesus Christ.¹⁷²

In this “field hospital church” the medicine of mercy is used to “meet the present need; it is available to all and requires no prescription.”¹⁷³ Using this stark image he drives home the point that the role of the pope is to be “the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.”¹⁷⁴ In order to fulfill his mission, Francis presents the human act of listening as a most important factor. He hopes that this is somehow manifest in a synodal church. These teachings of Pope Francis are not alien to those of the Second Vatican Council. Ormond Rush¹⁷⁵ comments that... although Francis “does not regularly cite the council explicitly, Vatican II can be shown to be the backdrop to much of what he says. He wants to take the whole of the council’s vision, and for him, the whole is more than the sum of the parts.”¹⁷⁶ During the nine years of his pontificate, on various occasions, he has spoken of a Church that is poor and for the poor; a merciful church, a mission church, the people of God, the Church as a Pilgrim on its journey, etc. For Rush, these are “vital aspects of what he

¹⁷² Cupich, Cardinal Blase, *Field hospital*, in *A Pope Francis Lexicon*, edict. Wooden, Cindy and McElwee, Joshua J. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018), 72.

¹⁷³ Cupich, *ibid.*, 73

¹⁷⁴ Francis, “*Address at the Ceremony*,” available online at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html (accessed 11/25/2019)

¹⁷⁵ Ormond Rush received his STD from the Gregorian University, Rome, and is currently Associate Professor and Reader in Australian Catholic University, Brisbane.

¹⁷⁶ Ormond, “Inverting the Pyramid,” 302.

interprets as the comprehensive vision of the council.” He gives further comment: “‘A synodal church’ is one such aspect, but one that, like the others, the council itself did not quite bring to neat formulation.”¹⁷⁷ However, for Rush, “‘Synodality’ is his catch-all phrase for how he believes the Second Vatican Council is envisioning the church *ad intra*-in its inner workings-without wanting to separate the Church’s inner life with the effectiveness of its outward (*ad extra*) mission in the world.”¹⁷⁸ Indeed, the precise meaning of “synod” is ‘walk on the road (or, path) together’. But even more than on the road together, “the Greek word ‘*hodos*’”, according to Eamonn Fitzgibbon,¹⁷⁹ “can also be understood by the more symbolically open ‘way’, we are all the way and followers of the Way.”¹⁸⁰ When we wander, we have little or no sense of purpose or direction, but when we walk together on the way we know where we are going; we have a common sense of purpose and direction. Vatican II used a most powerful image to talk about the Church: a pilgrim people, exiles journeying in a foreign land (*LG* 6). However, as people of God, we do not walk alone. The Lord walks with us and we are led by the Holy Spirit (*GS* 1).

One of the essential characteristics of a synod is listening. Pope Francis spoke of the synodal Church as “a Church which listens”, like a very old wise person “which has realized that listening is more than simply hearing.”¹⁸¹ This means that to listen requires that we pay attention to the speaker and discern and respond to their speech. This involves not only listening to each other but also attending to the Spirit to know what “he says to the churches” (*Rev.* 2:7). Wijlens

¹⁷⁷ Ormond, “Inverting the Pyramid,” 303.

¹⁷⁸ Ormond, “Inverting the Pyramid,” 303.

¹⁷⁹ Eamonn Fitzgibbon is a priest of the diocese of Limerick. He is Director of the Irish Institute for Pastoral Studies at MIC St Patrick’s Campus, Thurles.

¹⁸⁰ Fitzgibbon, Éamonn. “Together on the Way - Pope Francis and Synodality.” *The Furrow* 68, no. 10 (2017): 532–39, at 533. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44738620>. The “Way” is Jesus himself since He said: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). Kasper comments: The word *way* is “a fundamental word in the Bible for God’s journey with his people; Jesus himself said that he the way (John 14:6), and the first Christian understood themselves as people of the New Way (Act 19:9, 23)”. Kasper. *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 5-6.

¹⁸¹ Francis, address, October 17, 2015; cf. EG 171.

notes: “For Pope Francis, a synodal Church is a listening Church in the sense that 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’ (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).”¹⁸² This college is a place to learn from each other because one way or another we can always learn something from others. Here we become aware of a two-fold emphasis: the Church should listen to the Holy Spirit and the People of God.

1. Listening to the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the vital soul of the Church. Listening to the Holy Spirit in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7) is one of the important practical elements of the synodal Church. Amanda C. Osheim¹⁸³ notes: “A synodal church listens to the one Spirit who moves within all the faithful, guiding persons and communities to be faithful to God so that their shared stories may become part of salvation history.”¹⁸⁴ Thus the Pope invites the synod fathers to ask the Holy Spirit “for the gift of listening: to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.”¹⁸⁵ In preparing for the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis has asked the whole Church to pray to the Holy Spirit to invite Him to work with every member of the Church to transform and educate the mind and the heart. Because as the “*Preparatory Document*” states:

In order to ‘journey together’ in the synodal church, we need to let ourselves be educated by the Spirit to a true mentality, entering with courage and freedom of heart into a conversion process that is indispensable for the ‘continual reformation of which [the

¹⁸² Wijlens, “Reforming the Church by Hitting the Reset Button,” 248.

¹⁸³ Amanda C. Osheim (PhD, Boston College) is Associate Professor of Practical Theology at Loras College in Dubuque, IA, where she is currently the Endowed Professor of the Breitbach Catholic Thinkers and Leaders Program.

¹⁸⁴ Amanda C. Osheim, “Stepping toward a Synodal Church.” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (June 2019): 370–92, at 374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563919836225>.

¹⁸⁵ Wijlens, “Reforming the Church by Hitting the Reset Button,” 249.

Church] always has need, in so far as she is a human institution' (*UR*, no. 6; cf. *EG*, no. 26).¹⁸⁶

In the synodal Church, the People of God must listen to how the Holy Spirit is speaking to each of the faithful so that we may know what the will of God for each of us is. The Spirit speaks to us in many ways, but one of the effective ways is through Scripture. Pope Francis wrote: "We do not blindly seek God, or wait for him for speak to us first, for 'God has already spoken, and there is nothing further that we need to know, which has not been revealed to us.'" (*EG* 175).

Therefore, the most important requirement of a synodal church is every member of the Church needing to open to the Spirit who speaks to us through the Word and let the Word transform and free our hearts. The *Preparatory Document* states: "In order to 'journey together,' we need to let ourselves be educated by the Spirit to a truly synodal mentality, entering with courage and freedom of heart into a conversion process."¹⁸⁷

This leads us to another dimension of listening to the Holy Spirit, that is discernment. Discernment is a key gift of the Holy Spirit, but it also requires human cooperation. The Holy Spirit inspires in human heart, then human responds to it. Osheim considers "discernment is essential for the synodal church."¹⁸⁸ And Archbishop Pierre called "discernment is a hallmark of synodal spirituality."¹⁸⁹ In the synodal church, the purpose of discernment "is not to discern whether other persons are holy or good, and so are therefore trustworthy mediators of the church's tradition. Rather, a discerning spirituality develops one's capacity to see the Holy Spirit through all persons, events, and contexts."¹⁹⁰ Therefore, discernment "must not be occasional,

¹⁸⁶ Synod of Bishops "Preparatory Document," no. 9. The text can be found at: <https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-preparatory-document.html>

¹⁸⁷ Synod of Bishops "Preparatory Document," no. 9.

¹⁸⁸ Osheim, "Stepping toward a Synodal Church." 374.

¹⁸⁹ Pierre, "Synodality and Pope Francis", 15.

¹⁹⁰ Osheim, "Stepping toward a Synodal Church." 374.

but rather habitual”¹⁹¹ for all the people of God. Since it is a gift of God and it is necessary to see God’s will, thus we need to pray for that gift. Following the pattern established during the Second Vatican Council, the Preparatory Committee of the Synod on Synodality asks every member of the Church to recite the prayer: *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*¹⁹²

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
 as we gather together in Your name.
 With You alone to guide us,
 make Yourself at home in our hearts;
 Teach us the way we must go
 and how we are to pursue it.
 We are weak and sinful;
 do not let us promote disorder.
 Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
 nor partiality influence our actions.
 Let us find in You our unity
 so that we may journey together to eternal life
 and not stray from the way of truth
 and what is right.
 All this we ask of You,
 who are at work in every place and time,
 in the communion of the Father and the Son,
 forever and ever. Amen.

Listening to the Holy Spirit is necessary in the movement of the synodal Church, especially with the synod(al) Fathers. But how?- we might ask. In his interview, “A Big Heart Open to God”, Pope Francis reflects on the meaning of *sentire cum ecclesiae* (Thinking with the church); and he gave a quite remarkable statement: “When the dialogue among the people and the bishops and

¹⁹¹ Osheim, “Stepping toward a Synodal Church.” 374.

¹⁹² The text can be found on <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/EN-ADSUMUS.pdf>.

the pope goes down this road and is genuine, then it is assisted by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹³ Taking up the cause of the Holy Father’s imperative, Gaillardetz comments: “Let us not overlook the audacity of this claim. Francis is saying that we can be confident of the assistance of the Holy Spirit to the bishops *on the condition that they are open to listening to others.*”¹⁹⁴ In other words, for this Pope, the Holy Spirit is working in the people of God because all of them receive his gift, thus listening to them is one of the ways to listen to the Holy Spirit. This affirmation leads us to the second part of listening: listen to the People of God.

2. Listening to the People of God¹⁹⁵

When Pope Francis confirms that synodality involves every member of the Church: laity, religious brothers and sisters, priests, bishops, and the pope, all of whom Vatican II refers to as “People of God,”¹⁹⁶ he follows “the council’s affirmation of the shared dignity and consequent equality of all the baptized in the church, regardless of charisms and ministries.”¹⁹⁷ Building on this specific call to listen to the “sense of the faithful”, Pope Francis recognizes the Spirit speaking in the very midst of the people of God. Indeed, *Lumen Gentium* teaches that “The

¹⁹³ Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open To God,” *America* (September 30th, 2013), available at <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview> (accessed on June 17, 2014).

¹⁹⁴ Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 122.

¹⁹⁵ Werner Loser summarizes the studies of scholarships on the biblical roots of the notion of the church as people of God as well as its importance as a theme in patristic writings on the church as following: “In the early church, ‘people of God’ was a common designation for the church (it is central in Augustine), but from the Middle Ages on it yielded place to the concept of Body of Christ.” Werner Loser, “People of God,” in *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. Wolfgan Geinert and Francis Schussler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 527. Quoted from Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 287.

¹⁹⁶ Ormond Rush notes: “Throughout Christian history, the term ‘the people’ had often been used to name ‘the laity’-‘the faithful’ other than the pope, bishops, priests, and religious. The bishops at Vatican II, however, apply the terms ‘people’ and ‘the faithful’ in chapter 2 to refer to all the baptized in the church, ‘from the bishops to the last of the faithful lay persons (*ab episcopis usque ad extremos laicos fideles*)’ (LG 12). Rush, “Inverting the Pyramid,” 307-308. Another place he wrote: *Lumen Gentium* 31 summarized the teaching of chapter 2: “all the faithful, that is, who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are constituted the people of God, who have been made shares [*participes*] in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ and play their part in carrying out the mission of the whole Christian people in the church and in the world.” Quoted Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 293, footnote 28.

¹⁹⁷ Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 260.

baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood” (LG 10). Then the Council teaches that the gift which the Holy Spirit bestows on the Christian through the Sacrament of Baptism bestows upon them a share in the threefold office of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. For the Council, the whole People of God, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, participate in the inner life of Christ as priest, prophet, and king regardless of who they are in the Church. Following this logic, Anthony Ekpo, a pastoral assistant to the archbishop of Brisbane, comments that: “participation in Christ’s priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry is reserved for neither the ordained nor the laity alone; it is a reality shared by all the faithful ‘from the bishops to all the faithful’ (LG 12).”¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, the Council affirms: “The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief” (LG 12). These people possess a supernatural appreciation of the Faith called the *sensus fidei* (sense of the faith) - when the whole people manifest a universal consent in matters of faith as the Council states:

The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (cf. 1Jn. 2:20 and 27) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when, ‘from the bishops to the last of the faithful’ they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals (LG 12).

According to Sullivan, the concept of *sensus fidei* is not something new to the Church’s tradition, but the pyramid model of the church which had prevailed in the years before the council was not “conducive to dialogue in the church or is it open to input from the members. Hence, it is easy to see how the concept of *sensus fidelium* came to be neglected, even ignored, over the years.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Anthony Ekpo. “The *Sensus Fidelium* and the Threefold Office of Christ: A Reinterpretation of Lumen Gentium No. 12.” *Theological Studies* 76, no. 2 (June 2015): 330–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563915574666>, at 337.

¹⁹⁹ Sullivan. *The Road to Vatican II*, 67. Wijlens wrote: The church has always taught that the church as such is infallible, but over the course of history this infallibility of the church came to be understood as the infallibility of

She continues- “This neglect opened the door to additional problems.”²⁰⁰ One of the obvious problems arising from this neglect is ‘clericalism’, which Pope Francis regularly considers one of the greatest threats to Church integrity.²⁰¹

the magisterium. The infallibility of the church was not denied, but the infallibility of the magisterium was understood to be “active” whereas the infallibility of the church was reduced to being merely “passive”. Consequently, the church almost reached the point where the infallibility of the church became dependent on the infallibility of the magisterium. Wijlens, “Reforming the Church by Hitting the Reset Button,” 245.

²⁰⁰ Sullivan. *The Road to Vatican II*, 67.

²⁰¹ Nicholas Senz notes: “Clericalism is a disordered attitude toward clergy, an excessive deference and an assumption of their moral superiority. In the pithy description of Pope Francis, it’s when ‘Clerics feel they are superior, [and when] they are far from the people.’ Yet, as Pope Francis wrote, clericalism can be ‘fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons’—laypeople can fall into clericalism, too! Lay people can fall into thinking that their contributions to the life of the Church are only second-rate, or that in all things, surely ‘Father knows best,’ or that priestly virtue exhausts Christian virtue.” Nicholas Senz, “What is ‘clericalism?’”

<https://aleteia.org/2018/08/23/what-is-clericalism/>

Kathleen N. Hattrup, the Church and Spirituality Editor for Aleteia English, listed 5 of the many times Pope Francis has warned against clericalism.

“There is that spirit of clericalism in the Church, that we feel: clerics feel superior; clerics distance themselves from the people. Clerics always say: ‘this should be done like this, like this, like this, and you – go away!’” It happens “when the cleric doesn’t have time to listen to those who are suffering, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned: the evil of clericalism is a really awful thing; it is a new edition of this ancient evil [of the religious ‘authorities’ lording it over others].” But “the victim is the same: the poor and humble people, who await the Lord.” ~ Homily in Casa Santa Marta, December 13, 2016

A clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making. ~ Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*

But I often think of Jesus knocking on the door, but from inside, because we [do not] let him go out, because we often, without witness, hold him prisoner to our formalities, our closures, our selfishness, our clerical way of life. And clericalism, which is not just clerics, is an attitude that affects all of us: clericalism is a perversion of the Church. Jesus teaches us this path of exit from ourselves, the path of witness. And this is the scandal – because we are sinners! – that we do not go out of ourselves to give testimony. ~ Meeting with young Italians, August 11, 2018

The lack of consciousness of belonging to God’s faithful people as servants, and not masters, can lead us to one of the temptations that is most damaging to the missionary outreach that we are called to promote: clericalism, which ends up as a caricature of the vocation we have received. A failure to realize that the mission belongs to the entire Church, and not to the individual priest or bishop, limits the horizon, and even worse, stifles all the initiatives that the Spirit may be awakening in our midst. Let us be clear about this. The laypersons are not our peons, or our employees. They don’t have to parrot back whatever we say. “Clericalism, far from giving impetus to various contributions and proposals, gradually extinguishes the prophetic flame to which the entire Church is called to bear witness. Clericalism forgets that the visibility and the sacramentality of the Church belong to all the faithful people of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9-14), not only to the few chosen and enlightened.”[2] ~ Meeting with the bishops of Chile during apostolic trip to Chile, January 16, 2018

If we hope for a new and living chapter of faith in this [Latin American] continent, we will not get it without women. Please, do not let them be reduced to servants of our ingrained clericalism. For they are on the front lines of

In the early 1960s, the conciliar Fathers brought *sensus fidelium* back into focus for the Church's teaching and "its first explicit appearance in the council document in *LG* no. 12."²⁰² Article 12 affirms that 'the whole body of the faithful (*universitas fidelium*)' participates in the prophetic or teaching office of the church. Essential to that participation is 'the entire people's supernatural sense of the faith (*supernaturali sensus fidei totius populi*)' which the Spirit bestows.²⁰³ *Lumen Gentium* states:

The holy people of God share also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, ... The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One,

the Latin American Church, in their setting out with Jesus, in their persevering amid the sufferings of their people, in their clinging to the hope that conquers death, and in their joyful way of proclaiming to the world that Christ is alive and risen. I would like to repeat something I recently said to the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. It is imperative to overcome the clericalism that treats the *Christifideles laici* as children and impoverishes the identity of ordained ministers. ~ Meeting with executive committee of CELAM during apostolic journey to Colombia, September 7, 2017

Kathleen N. Hattrup, "5 of the many times Pope Francis has warned against clericalism." <https://aleteia.org/2018/08/23/5-of-the-many-times-pope-francis-has-railed-against-clericalism/>

²⁰² Ekpo, "The *Sensus Fidelium*", 330-331. According to Rush, *sensus fidei* can apply to either the individual or communal sense of faith depending on whether it is the *sensus fidei fidelis* or the *sensus fidei fidelium*. The former, *sensus fidei fidelis* (not just *sensus fidei*), refers to the sense of the faith of the individual believer, while *sensus fidei fidelium* or *sensus fidelium* refers to the corporate ecclesial sense of the faith that can be found in local communities, that is, at the parish, diocesan, and provincial levels of the church's life. There is, however, a dialectical relationship between the *sensus fidei fidelis* and the *sensus fidei fidelium* that enriches each other: our corporate sense of faith forms and nourishes our individual faith and vice versa. See Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful, and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2009) 215-19. The relationship and difference between the *sensus fidei fidelis* and the *sensus fidei fidelium* are highlighted in the International Theological Commission's *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_Cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html. cf. Ekpo, "The *Sensus Fidelium*", 331, footnote 2.

Peter Phan wrote: "Intimately connected with teaching function of the Church are the *sensus fidei* or *sensus fidelium* and reception/dissent. By *sensus fidei* is meant the 'subjective quality—a supernatural gift, graced sensitivity, or instinct-given to all believers, enabling them to perceive the truth of the faith' (Granfield, *The Limits of the Papacy*, 135). The *sensus fidelium* (*communis sensus fidei*, *sensus Ecclesiae*, *sensus Christi*) refers to the objective quality, 'the corporated presence of the *sensus fidei* in the community of believers, the objective mind of the Church—what the faithful believe' (Granfield, *The Limits of the Papacy*, 135)." While deeply convinced of the irreplaceable role of both the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium* in the formulation of the doctrines of the faith, especially when there is unanimous agreement (*consensus fidelium*), Granfield warns that they should not be overestimated or viewed in an uncritical or romantic way, especially if this *sensus fidelium* is determined by the use of polls. The reasons are that not every position held by the faithful is necessarily a true expression of the *sensus fidelium*, that the *sensus fidelium* itself is not self-sufficient but must be related to the hierarchical magisterium, that the magisterium and the *sensus fidelium* are complementary and not opposing realities, and that broad consultation should be part of the process by which doctrines are formulated." Cf. Peter C. Phan, "A North American Ecclesiology: The Achievement of Patrick Granfield," in Granfield, Patrick, and Peter C. Phan. *The Gift of the Church*, 493.

²⁰³ Cf. Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 310.

cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth (*LG* 12)

The Holy Spirit unceasingly acts in the Church and bestows on People of God the gift of *sensus fidei*. This in turn helps them “adhere unfailingly to the truth of the gospel, helps souls to penetrate it more deeply, and apply it more fully in daily life.”²⁰⁴ Ekpo chooses to argue thus,

Through the *sensus fidelium* God’s people are made capable of recognizing God’s word for what it is; however, it comes to them through God’s agents. The *sensus fidelium* helps the faithful cling without fail to the faith of the living tradition and revelation delivered to them through the saints, to penetrate it more deeply by accurate insights, and to apply it more thoroughly to life.²⁰⁵

Francis, then, propelled Vatican II’s teaching on the *sensus fidelium* when he explained that the image of the Church he wanted to project during his papacy is that of the “faithful people of God” bound together by a “*supernaturalis sensus fidei totius populi*” (the supernatural sense of faith of the entire people of God) (*LG* no. 12).²⁰⁶ In the speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the bishops’ synod, on 17, October 2015, the Holy Father said:

After stating that the people of God is comprised of all the baptized who are called to ‘be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood’ (*LG* 21), the Second Vatican Council went on to say that ‘the whole body of the faithful, who have an anointing which comes from the holy one, cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people of God’²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Ekpo, “*The Sensus Fidelium*”, 339.

²⁰⁵ Ekpo, “*The Sensus Fidelium*”, 340. Ekpo summarizes that “Among the aspects of the *sensus fidelium* emphasized by the Council Fathers in *LG* no. 12, three are worth highlighting . . . : first, the *sensus fidelium* is the gift of the Spirit; second, it is a gift given to all the faithful in the church; and third, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit that helps the faithful adhere unfailingly to the truth of the gospel, penetrate it more deeply, and apply it more fully in daily life: *accipit, adhaeret, penetrat, and applicat*. Ekpo, “*The Sensus Fidelium*”, 338.

²⁰⁶ Ekpo, “*The Sensus Fidelium*”, 330-331.

²⁰⁷ Pope Francis, speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the bishops’ synod, 17 October 2015.

Pope Francis returns to this topic again in *Evangelii Gaudium*. In paragraph 19 of *Evangelii Gaudium*, he rephrases the infallibility of the magisterium as based on the infallibility of the people of God:

In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The people of God are holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*, this means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith (*EG* 19).

Pope Francis is faithful to Vatican II's teaching on *sensus fidei*, and he goes further by emphasizing unique quality of the infallibility of the People of God.²⁰⁸ To that extent, Faggioli remarks: "This passage [*EG* 19] about the *sensus fidei* is even more remarkable because it is the only passage of the exhortation that talks about infallibility, and it does so in terms of infallibility *in credendo* of the people of God."²⁰⁹ In doing so, Pope Francis did not deny papal infallibility, rather he promotes a gentle decentralization by including and elevating the infallibility (the voices and experiences) of the People of God.

Because the gift of the Holy Spirit bestows Grace upon the whole people of God, they in general cannot err in the matter of faith. In the sense that they are capable of recognizing God's Word and cling to the Faith of the living tradition and revelation as Ekpo explains:

Through the *sensus fidelium* God's people are made capable of recognizing God's word for what it is, however it comes to them through God's agents. *The sensus fidelium* helps

²⁰⁸ *Lumen Gentium* recognizes two kinds of infallibility: the first is the infallibility of the whole people's belief which is highlighted in *Lumen Gentium* 12; the second is the infallibility of the magisterium which is highlighted in *Lumen Gentium* 25. Ekpo comments: "*LG* no. 12 affirms the pneumatic assistance of the whole people of God by the Holy Spirit *in credendo*, and *LG* no. 25 affirms it of the magisterium *in docendo*. These passages seem to suggest that the gift given by the Spirit to the whole people of God *in credendo* is different from the gift given to the bishops *in docendo*. The gift given to the whole body of the faithful seems to be that of passive obedience to the bishops, even if *DV* no. 10 uses the word *conspirado* to highlight the nature of the relationship between bishops and the faithful. This, again, seems to convey an understanding that conceives the church in terms of bipolar division, akin to the model of an *ecclesia docens* and an *ecclesia discens*. "*The Sensus Fidelium*", 342.

²⁰⁹ Massimo Faggioli, and Ilia Delio. *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving Toward Global Catholicity. Catholicity in an Evolving Universe*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020, 56.

the faithful cling without fail to the faith of the living tradition and revelation delivered to them through the saints, to penetrate it more deeply by accurate insights, and to apply it more thoroughly to life.²¹⁰

Moreover, “Through the Holy Spirit, the people of God are ennobled, elevated, and taken into the divine life.”²¹¹ They become the living witnesses, effectively and faithfully conveying the Word to new cultures and contexts. The Church should listen to all voices in order to “find what the Lord asks of his Church today.”²¹² In the Letter to Cardinal Marc Ouellet President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, on 19 March, Pope Francis invited the Cardinal (and through him to all the leaders of the Church) to trust in the people of God and trust that the work of the Holy Spirit is alive in them. He wrote: “Let us trust in our People, in their memory and in their ‘sense of smell,’ let us trust that the Holy Spirit acts in and with our People and that this Spirit is not merely the ‘property’ of the ecclesial hierarchy.”²¹³

Pope Francis believes that listening to the people of God is the best way to “help the Church to make pastoral decisions that correspond as closely as possible to God’s will.”²¹⁴ In 2014, Pope Francis decided to convoke the ‘Synod on the Family’ in a two-stage process. Before the first stage, he had a questionnaire distributed to be answered at all levels of the Church. The answers to the questionnaire became the basis of discussions for the bishops in the first stage. It was a frank and open discussion with no conditions or interference by Francis. The preliminary report from the first stage became the subject of the questionnaire before the second stage, which

²¹⁰ Ekpo, “*The Sensus Fidelium*”, 340.

²¹¹ Michael Welker, “The Holy Spirit,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University, 2007), 236-48, at 241. See. Ekpo, “*The Sensus Fidelium*”, 338.

²¹² Francis, 4 October 2014.

²¹³ Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to cardinal Marc Ouellet President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, 19 March 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html.

²¹⁴ Synod of Bishops, “*Vademecum: For the Synod on Synodality*,” September 2021, 1.3.

happened a year later. This is different from previous synods. Luigi Gioia, faculty member at Pontificio Ateneo Sant'Alselmo, comments: "Rather than a synod, it was a 'synodal process', a way of generating a broad conversation on the issues at stake based on the conviction that an ecclesial agreement is not produced by top-down authoritative decisions but by allowing the maturing of agreement – a *consensus* – at grass-roots level."²¹⁵ That was the first time the whole people of God were asked to give their opinions on the real issues which they confronted in their daily life: the state of Matrimony - divorced and remarried, the union between people of the same sex, and the pastoral care of children adopted or born in these unions... and most significantly is that it was "the first time people perceived the possibility to raise real questions without fear of censorship from the Roman Curia."²¹⁶ Pope Francis wanted to consult the people on the matter of family life before the Bishops gather at Vatican City to discuss the topic of family life. It was clear in his mind - "how could we speak about the family without listening to their joys and hope, their sorrows and their anguish?"²¹⁷ The bishops who will be meeting together in Rome to discuss family problems in this modern world need to open their ears and hearts to listen and understand the difficult family problems that the faithful have been facing in their daily lives. Only in so doing can they make pastoral decisions that are close to God's will and benefit the faithful.

But more surprising to many people was, in his opening address of the 2014 Synod, Pope Francis promoted the freedom of speech and speaking honestly. He explicitly states:

²¹⁵ Luigi Gioia, "The Recent Practice of Synodality and Its Ecclesiological Significance in the Light of Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*," 9; https://www.academia.edu/25532592/The_Recent_Practice_of_Synodality_and_its_Ecclesiological_Significance_in_the_Light_of_Pope_Francis_Evangelii_Gaudium.

²¹⁶ Gioia "The Recent Practice of Synodality," 9.

²¹⁷ Francis, 17 October 2015.

One general and basic condition is this: speaking honestly. Let no one say: “I cannot say this, they will think this or this of me...”. It is necessary to say with parrhesia all that one feels. After the last Consistory (February 2014), in which the family was discussed, a Cardinal wrote to me, saying: what a shame that several Cardinals did not have the courage to say certain things out of respect for the Pope, perhaps believing that the Pope might think something else. This is not good, this is not synodality, because it is necessary to say all that, in the Lord, one feels the need to say: without polite deference, without hesitation.²¹⁸

To speak honestly requires some confidence that the speaker can trust the listener: that the listener is listening openly and without judgment. Such trust is needed for the faithful “to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires” (*Canon* 212, §3).²¹⁹ Trust will lead to dialogue. Listening does not guarantee inclusive dialogue, but a good dialogue always includes listening. In the previous section, I mentioned that the language of the Second Vatican Council was the language of open dialogue. In this regard Gilles Routhier,²²⁰ points out: “in the texts of Vatican II, three actions specifically describe what dialogue is, which in this way is modulated based on these three actions: to express one’s opinion, to listen, and to counsel.”²²¹ This is the spirit of synodality²²² which Pope Francis has affirmed for the third millennium. The newly realized process began with Vatican II and now he wishes to put it into practice through the two-year Synod on the Family and other Synods in the future. It is clear for Wijlens, that through the process of a two-year Synod on the family, the

²¹⁸ Pope Francis, “Greeting to the Synod Fathers During the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops” (6th October 2014). Cf. Gioia “The Recent Practice of Synodality,” 10.

²¹⁹ Cf. Renken, “Synodality,” 38.

²²⁰ Gilles Routhier, the Monseigneur-de-Laval professor of theology and dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Université Laval (Quebec, Canada).

²²¹ Gilles Routhier, “The Renewal of Synodal Life in Local Churches,” in Faggioli, *For a Missionary Reform of the Church*, 259.

²²² Referring to Bernard Franck, Routhier wrote: “Bernard Franck has described the ‘synodality spirit’ as follows: Mutual listening, exchange and communication, sharing and solidarity, the desire to reach consensus, or a common conviction. It takes the will to collaborate and to cooperate, to accept and to welcome, to give and to receive. This supposes relationships marked by respect, charity, humility, and poverty. This is the synodal spirit.” Gilles Routhier, “The Renewal of Synodal Life in Local Churches,” 261.

exercise of the practice of collegiality is to be put into the context of synodality. Accordingly, he wrote:

Fifty years after the closing of Vatican II Pope Francis put the doctrine of papacy and collegiality as expressed in the third chapter in the operative level finally into the context of the second chapter of *Lumen gentium*. Pope and (college of) bishops are now located within the people of God. The synods of 2014 and 2015 reflect this in their operation. One can say; the exercise of the doctrine of collegiality was put into the context of synodality which includes all members of the faithful.²²³

Of course, we know that the result of the Synod on the Family, the final document *Amoris Laetitia*, caused some disagreements or conflict among the people of God on the crucial issues that the faithful have been confronting in their daily lives. Difficulties such as the communion for divorced and remarried people. Another is the pastoral response to people living in a same-sex unions. However, we should not be surprised; this need not be feared or couched in discouragement. It need not be considered as a sign of failure. Instead, we should see it as a normal characteristic of a truly synodal church. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis admitted that there are bound to be conflicts in the synodal Church. Interestingly, he addresses the necessity of facing and not ignoring conflict. Yet he also reminds us that we should keep everything in perspective. For Francis, ignoring or pretending something is not there should not be the attitude of the People of God. Instead of ignoring conflict or pretending it is not there, or becoming blinded by it and becoming prisoners to defiance, we should recognize and face conflict bravely. Because, as he argued, conflict can actually lead us to a greater realization of what we share in common. Furthermore, he states: "... there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head-on, resolve it, and make it a

²²³ Wijlens, "Reforming the Church by Hitting the Reset Button," 250; Borrás wrote: "The notion of synodality intersects with that of collegiality: the two are distinct, but they support and reinforce each other... The more we are 'synodal', the more we are 'collegial'-and vice versa." Borrás, "Ecclesial Synodality," 219.

link in the chain of a new process. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’ (Mt 5:9)” (EG 227). Another place he wrote: “In this way it becomes possible to build communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity” (EG 228). Confronting the reality of disagreement, of open conflict relating to the teaching of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis was obviously not afraid of it. Instead, he openly and adamantly acknowledged the inevitability of crisis and disagreement. Gioia remarks:

Yet he made clear that even these drawbacks were normal, to be expected and not to be feared or discouraged, nor to be considered a sign of failure. These are normal and predictable downsides in a truly synodal church, that is a church where pastors at all levels, pope included, know that ‘time is greater than space’, i.e. that nobody should try to ‘crystallize processes and presume to hold them back.’²²⁴

Moreover, as the Holy Father said in the concluding speech of the 2018 Youth Synod: “the purpose of the Synod is not a document,”²²⁵ but ongoing sharing of lived experience, “*to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness* that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.”²²⁶ (emphasis original). Synod is a process, not a solution. Thus, there is no quick solution for all the issues. Synodality require patience and openness to welcome new and suppressing things that come from the Holy Spirit through the brothers and sisters who are on journey with us.

Therefore, disagreement or conflict serves as the teacher who teaches us new and surprising

²²⁴ Gioia, “The Recent Practice of Synodality,” 11.

²²⁵ Pope Francis, concluding speech of the 2018 Youth Synod, 27 October 2018. Cf. Faggioli, “Synod and Synodality in Pope Francis’s Words”, 96.

²²⁶ Pope Francis, Opening speech of the 2018 Youth Synod, 3 October 2018. The text can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa-francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html

things. *Vademecum* states: “Listening to those who have the same views as we do bear no fruit. Dialogue involves coming together across diverse opinions. Indeed, God often speaks through the voices of those that we can easily exclude, cast aside, or discount.”²²⁷

Recognizing the fruit of the two-year Synod on Family, Francis wants the Synod on Synodality that is currently happening to have the same format. The first stage is the listening that happens within the local churches: parishes, religious communities, lay movements, associations of the faithful, and other ecclesial groups. All faithful are invited to involve themselves in the synodal process. For Francis, everyone, “even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked” (EG 236). This is the purpose of the first stage of the synodal process - as *The Preparatory Document* points out:

The purpose of this initial phase of the synodal journey is to foster a broad consultation process in order to gather the wealth of the experiences of lived synodality, in its different articulations and facets, involving the Pastors and the Faithful of the [local] Churches at all the different levels, through the most appropriate means according to the specific local realities: the consultation, coordinated by the Bishop, is addressed ‘to the Priests, Deacons and lay Faithful of their [local Churches, both individually and in associations, without overlooking the valuable contribution that consecrated men and women can offer’ (EG 70).²²⁸

In this listening phase, the bishops of the local churches have the responsibility to appoint the Diocesan Contact Person(s) so that the process of listening can reach “out to involve the greatest number of people possible, and especially those on the periphery who are often excluded and forgotten.”²²⁹ Stated explicitly, *Vademecum* wants the Diocesan Contact Person(s) to pay

²²⁷ Synod of Bishop, *Vademecum*, 2.2. The text can be found at: <https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-vademecum-for-the-synod-on-synodality.html>

²²⁸ Synod of Bishop, *Preparatory Document*, no. 31.

²²⁹ Synod of Bishop, *Vademecum*, 1.5.

particular attention to “women, the handicapped, refugees, migrants, the elderly, people who live in poverty, Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith, etc.” The widest participation will help to ensure that the syntheses formulated at the levels of dioceses, episcopal conferences, and the whole Church capture the true realities and lived experiences of the People of God.

The second phase of listening happens at the level of the Conference of Bishops. The purpose of this phase is “to compile the input and feedback that they have received from the dioceses and eparchies in order to formulate syntheses that aptly capture the contributions of participants at the local level... These syntheses will then serve as the basis for the first edition of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which will be published by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.”²³⁰ The initial *Instrumentum Laboris* will be the “working document” for different regional meetings.

As indicated earlier, the final phase of listening will happen at the assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2023 where the leadership of the Church will be gathered to speak and listen to one another on the basis of the Synodal Process that began at the local level. This final phase aims to “discern at a universal level the voice of the Holy Spirit who has been speaking throughout the entire Church.”²³¹

The Synod on Synodality is still progressing, thus we don’t yet know the fruit of it. However, there are some challenges which I will talk about in section VI. In short, in this section of the paper we emphasize the value of contemplative listening as essential for synodality. The people of God must listen to the Holy Spirit in order to know the will of God. The Church, in kind, needs to listen to the people of God so that She can make pastoral decisions that correspond

²³⁰ Synod of Bishop, *Vademecum*, 3.2.

²³¹ Synod of Bishop, *Vademecum*, 3.4.

as closely as possible to God's will, as we know it. But how can the Church listen to Her people if She does not change Her attitude and structure?

3. Conversion of Papacy

Pope Francis's desire for a humble, listening, discerning church has led him to make regular pleas for the recovery and reform of consultative and collegial structures. He admits that although Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* asked for help in finding "a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation" (UUS, 95). But until now there has been little progress. He wrote then:

Since I am called to put into practice what I ask of others, I too must think about a conversion of the papacy. It is my duty, as the Bishop of Rome, to be open to suggestions which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelization. Pope [John Paul II](#) asked for help in finding "a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation". We have made little progress in this regard. The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion (EG 32).

This desire led him to create the Council of Cardinals on 13, April 2013, which he described as "a further expression of episcopal communion and assistance to the *munus petrinum* which the Episcopates across the world is able to offer."²³² Later in his interview with Father Antonio Spadaro, S. J., Pope Francis makes clear his expectation from the Council of Cardinals:

"The consistories [of cardinals], the synods [of bishops] are, for example, important places to make real and active this consultation. We must, however, give them a less rigid form. I do not want token consultations, but real consultations. The consultation group of eight cardinals, this "outsider" advisory group, is not only my decision, but it is the result

²³² Pope Francis, "Chirograph Establishing the Council of Cardinals", 28 September 2013, quoted from Massimo Faggioli, "Synod and Synodality in Massimo Faggioli, "Synod and Synodality in Pope Francis's Words", *The Way*, 59/4 (October 2020), 89-100, at 89.

of the will of the cardinals, as it was expressed in the general congregations before the conclave. And I want to see that this is a real, not ceremonial consultation.²³³

Since then the 2013 Council of Cardinals had been working to reform the Roman Curia. After years of anticipation, on Saturday, March 19, 2022, Pope Francis promulgated the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* on the Roman Curia and its service to the Church and to the World as the fruit of the Council of Cardinals. According to Andrea Torneilli, the editorial director of the Vatican Dicastery for Communication, “The priority of evangelization and the role of the laity are the primary ideas that connect the new Apostolic Constitution governing the Roman Curia with the Second Vatican Council.”²³⁴ The most prominent change concerns the involvement of laymen and women in the roles of governance and responsibility. *Praedicate Evangelium* states that if “any member of the faithful” can preside over a Dicastery or a curial body, “given their particular competence, power of governance, and particular function,” it is because every institution of the Curia acts in virtue of the power entrusted to it by the Pope. This change has been hailed as a revolutionary development because it removes the barrier that prevents the laity from taking up important positions in the Roman Curia. Indeed, Article 7 of the apostolic constitution *Pastor Bonus* states: “matters requiring the exercise of the power of governance be reserved to those in Holy Orders.” Now, the layman or woman can preside over a Dicastery or a curial body if the pope appoints them. And they are to be considered equal to Cardinals, Bishops, or priests who are the head of any Dicastery. Because their authority comes from the Pope who appointed them, not from a Holy Order. Torneilli comments: “In this way, what was established by the Council is fully realized and has already been incorporated into

²³³ Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open To God,” *America* (September 30th, 2013). The text can be found at <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview> (accessed on April 21, 2021)

²³⁴ Andrea Torneilli, “Baptism and mission: Two conciliar keys to *Praedicate evangelium*,” <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2022-03/baptism-and-mission-two-conciliar-keys-to-praedicate-evangelium.html>

canon law, which recognizes that, by virtue of baptism, ‘there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality regarding dignity and action.’²³⁵

Pope Francis’s desire for listening and a call for a “conversion of the papacy” does not stop at establishing the council of cardinals. It seeks to influence souls by recognizing the power of teaching and governing of each bishop of particular churches. By the sacrament of Episcopal Consecration, the bishop takes on (in a new way) the baptismal promises: a “threefold office of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. These three are correlated to the three principal concerns of the bishop in the life of the diocese, which is presented as responsibilities of teaching, sanctifying, and governing.”²³⁶ Based on the teaching of Vatican II, Pope Francis seeks to redefine the Petrine ministry and the role of the bishop. In his vision, the Petrine ministry is to serve unity in charity, not to merely rule over all local churches. Thus, in *Evangelii Gaudium* he wrote: “It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. Therefore, he promulgates the importance “of the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’” (*EG* 16). In the opening of *Amoris Laetitia* Francis goes a step further: “I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium” (*AL*, 3).²³⁷ The bishop of a particular Church is the one who walks with his people “sometimes in front, sometimes behind, and sometimes in the middle.” Continuing this vein of thought- “We walk in front in order to guide the community, in the middle in order to encourage and support, and at the back so that no one too far behind, to keep them united.”²³⁸ Therefore, the bishop is the one who understands and has

²³⁵ Andrea Tornielli, “Baptism and Mission.”

²³⁶ Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 116

²³⁷ Massimo Faggioli, and Ilia Delio. *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis*, 103.

²³⁸ Francis. *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church*. Chicago: Loyola Press, a Jesuit ministry, 2014, 75; address to the clergy in the Cathedral of San Rufino in Assisi, Italy, October 4, 2013.

lived experience with his people's daily circumstances, because "under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the bishop can discern the most fruitful processes for listening to the People of God in his diocese."²³⁹ He is the suitable person to discern the issues which arise in any particular territory and the one to provide pastoral care for his people, not the Roman Curia. For this reason, in *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis calls for the full integration of divorced and remarried couples into full communion with the Church community. Even so, this leaves the responsibility and the "process of accompaniment and discernment" (*LA* 300) to individual bishops for them to reach decisions and draw up guidelines for the pastoral care and integration of such couples. This is why *Praedicate Evangelium* urged the bishops to exercise their authority with "a sense of responsibility, conveying the faculties included in the office of head of the particular Churches which are entrusted to them" (*Praedicate Evangelium*, Principles, No. 2).²⁴⁰

Furthermore, within the national bishops' conferences, many documents from the Vatican recognized this juridical authority over issues which relate to the customs and culture of particular ecclesial communities. And in 1995, John Paul II issued an encyclical letter on Commitment to Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*. Here he asked the Church to seek together "a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation."²⁴¹ Interestingly, Gioia points out,

Despite these declarations, during the pontificates of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI the papacy was considerably strengthened and centralization increased not only from a practical but especially from a theological viewpoint. During that period the interventions of the magisterium consistently undermined episcopal collegiality, notably by the

²³⁹ Synod of Bishop, *Vademecum*, 4.2.

²⁴⁰ Quoted from Gianfranco Ghirlanda, S. J., "The Apostolic Constitution 'Praedicate Evangelium' on the Roman Curia", <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-apostolic-constitution-praedicate-evangelium-on-the-roman-curia/>

²⁴¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on Commitment to Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995) n.95 at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html. Cited in EG 32.

affirmation that the universal church is “is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular church” and by the restrictions to the teaching role of the episcopal conference.²⁴²

Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium* that “The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit (EG 32). However, it is painful to admit that “this desire has not been fully realized, since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated” (EG 32). Therefore, under his papacy, Pope Francis wants a magisterium that listens. He puts into practice the principle of recognizing the teaching role of the episcopal conferences. In all the major documents that he has issued: *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Laudato si*, *Amoris laetia*, and *Gaudete et exultate*, the Holy Father quotes extensively from national and regional episcopal conferences. Like in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis cited messages and pastoral documents issued by nine different regional bodies of bishops from a wide diversity of contexts including those of Latin America (CELAM), Brazil, the Philippines, India, Italy, France, the Congo, the United States, and Europe.²⁴³ And in *Laudato Si*, he cited eighteen national and regional bishops’ conferences, most of whom speak from the Third World.²⁴⁴ By quoting from the national bishops’ conferences, Eugene Duffy comments, Pope Francis “is implicitly acknowledging that they have a teaching role and that he is incorporating their teaching into the universal magisterium. He is also acting as a conduit to

²⁴² Gioia “The Recent Practice of Synodality,” 3-4.

²⁴³ Catherine Clifford. “Pope Francis’ Call for the Conversion of the Church in Our Time.” *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (April 2015): 33–55, at 35.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=102386169&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

²⁴⁴ Eugene Duffy. “Diversity in Teaching by Episcopal Conferences: Some Positive Considerations.” *Studia Canonica* 53, no. 1 (2019): 53-74, at. 56. c doi:10.2143/STC.53.1.3287022

facilitate the teaching of individual conferences becoming accessible to the whole Church.”²⁴⁵

More recently, *Praedicate Evangelium* mentions episcopal conferences more than fifty times and clearly recognizes its essential role in the life of the Church. The *Praedicate Evangelium* says:

They [the national episcopal conferences] should now be consulted by the Roman Curia on many, if not all, questions of import for the universal Church, on issues ranging from the evangelization, to the teaching of right doctrine, to the appointment of bishops. For many of these issues, local bishops’ conferences will be left wondering if they can expect further canonical reforms explaining how they are meant to treat many of these issues — and perhaps granting them enhanced legal scope to do so.²⁴⁶

Pope Francis made another big step toward bringing about real collegial governance by granting to the synod of Bishops authority to publish the final document as an official act of the magisterium (that is, as official teaching). On September 19, 2018, the Chair of Peter issued the apostolic constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, on the Synod of Bishops. The Art 18. §1 states that: “Once the approval of the members has been obtained, the Final Document of the Assembly is presented to the Roman Pontiff, who decides on its publication. If it is expressly approved by the Roman Pontiff, the Final Document participates in the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter’ (*Episcopalis communio* art.18. §1). In other words, the final document will be a doctrinal text on the same level as the “post-synodal apostolic exhortation” that the pope himself will have written and published after the synods. This is really a revolutionary decision. Because in the mind of Paul VI, who re-established the Synod of Bishops, saw that this particular synod has a role of consultation only,²⁴⁷ and it was affirmed by the *Code of Canon Law* in 1983.²⁴⁸ The

²⁴⁵ Duffy. “Diversity in Teaching by Episcopal Conferences” 56.

²⁴⁶ Ed. Caondon, “*Praedicate evangelium*: Pope Francis’ curial reform still a work in progress”, <https://www.pillaratholic.com/p/predicate-evangelium-pope-francis?s=r>

²⁴⁷ Cf. Wijlens, “Reforming the Church by Hitting the Reset Button,” 241.

²⁴⁸ Gioia wrote: According to the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* (CIC 342-348) the synod of bishops is not primarily the expression of the collegiality of bishops but an emanation of the authority of the pope. The synod “is directly subject to the authority of the Roman Pontiff” who gathers it, determines its topic and length, approves or appoints its

power of publishing the final document belongs to the pope and it becomes papal teaching.

However, with *Episcopalis communio* the power of publishing the final is granted to the Synod of Bishops. Of course, with the consent of the pope. Someone may argue that the synod process will be still under the control and say-so of the pope. Of course, it will be, there is no doubt.

And why not? For within the Roman Catholic Church, even the ecumenical councils always act “with and under” the pope, who is the head of the college of bishops (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 22; *Episcopalis Communio* 1). The qualification placed upon the Synod’s authority is no different from the qualification placed upon an ecumenical council. If the Pope were to say to the bishops either at the Synod of Bishops or in an ecumenical council, that they are wrong and that he will not agree with their document; then it is not accepted in the Church. In any case, for the Holy Father is, by the will of God, “the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful” (*LG* 23, *PA* Prologue). And we should keep in mind the principle *cum Petro et sub Petro*. This principle is a guarantee of ecclesial unity. As Renken notes: “the fact that the Synod always acts *cum Petro et sub Petro* – indeed, not only *cum Petro*, but also *sub Petro* – is not a limitation of freedom, but a guarantee of

members, presides over it and defines its agenda (CIC 344). While instituted to foster “closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and bishops”, its main role is “to assist the Roman Pontiff with [its] counsel in the preservation and growth of faith and morals and in the observance and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline and to consider questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world” (CIC 342). Thus the synod simply is an advice-giving body and even when, in particular circumstances, it is endowed with deliberative power (which in practice has never happened), it is not on the basis of the authority of the college of bishops but of the authority of the pope (who also has to ratify the decision in any case) (CIC 343). Gioia, “The Present Practice of Synodality,” 15. Bradford E. Hinze comments: “In fact, papal and curial apprehension about synodality, and emphasis on the need to place restrictions on the exercise of episcopal collegiality, were already in evidence in Pope Paul VI’s 1965 *motu Proprio Apostolica Sillicitudo* that officially established a particular model of the synod of bishops designed as an extension of papal authority, with curial oversight and control over synodal procedures. This intervention served as a preemptive strategy that operated at cross-purposes with what the majority of council participants were poised to establish in their deliberations during the final revisions of *Christus Dominus*.” Bradford E. Hinze. “Synodality in the Catholic Church.” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 192, no. 2 (2012): 121–30, at 123. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001911072&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

unity.”²⁴⁹ In a similar sense, Clifford comments that during Pope Francis’s papacy, “papal teaching ... moves from the center in Rome out to periphery of the local churches, or which comes from the ‘top’ down to the bishops and the broader community of baptized faithful.”²⁵⁰

These aspects show that Pope Francis does not only receive and implement documents according to the spirit of Vatican II but also expands and advances the entire Council in many of its inherent aspects. He wants to build genuine collegiality in the Catholic Church. One in which the college of bishops with the pope as its head share the governing and teaching office in the Church.²⁵¹ For Pope Francis, putting collegiality into the practice of governing the Church is necessary, and step by step he has fulfilled the conciliar Fathers’ desire. To focus attention on this issue, Bradford E. Hinze, Professor of Theology at Fordham University, New York, notes:

Francis will be hailed for advancing the most important desires among the majority of bishops at Vatican II, the full development of a robust theology of episcopacy and episcopal collegiality in complement and counterbalance Vatican I’s teaching on the papacy, and their implementation in synods of bishops and episcopal conferences.²⁵²

He even takes a further step by saying that the synodal church is what the Lord expects from the church in the third millennium. The collegial church is necessary, but it does not automatically fulfill the expectations of evangelization to modern men and women. Because no matter how one might seek to define it, the collegial church is the church governed by the Hierarchy alone. The emphasis on synodality then is about sharing government, sharing power, and re-imagining necessary structures. Faggioli comments most properly:

²⁴⁹ Renken, “*Synodality*” 16, footnote 25.

²⁵⁰ Clifford. “Pope Francis’ Call for the Conversion of the Church in Our Time.” 35.

²⁵¹ Quinn notes: “True Collegiality necessarily means decentralization—that is, sharing of the governing and teaching offices in the church with the bishops rather than having all decisions and teaching come only from the pope and his Curia.” Quinn, “Vatican Council II Collegiality and Structures of Communion,” in Paul G. Crowley. *From Vatican II to Pope Francis*, 61.

²⁵² Hinze, Bradford. “Dreams of Synodality, Specters of Constraint.” *Louvain Studies* 43, no. 3 (2020): 297–312, at 307.

Episcopal collegiality at Vatican II means that the papacy and the college of bishops need to work collegiality to develop reflections necessary for the government of the church. On the other hand, collegiality is typical of a "guild," of a separate group. Therefore, collegiality must be integrated with synodality. Moreover, Vatican II did not articulate properly the relationship between *collegio episcoporum* and *communio ecclesiarum*.²⁵³

Along these same lines he states - "The college of bishops has been largely seen as the rubber stamp of papal primacy. Episcopal collegiality has meant (until Francis) something 'affective' without being 'effective.'"²⁵⁴ But to state it one more time, the synodal church is the church of listening, discerning, and praying in common, and it involves "the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church."²⁵⁵ It does not merely seek to

²⁵³ Massimo Faggioli, "For a Reform of the Central Government of a Collegial and Synodal Church Fifty Years After Vatican II," in in Faggioli, Massimo. *For a Missionary Reform of the Church: The Civiltà Cattolica Seminar*. Edited by Antonio Spadaro and Galli Carlos María. Translated by Demetrio S Yocum. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2017, 363-64.

²⁵⁴ Massimo Faggioli, "For a Reform of the Central Government of a Collegial and Synodal Church Fifty Years After Vatican II," 364.

⁹³ International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church", March 2, 2018, No. 7. In No. 66, International Theological Commission wrote: "The concept of synodality is broader than that of collegiality because it includes the participation of all in the Church and that of all the Churches. Collegiality in the strict sense denotes the assertion and expression of the communion of the People of God in the ranks of Bishops, in other words in the college of Bishops *cum Petro et sub Petro*, and - through that - communion between all Churches. The notion of synodality implies collegiality and vice versa, inasmuch as they both, being different, support and authenticate each other. Vatican II's teaching on the sacramentality of the episcopate and on collegiality is a basic theological premise for a correct and complete theology of synodality."

Cardinal Czerny distinguishes between the concept of collegiality and synodality. He said while collegiality refers, specifically, 'to the exercise of the ministry of the bishop,' synodality, is a 'broader' concept, as it 'implies the participation and involvement of the entire People of God in the life and mission of the Church. See Isabella Piro. "Cardinal Czerny: Synodality is a fundamental trait of ecclesial identity." The text can be found at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-12/czerny-synodality-is-a-fundamental-trait-of-ecclesial-identity.html>

While discussing the synod of bishops, Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl succinctly relates "collegiality" to "synodality": "Collegiality refers to the Successor of Peter governing the Church in collaboration with, and with the participation of, the bishops of the local churches, respecting their joint responsibility for the Universal Church. Synodality is one particular expression of that rightful participation of the local churches in governance, through consultation Ecclesialogically, what Pope Francis has done is to refocus, once again, on the ministry of the College of Bishops as was the case in the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen gentium*." D. W. WUERL, "Pope Francis: Fresh Perspectives on Synodality," 5, 9. Cf. Renken, "Synodality," 19, footnote 29.

Catherine Clifford explains: "synodality is actually a broader concept than collegiality. It entails a synergy of the gifts of all the baptised and it means that at every level of church life we have structures for dialogue and participation for all the baptised to make their needs known, share their gifts and put them at the service of the church. That way we are always in the process of discerning what the Gospel is requiring of us in each context and each new time." C. CLIFFORD, Interview on 2151 Century Ecumenism at BBI. The Australian Institute of

share power, but to lift up the People of God. It is not only about a “Teaching Church” (*Ecclesia docens*), but also a “Learning Church” (*Ecclesia discens*). Because in the synodal Church, everyone has something to share. And by mutual listening, we can benefit from the wisdom of those we are listening to, especially from the lowly. It is as Saint Benedict wrote: “the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger” (RB 3:3). Thus, when we carefully listen to each other, we are also listening to the Lord who works in us and through us. The synodal Church seeks to be a “discerning Church” (*ecclesia discernens*).²⁵⁶ For better or for worse, this is the Church that Pope Francis believes the Lord wants to see in the third millennium. He is obviously dedicated to the project ahead and he has been trying to build his case, even though, no doubt, many obstructions are waiting.

IV. Promise and Challenge of Pope Francis’s Synodality

A synodal Church is a Church that Pope Francis conceives that the Lord wants in the third millennium. The concept, it appears, is very dear to his heart. During these 9 years of his pontificate, he has been trying to accomplish God’s will by promoting a united Church and synodal church; one in which the People of God walk together on the way and share their responsibilities to build up the Church. All the baptized are called to share her mission of evangelization based on their particular vocations and abilities. This vision must be the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the moment the new pope appeared on the balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica with a modest gesture, his simple countenance heralded a revolution in the pontificate. It was a rather astonishing moment. But more importantly, he made clear, first and

Theological Education, 3 November 2014 at: <http://www.bbi.catholic.edu.au/newsevents/10/article/1369/21st-century-ecumenism> (20 May 2018). Cf. Renken, “Synodality,” 20, footnote 29.

²⁵⁶ B. Cupich, “Synodality: Pope Francis Calls for a New Way of Being Church,” in *Chicago Catholic*, 15 November 2015; see. Renken, “Synodality” 16, footnote 23.

foremost, that he was the bishop of Rome²⁵⁷ - and one among other bishops with his duty to serve the whole world. On that very first night of his papacy, Francis said: “And now, we take up this journey-bishop and people-the journey of the Church of Rome, which presides in charity over all the churches.”²⁵⁸ This truly indicated a big change was set to happen under Francis' leadership... a new approach to leadership. And as Mannion comments: “This message was heard loud and clear and was welcomed by members of the varied Christian churches.”²⁵⁹

In the following months, his daily homilies, writings, and speeches all pointed toward the vision of which he spoke on the balcony of Saint Peter's Basilica that first evening. That is the Church in the third millennium is to be understood as the synodal Church: one in which the pope, bishops, and the faithful all walk together, each needing the support and prayers of the other so that each baptized member might fulfill his or her mission. It is Francis' vision of what God wants the Church to be.

Actually, the idea of a synodal church is not necessarily new. History is full of moments when serious challenges emerged. Important communication was necessary between people. At crucial and often painful times leaders of the Church have come together to deliberate and decide how to remedy problems and how to proceed. It can be stated confidently that it was a practice from the earliest days in the Christian community. The Council of Jerusalem is one of many early examples of a synodal Church. There is plenty of evidence in the Acts of the Apostles that synod-like gatherings were being used to organize matters in the early days. Throughout the

²⁵⁷ Cardinal Walter Kasper wrote: “That is one of the oldest papal titles. With this self-description, he had adopted the statement of the martyr-bishop Ignatius of Antioch (approximately around the middle of the second century), who described the church of Rome as presiding in love. In the background stand the recollection of the ancient ecclesiology, according to which pastoral responsibility for the universal church is assigned to the bishop of Rome. To be bishop of Rome is here no appendix to the Petrine office, but rather its basis.” Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 47-48.

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 5.

²⁵⁹ Mannion, “Pope Francis's Agenda for the Church-*Evangelii Gaudium* as Papal Manifesto,” 6.

history of the Church, particularly in the Middle Ages, the Church was structured upon the monarchy model. Even so, governance utilizing forms of synod was practiced through numerous ecumenical councils. McPartlan,²⁶⁰ in his interview with Jonathan Lewis, said: “Those twenty-one ecumenical councils recognized by the Catholic Church show that synodality is intrinsic to Catholic ecclesiology.”²⁶¹ More recently, we have seen ‘synod’ happenings emerging from the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council on episcopal collegiality; a principle based on the sacrament of episcopal ordination, where the pope is both a member of the college of bishops and its head. In union with him and never apart from him, the college has supreme and full authority over the Church (*LG 22*). And with the revived ecclesiology of the People of God which “stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptized, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations, and their ministries,”²⁶² synodality becomes a more prominent element in the life and mission of the Church. The post-conciliar popes, in one way or another, have continued Vatican II’s vision of the synodal Church through both ordinary and extraordinary Synods of Bishops. However, McPartlan states that, “Pope Francis has further energized the Synod form by wanting to make sure that it is embedded in the people of God as a whole, drawing fully on the insights, wisdom, and holiness of the people of God, because then synodality is stronger.”²⁶³ For Francis then, Synodality is not just a form of Church government, but a way of being Church.²⁶⁴ Cardinal Kasper writes: “Pope Francis now wants to strengthen the synodal elements in the Catholic Church itself. That is supposed to happen on all levels of the

²⁶⁰ McPartlan is a priest of the Archdiocese of Westminster and served for two terms on the International Theological Commission (2004-2009, 2009-2014), and has been a member of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church since 2005.

²⁶¹ Jonathan Lewis, “Theologian says Church needs both synodality and primacy.”

<https://cruxnow.com/interviews/2019/01/28/theologian-says-church-needs-both-synodality-and-primacy>

²⁶² International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” no. 6.

²⁶³ Lewis, “Theologian says Church needs both synodality and primacy.”

²⁶⁴ Faggioli, “From Collegiality to Synodality,” 366.

local churches as well as on the level of the universal church.”²⁶⁵ Up to now, Pope Francis’s intention of making the synod become an essential element of the Church at all levels seems to be well-received. And while we see there are hopeful promises, real challenges and limits to Pope Francis’s theology of synodality cannot be ignored

1. Promises

Pope Francis’s ecclesiology of synodality has a solid foundation in the New Testament²⁶⁶ and the earliest traditions of the Church. In the document “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church”, the ‘synod’ is understood within an ecclesiology of communion, which emphasizes “the common dignity and mission of all the baptized, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations, and their ministries...”²⁶⁷ By the baptismal grace, all the baptized participate in the threefold office of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. Each member has a responsibility to build up the Church and fulfill her mission of evangelization. By affirming synodality as the essence of the Church, Wijlens says that Pope Francis has hit “the reset button” with “regard to the interpretation of Vatican II. Something happened in the way the faithful, the bishops and Pope listened and interacted with each other in order to arrive at a decision.”²⁶⁸ Vatican II asserted that the faithful were to participate in the life of the Church more actively. And the synodal path is the method that Pope Francis promotes so that the faithful can live out their baptismal vocations and participate in the life and mission of the Church more effectively.

²⁶⁵ Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, 50.

²⁶⁶ For the foundation of synodality from New Testament see Barbara E. Reid, OP., “Synodal and Collegial Thinking and Acting in the New Testament,” in Andraos, Michel, Thierry-Marie Courau, and Mendoza-Álvarez Carlos, eds. *Synodalities*. Concilium, 2021/2. London: SCM Press, 2021, 59-67; Internal Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” no. 12-23.

²⁶⁷ Internal Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” no. 6.

²⁶⁸ Wijlens, “Reforming the Church by Hitting the Reset Button,” 235.

The basis of synodality is mutual listening: active dialogue aimed at establishing a relationship between the members of the Church, and it begins with the local churches. From his own pastoral experience, Pope Francis acknowledges that each particular church has its own situations and cultures; with cultural and ethnic expressions of rich popular devotion and liturgical practice; each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Thus, for Francis, it is not necessarily wise for the bishop of Rome to take over the duty of the local bishops in order to determine what is needed and good for people in particular Christian settings. Because by the sacrament of episcopal ordination, each bishop is the Vicar of Christ of his own church; in unity with the universal church and its leader “has supreme and full authority over the church” (*LG* 22). In formulating this principle, Francis seeks to promote unity in diversity.

From the very beginning of his pontificate, Francis has emphasized the importance of the poor Church and the Church for the poor. For him, the Church must get out of her comfort zone to go to be with the poor: tend to the margins – seek to heal the wounds of the neglected, and to proclaim the gospel of mercy for them. For Faggioli, “the connection between the poor Church and the merciful Church is key for the idea of synodality.”²⁶⁹

By emphasizing the gift of the Holy Spirit in the concept of *-sensus fidei*, the gift that assumes that the People of God consulted all together cannot err in the matters of faith, Pope Francis retrieves one of the key elements in Vatican II’s theology on the People of God. Interestingly enough, neither John Paul II nor Benedict XVI lent much weight to this idea.²⁷⁰ Cardinal Ratzinger, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, claimed that “the theology of the people of God fosters a misguided synodal vision of local, regional, and

²⁶⁹ Faggioli, “From Collegiality to Synodality,” 365.

²⁷⁰ See. Hinze, “Synodality in the Catholic Church,” 127; Hinze, “Can We Find A Way Together?,” 217.

national churches based on an understanding of the church along the lines of modern democracies.”²⁷¹ He seems to have grave doubts about the universal applicability of the synodal way. By focusing upon the important theme of Vatican II on the People of God, Pope Francis expressed disagreement with the apprehensions of his predecessors. He seeks to help the faithful to rediscover their baptismal vocation and responsibility. The true strength of the Christian community is its openness to the Holy Spirit: *sensus fidei*, carries the assumption that credibility in matters of faith is fostered amongst all the faithful. With the synodal path, Pope Francis seeks to open more opportunities for laity to participate in the life of the Church. He promises to open the Vatican to the non-ordained and make them eligible for high positions, positions normally reserved for ordained clergy.

Structural reform of the Church’s government is necessary with the synodal church. But pastoral reform cannot be neglected. Thus, synodality is not just about changing structure. It is about mutual dialogue and establishing working relationships between the People of God and official Church governance. The expressed purpose is to transform clericalist practices in which individuals or groups in the church makes decisions along with official leaders. Rafael Luciani,²⁷² professor at Boston College, said in the interview with Hosffman Ospino:

More than a drive to reform structures, synodality points to communicational dynamics and ways of relating with one another as baptized people. As synodal vision challenges us to transform clericalist practices in which an individual or a group in the church makes decisions without listening and consulting, as if existing beyond the people of God.

²⁷¹ Hinze, “Synodality in the Catholic Church,” 127.

²⁷² Luciani, a native of Venezuela, serves as a theological expert for the regional Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) and the Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR). He is also one of three Latin American theologians invited as expert advisers for the theological commission of the secretariat for the next Synod of Bishops. Earlier this year, Francis expanded the upcoming synod: It will begin with a diocesan phase this fall, followed by continental meetings next year, and will conclude with a general assembly at the Vatican in 2023.

Synodality demands that we listen and engage in dialogue to establish binding relationships that build church.²⁷³

Besides these promises, there are also some limits and challenges to Pope Francis's theology of synodality. The limits and challenges could be from outside, or from the concept of synodality itself.

2. Limits and challenges

Limits and challenges to Pope Francis's theology of synodality from outside.

Francis is the first Latin American pope and the first Jesuit pope. He is also the first pope of the post-conciliar period who does not come from a career in the diplomatic service or from a professional academic background. These "firsts" could be a challenge for him. Is he to be trusted as a leader of a universal Church? Because the universal Church is so complexly diverse, it needs pastoral men in leadership, but also political and diplomatic skills come into play. It seems to me that Francis' strength is pastoral. But his weaknesses are political and diplomatic. Thus, in these nine years of his pontificate, Francis has been hailed by "regular" people, of course by many expert people too, because he uses the vocabulary of ordinary people and communicates as if he is one of them. In his public statements he emphasizes God's mercy and does not scold or reprimand. Apart from his restrictions enforced upon Catholics attending the traditional Latin Mass, he appears to even non-catholics to be sincere. He does not simply talk, he makes a point of acting as he believes Jesus would act, most especially, by showing his love for the poor. His style is nothing if not simple—he eschews the trappings of the office, he assumes no special privileges... But he has been criticized by some high-ranking officers of the Church who, according to Kasper, "don't want to let themselves be surprised anymore by God

²⁷³ Hosffman Ospino, "A Closer Look at Synodality and Its Promise for a more inclusive church," National Catholic Reporter at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/closer-look-synodality-and-its-promise-more-inclusive-church>

and who resist reforms, just as it is for progressives, who expect feasible, concrete solutions right here and now.”²⁷⁴ While I can’t totally agree with Kasper’s comment, the opposition to Francis’s theology of synodality from some high-ranking church officials is real enough. Indeed, in an interview in 2018, Cardinal Raymond Burke criticized the concept of “synodality”.²⁷⁵ His critique is stated thusly: “It’s become like a slogan, meant to suggest some kind of new church which is democratic and in which the authority of the Roman Pontiff is relativized and diminished — if not destroyed.” Burke offers that the traditional meaning of the term synod used to be “to find ways to teach the Catholic faith more effectively and to promote the proper discipline in the Church. That’s basically what a synod of bishops is — that’s its definition.” But now, he claims, “seemingly, the term ‘synodality’ is being used to suggest that conferences of bishops would have Doctrinal Authority.” For him, this is very dangerous because “the Catholic Church has now become some kind of democratic body with some kind of new constitution.” Cardinal Burke said that he is not speaking out against the pope personally. However, he feels compelled to raise some concern about Pope Francis’s leadership. He was obviously not afraid to criticize Pope Francis' reformist agenda. Speaking for many who are uncertain about the project, he observes that some Catholics feel the Church under Pope Francis' pontificate is "like a ship without a rudder."²⁷⁶

Sharing Cardinal Burke’s concern and worry, Cardinal Robert Sarah, while he was prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, was also critical of how synodality was being interpreted. In an interview in 2019, he said that by

²⁷⁴ Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 92.

²⁷⁵ Bree A. Dail, “Cdl. Burke: ‘Synodality’ suggests some kind of ‘new church’ where pope’s authority is destroyed.” <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/cdl-burke-synodality-suggests-some-kind-of-new-church-where-popes-authorit/> accessed April 17th 2022.

²⁷⁶ J. McKenna, “Burke: Church under Francis is a 'ship without a rudder'”, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/burke-church-under-francis-ship-without-rudder>. Accessed April 18, 2022.

promoting synodality in the Church, “people are trying to detach the local churches from Rome. People want to be autonomous with regard to Rome and the vicar of Jesus Christ, that is, Peter, he who gives direction to the church of Rome.” He discerns that synodality is a way people can misuse authority, a way to diminish the central authority of the Church. In his view it literally undermines the authority of the Chair of Peter. This then progresses to wear away at the unity of the Church. Sarah said that “without Peter, everything in the Catholic Church would be destroyed, reduced to fragments and become nothing. Jesus never created bishops’ conferences or local churches. It is on Peter that He built His Church. Destroying the unity of His church amounts to rejecting Jesus. People want to tear up and destroy the unity of the Church.”²⁷⁷ Although Sarah’s concern is not necessarily all about the synodality, it should be considered by all members of the Church, so that the unity of the Church always remains.

Cardinal Gerhard Muller, the former prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, did not oppose the concept of synodality itself. He admitted that synodality “may well be justified to speak of a synodal principle in the cooperation of bishops, priests and laity in diocesan and supra-diocesan bodies.” But for him, the term synodality has been misunderstood. He explains that synodality is used in two different ways — namely, as synodality among bishops in leading the Church, on the one hand. And as synodality among all members of the Church as means of unity, on the other. Müller intelligently questions whether these two meanings “can be derived from the same principle.” For him, it is not possible to unify the two positions on the topic. He states firmly: “Membership of the college of bishops gives rise to a shared responsibility among all bishops for ensuring that the whole Church remains true to the

²⁷⁷ Jeanne Smits, “Cdl. Sarah criticizes synodality: ‘Jesus never created bishops conferences or local churches.’” <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/cdl-sarah-criticizes-synodality-jesus-never-created-bishops-conferences-or-local-churches/> accessed April 17, 2022.

teachings of the apostles, for unity of faith, unity in the sacraments and the visible communion of all faithful and bishops with and under the Pope.” In distinction to that type of synodality, “the shared responsibility of all religious and laity is not derived from participation in the apostolic ministry of the Pope and the bishops, but from their participation in the priesthood of Christ and thus in the prophetic mission and diaconal task of the Church in *martyria* (witness), *leiturgia* (worship) and *diakonia* (service).” Unfortunately, Cardinal Muller notes that under the pontificate of Pope Francis, “a matter of finally clearing the ‘reform gridlock’” had taken a wrong turn.²⁷⁸

On May 31, 2019, Cardinal Raymond Burke and Bishop Athanasius Schneider, together with several other bishops, issued a public declaration of truths of the faith aiming to remedy the ‘almost universal doctrinal confusion and disorientation’ endangering the spiritual health and eternal salvation of souls in the Church today. The declaration upholds the Church's perennial teaching on the Eucharist, marriage and priestly celibacy.²⁷⁹

Another outside factor that might affect Francis’ reform project is the presence of Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, “whose role for the implementation of the ecclesiology of Vatican II especially in terms of the style of Church governance can hardly overstated,”²⁸⁰ in the Vatican. Although we know that after stepping down from the papacy, Benedict took up residence at the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery with the firm intention of living a life of prayer and contemplation in solitude, he never publicly criticized Francis’s reformist agenda. And the relationship between

²⁷⁸ Martin Burger, “Former Vatican doctrine head corrects modern, wrong understanding of ‘synodality’”. <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/former-vatican-doctrine-head-corrects-modern-wrong-understanding-of-synodality/> accessed April 18, 2022.

²⁷⁹ Life Site, “Cdl Burke, Bp Schneider issue ‘declaration of truths’ to correct rampant ‘doctrinal confusion’ in Church.” <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/cdl-burke-bp-schneider-issue-declaration-of-truths-to-correct-rampant-doctrinal-confusion-in-church/> accessed on April 17, 2022.

²⁸⁰ Faggioli, “From Collegiality to Synodality,” 366.

Pope Francis and Benedict is evidently warm. In 2014, Pope Francis praised his predecessor, Benedict XVI as a great grandfather. He said: “I have said many times that it gives me great pleasure that he lives here in the Vatican, because it is like having a wise grandfather at home.”²⁸¹ Recently, on the occasion of Benedict XVI’s birthday, Francis praised the pope emeritus as a prophet. “Pope Benedict was a prophet of this Church of the future, a Church that will become smaller, lose many privileges, be more humble and authentic and find energy for the essential.” Francis made this declaration during the meeting with Jesuits at the apostolic nunciature in Malta on April 3.²⁸² However, it seems evident that the presence of a pope emeritus in the Vatican has, in one way or another, created some constraints on Francis' agenda for a reformed church governance.

Although most Catholics appreciate Francis’s reformist agenda, “there are still a considerable number of bishops, priests and seminarians who resist Francis’ program of a sound decentralization, an inverted pyramid, and a polyhedral approach to the universal church.”²⁸³ These are obstacles that will tend to constrict Francis’s reformist vision. It may be more difficult than he imagines coming to people at every level of the Church. Will there be open acceptance of the plan across the globe? Hinze rightly questions: “How can Francis’ vision of synodality take root in local churches if it is not formed in seminaries and schools of theology and ministry and among local bishops, parish priests, and lay ministers?”²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Ann Schneible, “Pope Francis calls Benedict XVI the ultimate 'grandfather'”

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/30597/pope-francis-calls-benedict-xvi-the-ultimate-grandfather>

²⁸² <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/250979/benedict-xvi-was-a-prophet-of-church-s-future-pope-francis-tells-malta-s-jesuits>

²⁸³ Bradford. “Dreams of Synodality, Specters of Constraint.” 308

²⁸⁴ Bradford. “Dreams of Synodality, Specters of Constraint.” 309

In addition to these factors, poverty in the third world is also an obstacle to Francis's synodality. The primary concern of the poor is how to feed their families and survive in a rather cruel set of circumstances, not a synodal church. They do not dream of sharing power and making decision for their local church communities. Moreover, in poor countries, the traditional role of the clerical is still strong.²⁸⁵ People grant significant power to their parish priests. In these countries, particular in Asian, "For cultural reasons — but sometimes also because of a very traditional way of living the Church — there is little co-responsibility of the laity. Even if they go to Mass much more than in Europe, many lay people in Asia think that being Catholics stops there, waiting for indications from pastors on what they should do."²⁸⁶ Perhaps this needs to change. But it will take a long time to change a cultural pattern.

Along with other problems, Faggioli points out similar limitations, that derive from Francis' theology and practice of synodality itself.

There are limits in Francis's ambivalence about *collegiality* and *synodality*. One issue that will need clarification concerns the relationship between synodality and the Bishops' Synod, given that the Synod created by Paul VI in 1965 is not an expression of the Church's synodality and not an institution of the Church's synodality. Because of both the structure given to it by Paul VI in 1965 and the ecclesiology of the collegiality of Vatican II, the Bishops' Synod is still a form of the exercise of papal primacy extended to include forms of episcopal collegiality. Making the Bishops' Synod an institution of ecclesial synodality would require some structural changes that go much further than the ones decided by Francis as a listening primacy: in terms of membership (not only bishops and some clergy appointed by the pope) and of overcoming the diarchy between pope and Roman Curia when it is about the government of the universal Church. In other words, the limits of Francis's synodality are part of the problem of 'exiting from the universalist perspective of Vatican II.' Is Francis's synodality part of an ecclesiology of the subject

²⁸⁵ Francis points out that clericalism can be a sin for both clergy and laity: for clergy, if they demand to be treated as superior to the laity; and for laity, if they resign themselves to the status quo—"Let Father do everything"—and shirk the responsibilities proper to their own vocation as baptized Christians. Kathleen N. Hattrup, "5 of many times Pope Francis has warned against clericalism." <https://aleteia.org/2018/08/23/5-of-the-many-times-pope-francis-has-railed-against-clericalism/>

²⁸⁶ Giorgio Bernardelli "Christina Kheng on the Churches of Asia and Synodality." <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christina-Kheng-on-the-Churches-of-Asia-and-Synodality-54359.html>

local churches (following Jean-Marie Tillard and Herve Legrand) or is it a synodality rooted in the sacrament of the holy orders (following Eugenio Corecco)?²⁸⁷

It seems to me that we do not have a clear answer as to whether or not Francis's synodality is part of an ecclesiology rooted in the subject of local church experience; or, is it a synodality rooted in the sacrament of the Holy Orders.

Another limit is rooted in Francis's ecclesiology of the people. Referring to Chiron, Faggioli comments:

In his 2016 article on the *sensus fidei* in Francis, Chiron correctly acknowledged the steps made by Francis's ecclesiology of synodality, rooted in his dynamic use of the *sensus fidei*: 'We can therefore consider the use of *sensus fidei* only within the framework of a dynamic. If the *sensus fidei* is a given, we have access to it, or rather it manifests itself only through an institutionalized process of speech. No doubt it is necessary to take distance from a static understanding of *consensus fidelium*, understood only as unanimity in a given expression of faith.' At the same time, Chiron cautiously alerted to the limits of Francis's implementation of synodality. On the one side, Chiron made clear the need of giving institutional dimension to synodality: 'the culture of encounter needs to find institutional expression.' Chiron also showed the possible constraints for a truly ecclesial-institutional dimension of synodality in the context of an ecclesiology of the *sensus fidei* where the *sensus fidei* is expressed in the popular piety alone.²⁸⁸

Since Francis' vision of synod is to involve every member of the Church, both the Pope and the International Theological Commission have invoked the medieval principle: *Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet*, "what affects everyone ought to be discussed and decided by everyone." Gaillardetz comments: "This principle challenges the clerical paternalism that informs Church governance at every level. A clerical paternalism is unlikely to yield to the demands of this principle without a thorough reconsideration of the bishop's structural relationship to his flock."²⁸⁹ However, this principle has its problems. The overall synodal

²⁸⁷ Faggioli, "From Collegiality to Synodality," 367.

²⁸⁸ Faggioli, "From Collegiality to Synodality," 367.

²⁸⁹ Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Synodal Shape of Church Ministry and Order," in *Synodalities*. Concilium, 2021/2, 104.

principle is to encourage everyone, even non-Catholics, to express their various opinions on a whole variety of topics concerning doctrine, liturgy, and morals. However, if such opinions are contrary to the faith of the Church, and these opinions are loudly proclaimed, then chaos may well be assured. The German “synodal path” is a timely example of what happens when Church teaching is put up for debate. So, should the Church establish a “red line” that no one can cross in their discussion? In this context of a synodal church, the question arises whether certain doctrines of faith and morality are immutable. Or, are all doctrines subject to reform? I think the faithful should keep in mind this question. The leaders of the church should have the clear guidance in order to avoid confusion and division among the faithful.

We also see some contradictions between the Pope’s teaching and acting concerning synodality. It appears that Francis’ vision is that there will be sufficient responsibility at the local levels of Church and with the support of *sensus fidei* that all matters of ecclesial need can be addressed in a healthy, pastoral way within the particular churches. He has proven himself not above interfering with local responsibilities. The letter he sent to the German bishops, who are deeply engaged in a synodal process, is a rather glaring example. In that letter, he underlines two points: first, “the synodal path of personal and ecclesial renewal must be linked to the Church’s central task of evangelization and be guided by the Holy Spirit;” and second, “any process of synodal renewal must guard against the twin dangers of polarization and fragmentation by means of a strong *sensus ecclesiae* and connectedness to the universal Church.”²⁹⁰

A crucial point in all this is that listening to all the members of the Church is presented as the key to synodal life. The most important thing in the concept of synodality is to build up

²⁹⁰ Marmion, D. (2021), ‘A Church that Listens’: Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church. New Blackfriars, 102: 442-458, at 454. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12609>

possibilities for dialogue and establish sound relationships between the members of the Church. However, in 2016, when *Amoris Laetitia* ("The Joy of Love") was published, Cardinal Burke joined three other archbishops in sending questions to the pope asking for clarification of the document, Francis ignored their concerns. We might fairly ask: how can we dialogue, listen, and discern together when we ignore genuine requests for dialogue in order to understand each other's point of view?

Hinze points out: "The *Code of Canon Law* specifies certain synodal and conciliar processes wherein lay people, including women religious, and lay theologians may have a vote. But the *Code* makes it clear these votes are not decision-making but are consultative only."²⁹¹ Not too surprisingly, on February 8, 2021, Pope Francis appointed a French religious sister to the position of under-secretary of the Synod of Bishop. This appointment was hailed as Francis' sign of positive evolution because the position had only ever been held by ordained men. Even so, there is no certainty that she will have the right to vote at the Synod on Synodality. Even the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* on the Roman Curia and its service to the Church and to the World elevates laity to high positions of Dicastery or a curial body. And there is no guarantee that the lay head of a Dicastery or a curial body can vote in the Synods. Hinze comments:

Pope Francis has shown unprecedented appreciation of the sense of the faithful people, popular cultures, and popular forms of piety. But it is doubtful that he has substantially advanced the exercise of the authority of lay people in lay leadership in the church. Francis wants cardinals, arch/bishops, and priests to listen carefully to the sense of the faithful, the laity, women, especially the poor and the marginalized, but he does not want to afford them decision-making authority. He criticizes the abuse of clerical and episcopal authority in terms of clericalism and infantilizing lay people. But these

²⁹¹ Bradford Hinze. "Dreams of Synodality, Specters of Constraint." *Louvain Studies* 43, no. 3 (2020): 297–312, at 305.

criticisms are never translated into church-wide policies promoting lay leadership in authoritative and decision-making capacities.²⁹²

Pope Francis calls for a sound decentralization, an inverted pyramid, a polyhedral vision of the Church. One thing he does not call for is the decision-making authority of the laity.

Very well, these are some limitations and challenges of Francis' theology of synodality. They either come from outside or from inside the concept of synodality itself. These limitations and challenges are the obstacles that prevent synodality from becoming essential to the life of the Church. Is it prudent to think that every voice can be equal? Perhaps we need some special education on what it means to literally expect input from every member of the Church. These obstacles are not insurmountable. Change however requires a measure of time... The question of course becomes: is Pope Francis, the architect of the ecclesiology of synodality, strong enough to see things through? Will he have enough time to get the job done...or even properly initiated? And will the next pope want to continue the work of Pope Francis?

Conclusion

The Church in the third millennium is faced with many difficulties both from within and without the Church. The difficulties that come from within such as scandals over the abuse of power, sexual abuse and its cover-up from the Church's leaders, clericalism... other difficulties come from without such as the rapid involvement of technology, the people have lost their trust in the Church because of abuse scandals. There are many contradictions and difficulties quickly and constantly emerging in the world today. These difficulties have challenged the Church to find the best way to be witness and proclaim the Gospel. From the first moment of his

²⁹² Hinze. "Dreams of Synodality, Specters of Constraint." 306

pontificate, Pope Francis acknowledged the difficulties that the Church under his pontificate would undergo and the best way to overcome them. Though a key item of his pontificate, synodality is not totally novel. It has roots in scripture and was practiced in the early church in the form of local synods, then in the form of ecumenical councils. Most recently, the Second Vatican Council promoted episcopal collegiality in which the pope and the college of bishops share the authority of governing the Church. Episcopal Conferences and Synods of Bishops are limited ways of exercising episcopal collegiality. Pope Francis's ecclesiology of synodality is nothing else but that all are to receive all the teachings and practices of the Church. However, he puts his emphasis on the image of synodal Church in the context of the world of today. And the new aspect of the ecclesiology of Pope Francis' synodality is that it concerns every member of the Church. This novelty may bring new enthusiasm to the faithful. But will it help them to acknowledge their baptismal vocation and be more actively involved in the life and mission of the Church? We do not as yet have an adequate assessment of the effectiveness of the synodal path that Francis wants. How in fact is it to be practiced on all levels of the Church? Time will give us an exact answer. However, it must be admitted that the synodal path advocated by Pope Francis is causing certain difficulties for the Church, such as the risk of division, or even schism. It also raises some serious questions, such as, are all voices in the Church equal? Whether all the doctrines of the Church can be openly discussed and decided by majority vote or, are there some "red lines" that cannot be crossed? If yes, then what is the real authentic spirit of synodality? What is the role of the pope and individual bishop in the synodal Church? Where is the autonomous authority of the bishop in teaching, governing and sanctifying in union with the primacy of the pope in the synodal Church? These questions need further study and investigation.

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