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INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

SYNODALITY IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

PRELIMINARY NOTE

During its 9th Quinquennium, the International Theological Commission undertook a study of synodality in the life and mission of the Church. The work was carried out by a specific sub-committee, whose president was Mgr. Mario Ángel Flores Ramos and whose members were Sr. Prudence Allen RSM, Sr. Alenka Arko of the Loyola Community, Mgr. Antonio Luiz Catelan Ferreira, Mgr. Piero Coda, Rev. Carlos María Galli, Rev. Gaby Alfred Hachem, Prof. Héctor Gustavo Sánchez Rojas SCV, Rev. Nicholaus Segeja M'hela and Fr. Gerard Francisco Timoner III OP.

General discussions on this theme took place during the meetings of the sub-committee and during the Plenary Sessions of the Commission itself, held between 2014 and 2017. The present text was approved by the majority of the members of the Commission during its 2017 Plenary Session, by means of a written vote. It was later approved by the President, His Eminence Cardinal Luis F. Ladaria S.J., Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who authorised its publication on 2nd March 2018, after receiving a favourable response from Pope Francis.

INTRODUCTION

THE KAIRÓS OF SYNODALITY

1. "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium"[1]: this programmatic commitment was made by Pope Francis at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops by Blessed Paul VI. He stressed that, in fact, synodality "is an essential dimension of the Church", in the sense that "what the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word 'synod'"[2].

2. This document is meant to offer some useful guidelines for going deeper into the theological sense of this promise and some pastoral orientations about what it implies for the Church's mission. The Introduction indicates the etymological and conceptual data required for a preliminary clarification of the content and use of the word 'synodality'; it then puts into context what a momentous and new teaching the Magisterium has offered us on this subject in the wake of Vatican II.

Synod, Council, Synodality

3. "Synod" is an ancient and venerable word in the Tradition of the Church, whose meaning draws on the deepest themes of Revelation. Composed of a preposition συν (with) and the noun ὁδός (path), it indicates the path along which the People of God walk together. Equally, it refers to the Lord Jesus, who presents Himself as "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14,6), and to the fact that Christians, His followers, were originally called "followers of the Way" (cf. Acts 9,2; 19,9.23; 22,4; 24,14.22).

In ecclesiastical Greek it expresses how the disciples of Jesus were called together as an assembly and in some cases it is a synonym for the ecclesial community[3]. Saint John Chrysostom, for example, writes that the Church is a "name standing for 'walking together' (σύνοδος)"[4]. He explains that the Church is actually the assembly convoked to give God thanks and glory like a choir, a harmonic reality which holds everything together (σύστημα), since, by their reciprocal and ordered relations, those who compose it converge in αγάπη and ὁμονοία (common mind).

4. Since the first centuries, the word "synod" has been applied, with a specific meaning, to the ecclesial assemblies convoked on various levels (diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal or universal) to discern, by the light of the Word of God and listening to the Holy Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions that arise as time goes by.

The Greek σύνοδος is translated into Latin as synodus or concilium. Concilium, in its profane use, refers to an assembly convoked by some legitimate authority. Although the roots of "synod" and "council" are different, their meanings converge. In fact, "council" enriches the semantic content of "synod" by its reference to the Hebrew קָהָל (qahal), the assembly convoked by the Lord, and its

translation into Greek as ἐκκλησία, which, in the New Testament, refers to the eschatological convocation of the People of God in Christ Jesus.

In the Catholic Church the distinction between the use of the words "council" and "synod" is a recent one. In Vatican II they are synonymous, both referring to the council session[5]. A precise distinction was introduced by the Codex Iuris Canonici of the Latin Church (1983), which distinguishes between a particular (plenary or provincial) Council[6] and an ecumenical Council[7] on the one hand, and a Synod of Bishops[8] and a diocesan Synod[9] on the other hand[10].

5. In the theological, canonical and pastoral literature of recent decades, a neologism has appeared, the noun "synodality", a correlate of the adjective "synodal", with both of these deriving from the word "synod". Thus people speak of synodality as a "constitutive dimension" of the Church or tout court of the "synodal Church". This linguistic novelty, which needs careful theological clarification, is a sign of something new that has been maturing in the ecclesial consciousness starting from the Magisterium of Vatican II, and from the lived experience of local Churches and the universal Church since the last Council until today.

Communion, synodality, collegiality

6. Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term or as a concept in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that synodality is at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging.

The ecclesiology of the People of God stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptised, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries. In this context the concept of communion expresses the profound substance of the mystery and mission of the Church, whose source and summit is the Eucharistic synaxis[11]. This is the res of the Sacramentum Ecclesiae: union with God the Trinity and unity between human persons, made real through the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus[12].

In this ecclesiologicalcontext, synodality is the specific modus vivendi et operandi of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission.

7. While the concept of synodality refers to the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church, the concept of collegiality defines the theological significance and the form of a) the exercise of the ministry of Bishops in the service of the local Church entrusted to the care of each of them, and b) of the communion between local Churches at the heart of the one universal Church of Christ, brought about by means of the hierarchical communion of the College of Bishops with the Bishop of Rome.

Collegiality is thus the specific form in which ecclesial synodality is manifested and made real through the ministry of Bishops on the level of communion of the local Churches in a region, and on the level of communion of all the Churches in the universal Church. An authentic manifestation of synodality naturally entails the exercise of the collegial ministry of the Bishops.

A new threshold in the wake of Vatican II

8. The fruits of the renewal promised by Vatican II in its promotion of ecclesial communion, episcopal collegiality and thinking and acting 'synodally' have been rich and precious. There is, however, still a long way to go in the direction mapped out by the Council[13]. In fact, today the drive to find an appropriate form for a synodal Church – although it is widely shared and has been put into practice in positive ways – seems to be in need of clear theological principles and decisive pastoral orientations.

9. Hence the new threshold that Pope Francis invites us to cross. In the wake of Vatican II, following in his predecessors footsteps, he insists that synodality describes the shape of the Church that emerges from the Gospel of Jesus, which is called to become incarnate today in history, in creative fidelity to Tradition.

In conformity with the teaching of Lumen Gentium, Pope Francis remarks in particular that synodality "offers us the most appropriate framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself"[14] and that, based on the doctrine of the sensus fidei fidelium[15], all members of the Church are agents of evangelisation[16]. Consequently making a synodal Church a reality is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God.

Besides, synodality is at the heart of the ecumenical commitment of Christians: because it represents an invitation to walk together on the path towards full communion and because – when it is understood correctly – it offers a way of understanding and experiencing the Church where legitimate differences find room in the logic of a reciprocal exchange of gifts in the light of truth.

The aim and structure of the document

10. **I**n its first two chapters, this document offers to respond to the need to go deeper into the theological meaning of synodality along the lines of Catholic ecclesiology, in harmony with the teaching of Vatican II. In the first, we return to the normative sources of Sacred Scripture and Tradition to elucidate how the synodal image of the Church has its roots in the way Revelation has unfolded throughout history and to point out the fundamental connotations and specific theological criteria that define the concept and indicate how it can be put into practice.

The second chapter puts forward the theologal foundations of synodality in conformity with the ecclesiological doctrine of Vatican II, linking them with the perspective of the pilgrim and missionary People of God and with the mystery of Church as communion, in relation to the Church's distinctive characteristics: unity, holiness, Catholicity and apostolicity. Lastly it goes into the link between the participation of all the members of the People of God in the mission of the Church and the exercise of authority by their Pastors.

On this basis, the third and fourth chapters are meant to suggest some pastoral orientations: the third chapter concerns the practical question of 'making synodality happen' on all levels, in the local Church, in the communion between local Churches in a region, in the universal Church; the fourth chapter refers to spiritual and pastoral conversion and to the communal and apostolic discernment that are necessary for an authentic synodal experience of Church, with an appreciation of its positive effects on ecumenism and on the social diakonia of the Church.

CHAPTER 1

SYNODALITY IN SCRIPTURE, IN TRADITION AND IN HISTORY

11. The normative sources for the synodal life of the Church in Scripture and Tradition show that at the heart of God's plan of salvation the whole human race's call to union with God and unity in Him is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and brought about through the ministry of the Church. They offer the guidelines we need to discern the theological principles which must animate and regulate synodal life, its structures, its processes and the events it will involve. On this basis it is possible to trace the forms of synodality developed in the Church in the course of the First Millennium and then, in the Second Millennium, in the Catholic Church, keeping in mind some aspects of the synodal practice of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities.

1.1 The teaching of Scripture

12. The Old Testament shows that God created the human person, man and woman, in his image and likeness as a social being called to work with Him by moving forward in the sign of communion, by caring for the universe and directing it towards its goal (Genesis 1,26-28). From the beginning, sin plagues God's plan, tearing apart the network of ordered relationships which expressed truth, goodness and the beauty of creation, and blinding men's and women's hearts to their calling. God, however, rich in mercy, confirms and renews His covenant to bring all that has been scattered back to the path of unity, healing human freedom and directing it to welcome and live the gift of union with God and unity with our brothers and sisters in creation, our common home (e.g. Genesis 9,8-17; 15; 17; Exodus 19-24; 2 Samuel 7,11).

13. In carrying out His plan, God convokes Abraham and his descendants (cf. Genesis 12,1-3; 17,1-5; 22,16-18). This assembly (קָהָל/עֵדָה - the first term often being translated into Greek as ἐκκλησία), ratified in the Sinai covenant (cf. Exodus 24,6-8; 34,20ff), makes the People freed from slavery important and worthy to speak to God; in the exodus journey they gather around their God to celebrate His cult and live by His law, recognising that they belong to Him alone (cf. Deuteronomy 5,1-22; Joshua 8; Nehemiah 8,1-18).

קָהָל/עֵדָה (qahal /ʿedah)is the first form in which the People of God's synodal vocation is disclosed. In the desert, God orders the census of the tribes of Israel, giving each its place (cf. Numbers 1-2). At the centre of the assembly, as its only guide and shepherd, is the Lord, who becomes present through the ministry of Moses (cf. Numbers 12; 15-16; Joshua 8,30-35), with whom others are associated in a subordinate and 'collegial' way: the Judges (cf. Exodus 18,25-26), the Elders (cf. Numbers 11,16-17.24-30), and Levites (cf. Numbers 1,50-51). The assembly of the People of God consists not only of men (cf. Exodus 24,7-8) but also women and children and even foreigners (cf. Joshua 8,33.35). It is the partner convoked by the Lord every time He renews His covenant (cf. Deuteronomy 27-28; Joshua 24; 2 Kings 23; Nehemiah 8).

14. The message of the Prophets teaches the People of God the need to journey through the hardships of history in faithfulness to the covenant. That is why the Prophets invite them to conversion of their hearts to God and to justice in their relationships with their neighbours, often the poorest, the oppressed, foreigners, as a tangible witness to God's mercy (cf. Jeremiah 37,21; 38,1).

For that to happen, God promises to give them a new heart and spirit (cf. Ezekiel 11,10), and to open before His People the way to a new Exodus (cf. Jeremiah 37-38): then He will set out a new covenant, engraved no longer on stone tablets but on their hearts (cf. Jeremiah 31,31-34). It will open out to universal horizons, since the Servant of the Lord will gather together the nations (cf. Isaiah 53), and it will be sealed by the outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord on all the members of His People (cf. Joel 3,1-4).

15. God achieves the new covenant He has promised in Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah and Lord, whose kérygma, life and person reveal that God is a communion of love who, in His grace and mercy, wishes to embrace the whole of humanity in unity. Jesus is the Son of God, destined from eternity to love the Father's heart (cf. John 1,1.18), made man in the fullness of time (cf. John 1,14; Galatians 4,4) to bring to fulfilment God's plan of salvation (cf. John 8,29; 6,39; 5,22.27). He never acts alone, and in all things does the will of the Father: the Father dwells in Him and carries out His work through the Son He has sent into the world (cf. John 14,10).

The Father's plan is fulfilled eschatologically in the Paschal Mystery, when Jesus gives His life to take it up again in the resurrection (cf. John 10,17) and to share it with His disciples as sons and daughters, sisters and brothers in the outpouring "without reserve" of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3,34). The Paschal Mystery of Jesus is the new exodus, which gathers in unity (συναγάγῃ εἰς ἓν) all who by faith believe in Him (cf. John 11,52), whom He conforms to Himself by Baptism and the Eucharist. The work of salvation is the unity for which Jesus implored the Father just before His Passion: "May they all be one, Father, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (cf. John 17,21).

16. Jesus is the pilgrim who proclaims the good news of the Kingdom of God (cf. Luke 4,14-15; 8,1; 9,57; 13,22; 19,11), teaches "the way of God" (cf. Luke 20,21) and points the way to it (Luke 9,51-19,28). In fact, He Himself is "the way" (cf. John 14,6) that leads to the Father; in the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16,13) He shares with everyone the truth and love of communion with God and our sisters and brothers. Living communion according to the standard of Jesus' new commandment means walking together in history as the People of God of the new covenant, in a way that fits the gift received (cf. John 15,12-15). In his account of the disciples at Emmaus, Luke gives us a living icon of the Church as People of God, guided on its way by the risen Lord, who lights it up by His Word and feeds it with the Bread of Life (cf. Luke 24,13-35).

17. The New Testament uses a specific term to express the power Jesus received from the Father to grant salvation, which He exercises over all creatures in the power (δύναμις) of the Holy Spirit: ἐξουσία (authority). It consists in imparting the grace that makes us "children of God" (cf. John 1,12). The Apostles receive this ἐξουσία from the risen Lord, who sends them to teach the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all He has commanded (cf. Matthew 28,19-20). By virtue of baptism, every member of the People of God is given a share in this authority, having received the "anointing of the Holy Spirit" (cf. 1 John 2,20.27), having been taught by God (cf. John 6,45) and having been guided "to the complete truth" (cf. John 16,13).

18. The Lord's ἐξουσία is expressed in the Church through the variety of spiritual gifts (τα πνευματικά) or charisms (τα χαρίσματα) the Spirit shares out among the People of God for the upbuilding of the one Body of Christ. In exercising them we need to respect an objective τάξις, so that they can develop in harmony and bear the fruit they are meant to bear for the good of all (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,28-30; Ephesians 4,11-13). The Apostles have the first place among them - with a special and pre-eminent role being attributed by Jesus to Simon Peter (cf. Matthew 16,18f., John 21,15ff.): they, in fact, are entrusted with the ministry of guiding the Church in fidelity to the depositum fidei (1 Timothy 6,20; 2 Timothy 1,12.14). But the term χάρισμα also evokes the gratuitous and varying character of the free initiative of the Spirit, who grants each one his or her own gift with a view to the general good (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,4-11; 29-30; Ephesians 4,7), always in terms of mutual submission and service (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,25): since the highest gift, the one that regulates them all, is love (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,31).

19. The Acts of the Apostles document some important moments along the path of the Apostolic Church when the People of God is called as a community to discern the will of the risen Lord. The leading figure who guides the way and gives direction is the Holy Spirit, poured out on the Church on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2,2-3). The disciples, in carrying out their various roles, have the responsibility of listening to the Spirit's voice and discerning the way to go (cf. Acts 5,19-21; 8,26.29.39; 12,6-17; 13.1-3; 16,6-7.9-10; 20,22). Good examples are: the choice of "seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom", who were entrusted by the Apostles with the task of "giving out food" (cf. Acts 6,1-6); and the discernment of the crucial question of the mission to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 10).

20. This question is dealt with in what tradition has called 'the apostolic Council of Jerusalem" (cf. Acts 15, and also Galatians 2,1-10). There we can see a synodal event coming into being, in which the apostolic Church, in a decisive moment of its development, lives out its vocation in view of its mission, enlightened by the presence of the risen Lord. Across the centuries, this event has been interpreted as the paradigm for Synods celebrated by the Church.

The account gives a precise description of the unfolding of the event. In view of the important and controversial question facing them, the community at Antioch decides to consult "the Apostles and Elders" (15,2) of the Church in Jerusalem, and sends Paul and Barnabas there. The community in Jerusalem, the Apostles and the Elders promptly meet (15,4) to examine the situation. Paul and Barnabas explain what has happened. A lively and open discussion follows (ἐκζητήσωσιν: 15,7a). They listen particularly to Peter's authoritative witness and profession of faith (15,7b-12).

James interprets what happened in the light of prophecy (cf. Amos 9,11-12; Acts 15,14-18), which asserts God's universal saving will, and that He has chosen "a people… out of the gentiles" (ἐξ ἐθνων λαόν: 15,14), and he formulates his decision giving some rules of behaviour (15,19-21). His speech shows a vision of the Church's mission that is firmly grounded in God's plan, but at the same time is open to Him making Himself present in the gradual unfolding of the history of salvation. Eventually they choose some representatives to take the letter that explains the decision taken and prescribes the procedure to be followed (15,23-39); the letter is delivered and read to the community in Antioch, who receive it gladly (15,30-31).

21. Everyone plays an active part, though with varied roles and contributions. The question is presented to the whole Church in Jerusalem (παν τὸ πληθος: 15,12), which is present throughout and involved in the final decision (ἐδοξε τοις ἀποστολόις καί τοις πρεσβυτέροις σύν ὁλη τη ἐκκησία: 15,22). But in the first instance those consulted are the Apostles (Peter and James each give a speech) and the Elders, who exercise their specific ministry with authority.

The decision is taken by James, who guides the Church in Jerusalem, by virtue of the action of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church along its path by guaranteeing its fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus: "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves" (15,28). It is received and adopted by the whole assembly in Jerusalem (15,22) and then by the assembly in Antioch (15,30-31).

By all listening to the Holy Spirit through the witness given of God's action and by each giving his own judgment, initially divergent opinions move towards the consensus and unanimity (ὁμοθυμαδόν: cf. 15.25) that are the fruit of communal discernment that serve the evangelising mission of the Church.

22. The way the Council of Jerusalem was handled is a real-life demonstration of the fact that the way the People of God moves forward is something orderly and well thought out, where each person has a specific position and role (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,12-17; Romans 12,4-5; Ephesians 4,4).

The apostle Paul, in the light of the eucharistic synaxis, evokes the image of the Church as the Body of Christ, in order to explain both the unity of the organism and the diversity of its members. Just as in the human body all the members are necessary in their specific way, in the same way in the Church all have the same dignity by virtue of Baptism (cf. Galatians 3,28; 1 Corinthians 12,13) and all must all make their contribution to carry out the plan of salvation "according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Ephesians 4,7).

So all are equally responsible for the life and mission of the community and all are called to work in accordance with the law of mutual solidarity in respect of their specific ministries and charisms, inasmuch as every one of them finds his or her energy in the one Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 15,45).

23. The end-point of the journey of the People of God is the new Jerusalem, enveloped by the radiant splendour of God's glory, where the heavenly liturgy is celebrated. There the book of the Apocalypse contemplates "a Lamb standing that seemed to have been sacrificed" which, by its blood, has ransomed for God "people of every race, language, people and nation" and has made them "a line of kings and priests for God, to rule the world"; the angels and "ten thousand times ten thousand of them and thousands upon thousands" take part in the heavenly liturgy with all creatures in heaven and on the earth (cf. Apocalypse 5,6.9.11.13). Later the promise which holds the deepest meaning of God's saving plan will be fulfilled: "Here God lives among human beings. He will make His home among them; they will be His people, and He will be their God, 'God-with-them'" (Apocalypse 21,3).

1.2 The witness of the Fathers and Tradition in the First Millennium

24. Persevering along the road to unity across places, cultures, situations and generations is the challenge to which the People is called to respond in faith to the Gospel, and sowing the seed of the Gospel in the experience of the various peoples. Synodality appears from the start as the guarantee and incarnation of the Church's fidelity to her apostolic origins and her Catholic calling. It presents itself in a form that is substantially a single entity, but one which gradually unfolds - in the light of what Scripture indicates - in the living development of Tradition. This single entity thus has many forms according to different historical contexts and in dialogue with the variety of cultures and social situations.

25. At the beginning of the second century, Ignatius of Antioch describes the synodal understanding of the various local Churches, which saw themselves as jointly embodying the one Church. In his letter to the community in Ephesus, he says all its members are σύνοδοι, "companions on the journey", by virtue of the dignity of baptism and their friendship with Christ[17]. Furthermore, he stresses the divine order that makes the Church a single body[18], called to sing the praise of unity with the Father in Christ Jesus[19]: the college of Presbyters is the Bishop's council[20] and the members of the community, in their various roles, are all called to build it up. Ecclesial community is created and at its clearest in the eucharistic synaxis presided over by the Bishop, which feeds the conviction and hope that at the end of history God will gather in His Kingdom all the communities that now live it and celebrate it in faith[21].

The distinctive characteristics of the true Church are: fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles and the celebration of the Eucharist under the guidance of the Bishop, the successor of the Apostles; the ordered exercise of ministries; the primacy of communion in mutual service to the praise and glory of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Cyprian of Carthage, who was the heir and interpreter of this tradition in the middle of the third century, formulates the episcopal and synodal principle that must rule its life and mission locally and at a universal level: while nothing should be done in the local Church without the Bishop - nihil sine episcopo - it is equally true that nothing should be done without your council (the Presbyters & Deacons) - nihil sine consilio vestro - or without the consensus of the people - et sine consensu plebis[22] - always holding firm to the rule according to which episcopatus unus est cuius a singulis in solidum pars tenetur (the episcopate is one, of which each member has an undivided share in it)[23].

26. From the fourth century onwards, ecclesiastical provinces were established; these demonstrated and promoted communion between local Churches and were headed by a Metropolitan. In view of common deliberations, there were provincial synods, specific instruments for the exercise of ecclesial synodality.

Canon 6 of the Council of Nicea (325) recognised the pre-eminence (πρεσβεία) and regional primacy of the sees of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch[24]. The see of Constantinople was added to the list of principal sees at the Council of Constantinople I (381): Canon 3 conferred an honorary presidency after the Bishop of Rome[25], a title confirmed at the Council of Chalcedon (451)[26], when the see of Jerusalem was added to the list. In the East, this pentarchy is considered as the form and guarantee of the exercise of communion and synodality between these five apostolic sees.

While it recognises the role of the Patriarchs in the East, the Church in the West does not consider the Church of Rome as one Patriarchate among others, but attributes to it a specific primacy at the heart of the universal Church.

27. Apostolic canon 34, which goes back to the end of the third century and is well known in the East, established that any decision that is beyond the competency of the local Bishop must be taken by a synod: "The Bishops of each nation (ἔθνος) must recognise the one who is first (πρότος) among them and consider him their head (κεφαλή), doing nothing significant without his agreement (γνώμη) … but the first among them (πρότος) must do nothing without the consensus of all"[27]. The action of a Synod in concord (ὁμονοία) brought into being in this way by the Church is for the glorification of God the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit. The role of the πρότος at provincial, metropolitan (and eventually patriarchal) level is to convoke and preside at the Synod at the appropriate level to deal with common questions and issue the required solutions in virtue of the authority (ἐξουσία) of the Lord expressed by the Bishops gathered in Synod.

28. Although the Synods celebrated periodically from the third century onwards at diocesan and provincial levels dealt with disciplinary, cultic and doctrinal matters that had arisen locally, there is a firm conviction that the decisions taken were an expression of communion with all the Churches. This ecclesial sense is a sign of awareness that each local Church is an expression of the one Catholic Church; this is clear from the sharing of synodal letters, lists of synodal canons sent to other Churches, requests for mutual recognition between the various sees, the exchange of delegations that often involved tiring and dangerous journeys.

From the beginning, the Church of Rome has enjoyed particular respect, by virtue of the fact that the Apostles Peter - the Bishop of Rome is recognised as his successor - and Paul were martyred there[28]. The apostolic faith firmly held there, the ministry of authority exercised by her Bishop in the service of communion between Churches, her rich history of organising synods: these all make the Church of Rome a reference-point for all Churches, which all consult her to resolve controversies[29], so that she functions as a See of appeal[30]. Furthermore, in the West the See of Rome has become the organisational prototype of other Churches both administratively and canonically.

29. In 325 the first Ecumenical Council, convoked by the Emperor, was celebrated in Nicea. Those present included bishops from various regions of the East and Legates of the Bishop of Rome. The Council's profession of faith and its canonical decisions are recognised as having a normative value for the whole Church, despite adverse reactions, which has been the case on other occasions throughout history, too. With the Bishops exercising their ministry synodally, the Council of Nicea was the first institutional expression, on the universal level, of the ἐξουσία of the risen Lord guiding and directing the way forward for the People of God in the Holy Spirit. There were similar experiences in successive Councils in the First Millennium, which gave authentic shape to the identity of the one Catholic Church. In those Councils there was a gradual clarification of the attitude required for exercising the authority of an Ecumenical Council: the συμφωνία (symphōnía) of the heads of the various Churches, the συνεργεία (synergeía) of the Bishop of Rome, the συμφρόνησις (symphrónēsis) of the other Patriarchs and agreement of its teaching with that of preceding Councils[31].

30. As for the modus procedendi, local Synods in the First Millennium, on the one hand, followed the Apostolic Tradition and, on the other hand, as far as practical procedures were concerned, were influenced by the culture of the place where they were held[32].

In the case of a Synod in a local Church, in principle the whole community took part, each grouping in accordance with its respective role[33]. In provincial Synods, participants were the Bishops of the various Churches, though presbyters and monks could be invited to contribute. Only Bishops took part in the Ecumenical Councils celebrated in the First Millennium. It was mainly diocesan and provincial Synods that shaped the synodal procedure adopted in the First Millennium.

1.3 The development of synodal procedure in the Second Millennium

31. Since the beginning of the Second Millennium, synodal procedure gradually took on different forms in the East and in the West, particularly after the breakdown of communion between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome (11th century) and when ecclesiastical territories belonging to the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem came under the political control of Islam.

In the Eastern Churches, synodal procedure continued to follow the tradition of the Fathers, particularly on the level of patriarchal and metropolitan Synods, but there were also special Synods, in which Patriarchs and Metropolitans took part. In Constantinople the activity of a permanent Synod (Σύνοδος ἐνδημοῦσα) became more strongly established; it had also been known since the fourth century in Alexandria and Antioch, with regular assemblies to examine liturgical, canonical and practical questions with different forms in the Byzantine period and, after 1454, in the Ottoman period. Permanent Synods live on today in the Orthodox Churches.

32. In the Catholic Church, the Gregorian reform and the struggle for the libertas Ecclesiae contributed to the affirmation of the Pope's authority as primate. On the one hand, this freed Bishops from subordination to the Emperor but, on the other hand, if not properly understood, it ran the risk of weakening the identity of local Churches.

Since the fifth century, the Roman Synod had functioned as the Bishop of Rome's Council, attended not only by the Bishops of the Roman province but also by Bishops present in Rome when it took place, as well as Presbyters and Deacons, and this became the model for Councils in the Middle Ages. The Pope or his Legate presided at these, but they were not assemblies involving only Bishops and ecclesiastics; they were also an expression of western Christendom which involved, in their various roles, not only the ecclesiastical authorities (Bishops, Abbots and Superiors of Religious Orders), but also civil authorities (representatives of the Emperor or of Kings and high dignitaries), as well as theological and canonical experts (periti).

33. On the level of local Churches, partly continuing the vast synodal procedure exercised in the Western Roman Empire introduced by Charlemagne, Synods lost their simply ecclesiastical character and took on the form of royal or national Synods, at which Bishops participated under the presidency of the King.

Throughout the Middle Ages, there were examples of revitalisation of Synodal procedure in the widest sense of the term. The Monks of Cluny are one case. Cathedral Chapters helped to keep synodal procedure alive, as did the new communities of religious life, particularly the Mendicant Orders[34].

34. At the end of the Middle Ages, a unique situation came about in the Western Schism (1378-1417), when there were simultaneously two, and later three, people claiming the title of Pope. The Council of Konstanz (1414-1418) solved this intricate question by applying emergency canon law foreseen in medieval canonical thinking, and went on to elect the legitimate Pope. In this situation, however, the conciliarist idea developed, whose aim was to impose a permanent council over and above the primatial authority of the Pope.

The theological justification and practical application of conciliarism would be judged not to be in conformity with Tradition. It does, however, leave a lesson for Church history: there is always a danger of schism lying in wait, which cannot be shrugged off, and the continual reform of the Church in capite et membris cannot happen without making correct use of the synodal procedure that follows in the wake of Tradition and looks to the primatial authority of the Pope as its own guarantee.

35. A century later, in response to the crisis triggered off by the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church held the Council of Trent. It is the first Council in modern times with certain characteristics: it is no longer a Council of Christendom as in the Middle Ages; the participants are Bishops as well as Superiors of religious Orders and monastic Congregations, while the legates of Princes who attend do not have the right to vote.

The Council established the norm that diocesan Synods should take place annually, provincial Synods every three years, as a way of passing on the impetus of Trent's reforms to the whole Church. An example and model of this is to be found in what Saint Charles Borromeo did as Archbishop of Milan. In his long ministry, he convoked five provincial Synods and eleven diocesan ones. In America, Saint Turibius of Mogrovejo undertook something similar: he convoked three provincial Synods and thirteen diocesan ones. There were also three provincial Councils in Mexico in the same century.

In keeping with the culture of the time, the diocesan and provincial Synods celebrated following the Council of Trent were not meant to involve the active participation of the whole People of God - the congregatio fidelium - but to pass on and enact the Council's norms and dispositions. The apologetic reaction to the Protestant Reformation's criticism of ecclesiastical authority and to similar responses in a number of modern schools of thought has accentuated the hierarchological vision of the Church as societas perfecta et inaequalium, to the point of Seeing Bishops, and above them the Pope, as the Ecclesia docens, with the rest of the People of God as the Ecclesia discens.

36. The ecclesial communities born of the Protestant Reformation promote a certain kind of synodal approach, in the context of an ecclesiology and a sacramental and ministerial doctrine and practice which depart from Catholic Tradition.

The synodal government of the ecclesial community, in which a certain number of the faithful take part by reason of the common priesthood involved in baptism, is held to be the structure that is most in tune with the life of the Christian community according to the Lutheran confession. All the faithful are called to take part in the election of ministers and to ensure fidelity to the teaching of the Gospel and ecclesiastical order. This prerogative is generally exercised by civil rulers, which has led in the past to a regime very closely linked to the State.

The ecclesial communities of the reformed tradition have Jean Calvin's doctrine of the four ministries (pastors, teachers, presbyters and deacons), according to which the presbyter represents the dignity and powers conferred on all the faithful with baptism. Presbyters, along with Pastors, are thus responsible for the local community, while synodal procedure foresees the presence in the assembly of teachers and the other ministries, with a majority of lay faithful.

Synods have always been part of the life of the Anglican Communion on all levels - local, national and international. The expression according to which she is synodically governed, but episcopally led is not meant simply to indicate a division between the legislative power (which belongs to Synods, in which all sectors of the People of God take part) and the executive power (specific to Bishops), but rather the synergy between the charism and personal authority of the Bishop, on the one hand, and, on the other, the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on the whole community.

37. Vatican Council I (1869-1870) endorsed the doctrine of the primacy and infallibility of the Pope. The primacy of the Bishop of Rome, for whom "in blessed Peter is established the principle and the perpetual and visible foundation of the unity of faith and communion", is presented by the Council as the ministry set to guarantee the unity and indivisibility of the episcopate at the service of the faith of the People of God[35]. The formula according to which ex cathedra definitions of the Pope are irreformable "in themselves and not in virtue of the consensus of the Church"[36] "does not make the consensus Ecclesiae superfluous" but affirms the exercise of authority which belongs to the Pope by virtue of his specific ministry[37]. This is borne out by consultation carried out through the Bishops among the whole People of God, which is what Blessed Pius IX wanted in view of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception[38], the approach taken by Pius XII in regard to the definition of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary[39].

38. The need for a pertinent and consistent re-launch of Synodal practice in the Catholic Church became clear as early as the nineteenth century, thanks to prophetic writers like Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838), Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855) and John Henry Newman (1801-1890), who returned to the normative sources of Scripture and Tradition, heralding the providential renewal that came with the biblical, liturgical and patristic movements. They stressed that a primary and fundamental element in the life of the Church is the dimension of communion, which implies an ordered synodal practice on every level, giving due importance to the sensus fidei fidelium, intrinsically related to the specific ministry of the Bishops and the Pope. The emergence of a new climate in ecumenical relationships with other Churches and ecclesial communities, and a more careful discernment of the advanced demands of modern consciousness concerning the participation of every citizen in running society, call for a new and deeper experience and presentation of the mystery of the Church as intrinsically synodal.

39. It should not be forgotten that, from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, a new institution came into being and acquired a certain significance: episcopal conferences may not have had a precise canonical profile, but, as a gathering of the Bishops of a single country, they were a sign of a rediscovery of a collegial interpretation of the exercise of the episcopal ministry in a specific territory and in view of changing geopolitical circumstances. In the same spirit, on the eve of the twentieth century, Leo XIII convoked a plenary Latin American Council, which brought together the Metropolitans of the ecclesiastical province of the continent (1899). In terms of theology and ecclesiological experience, there was a growing awareness that "the Church is not identical with her pastors; that the whole Church, by the action of the Holy Spirit, is the subject or 'organ' of Tradition; and that lay people have an active role in the transmission of the apostolic faith"[40].

40. The Second Ecumenical Vatican Council continued along the lines of of Vatican I and made it part of a programme of aggiornamento, taking account of the gains of the intervening years and including them in a rich synthesis in the light of Tradition.

The dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium sets out a vision of the nature and mission of the Church as communion, with the theological presuppositions of a suitable re-launch of synodality: the mystical and sacramental conception of the Church; her nature as People of God on pilgrimage through history towards the heavenly homeland, in which all her members are by virtue of baptism honoured with the same dignity as children of God and appointed to the same mission; the doctrine of sacramentality of the episcopate and collegiality in hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome.

The decree Christus Dominus emphasises that the local Church is a subject, and encourages Bishops to exercise the pastoral care of the Church entrusted to them in communion with their presbyterate, taking advantage of the help of a specific senate or council of presbyters and formulating the invitation to establish a pastoral Council in every Diocese, in which presbyters, religious and lay people should take part. It also expresses the wish that, on the level of communion between Churches in a region, the venerable institution of Synods and Councils should be re-invigorated, and invites the promotion of Episcopal Conferences. In the Decree Orientalium Ecclesiarum the institution of the Patriarchate and its synodal form are put forward in relation to Eastern Catholic Churches.

41. In terms of re-vitalising synodal practice on the level of the universal Church, Blessed Paul VI instituted the Synod of Bishops. It is a "permanent Council of Bishops for the universal Church", directly and immediately subject to the power of the Pope, "providing information and offering advice", which "can also enjoy the power of making decisions when such power is conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff"[41]. This institution aims to continue to extend to the People of God the benefits of communion lived during the Council.

Saint John Paul II, on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Year 2000, offered an assessment of the path that had been travelled to incarnate - in conformity with the teaching of Vatican II - the very essence of the mystery of the Church through the various structures of communion. Much has been done - he stressed - "but there is certainly much more to be done, in order to realise all the potential of these instruments of communion …(and) to respond promptly and effectively to the issues which the Church must face in these rapidly changing times"[42].

In the more than fifty years that have passed since the last Council until today, the awareness of the Church as communion has grown in broad sectors of the People of God and there have been positive experiences of synodality at diocesan, regional and universal levels. In particular, there have been fourteen general ordinary assemblies of the Synod of Bishops; the experience and activity of Episcopal Conferences have developed; everywhere there have been synodal assembles. Councils have also come into being which foster communion and co-operation between local Churches and Bishops to develop pastoral approaches on the level of regions and continents.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF SYNODALITY

42. The teaching of Scripture and Tradition show that synodality is an essential dimension of the Church. Through synodality, the Church reveals and configures herself as the pilgrim People of God and as the assembly convoked by the risen Lord. Chapter 1 showed, in particular, the exemplary and normative character of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15,4-29). That shows, in the face of a decisive challenge for the early Church, the method of communitarian and apostolic discernment which is an expression of the very nature of the Church, the mystery of communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit[43]. Synodality is not simply a working procedure, but the particular form in which the Church lives and operates. With this in view, and in the light of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, the present chapter will focus on the basis and theologal content of synodality.

2.1 The theologal basis of synodality

43. The Church is de Trinitate plebs adunata[44], called and qualified as the People of God to set out on her mission "to God, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit"[45]. In this way, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, the Church shares in the life of communion of the Blessed Trinity, which is destined to embrace the whole of humanity[46]. In the gift and commitment of communion can be found the source, the form and the scope of synodality, inasmuch as it expresses the specific modus vivendi et operandi of the People of God in the responsible and ordered participation of all its members in discerning and putting into practice ways of fulfilling its mission. Exercising synodality makes real the human person's call to live communion, which comes about through sincere self-giving, union with God and unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ[47].

44. In order to implement the plan of salvation, the risen Jesus conferred the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles (cf. John 20,22). On the day of Pentecost the Spirit of God was poured out on all those who, whatever their origins, heard and welcomed the kérygma, prefiguring the universal gathering of all peoples in the one People of God (cf. Acts 2,11). In the depths of their hearts, the Holy Spirit brought into being and shaped the communion and mission of the Church, the Body of Christ and the living Temple of the Spirit (cf. John 2,21; 1 Corinthians 2,1-11). "To believe that the Church is 'holy' and 'Catholic', and that she is 'one' and 'apostolic (as the Nicene Creed adds), is inseparable from belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"[48].

45. The Church is One because she has her source, her model and her goal in the unity of the Blessed Trinity (cf. John 17,21-22). She is the People of God on pilgrimage on earth in order to reconcile all people in the unity of the Body of Christ, through the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12,4).

The Church is Holy because she is the work of the Blessed Trinity (cf. 2 Corinthians 13,13): made holy by the grace of Christ, who has given Himself to her as a Bridegroom gives himself to his Bride (cf. Ephesians 5,23), and made alive by the love of the Father poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. Romans 5,5). The communio sanctorum becomes real in her in both of its senses: communion with holy things (sancta) and communion between people who have been made holy (sancti)[49]. In this way, the holy People of God journeys towards perfection in holiness - the calling of all its members - accompanied by the intercession of Our Blessed Lady, the Martyrs and the Saints, having been constituted and sent forth as the universal sacrament of unity and salvation.

The Church is Catholic because she preserves the integrity and totality of faith (cf. Matthew 16,16) and she has been sent to gather into one holy People the peoples of the earth (cf. Matthew 28,19). She is Apostolic because she has been built on the foundation of the Apostles (cf. Ephesians 2,20), because she hands on their faith and because she is taught, sanctified and governed by their successors (cf. Acts 20,19).

46. The principle of synodality is the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God. Actually, as the nexus amoris in the life of God as Trinity, the Spirit gives this same love to the Church, and she is built into the κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (cf. 2 Corinthians 13,13). The gift of the Holy Spirit, which is one and the same in all who have been baptised, is manifested in many forms: the equal dignity of the baptised; the universal call to holiness[50]; the participation of all the faithful in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Jesus Christ; the richness of hierarchical and charismatic gifts[51]; the life and mission of each local Church.

47. The Church's synodal path is shaped and nourished by the Eucharist. It is "the centre of the whole of Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually"[52]. The source and summit of synodality are in the celebration of the liturgy and - in a unique way - in our full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharistic synaxis[53]. Because of our communion with the Body and Blood of Christ, "we, although there are many of us, are one single body, for we all share in the one loaf" (1 Corinthians 10,17).

The Eucharist represents and visibly brings about our membership of the Body of Christ, which we share with each other as Christians (1 Corinthians 12,12). Local Churches are formed around the table of the Eucharist and gather there in the unity of the one Church. The Eucharistic synaxis expresses and brings into being the ecclesial "we" of the communio sanctorum, in which the faithful are made sharers in God's grace in its many forms. The Ordo ad Synodum from the Councils of Toledo in the seventh century, and the Cærimoniale Episcoporum, promulgated in 1984, show the liturgical nature of a synodal assembly, and stipulate that it should begin with and be centred on the celebration of the Eucharist and the proclamation of the Gospel.

48. The Lord pours out His Spirit in all places and at all times on the People of God, to allow them to share His life, feeding them with the Eucharist and guiding them in synodal communion. "Being truly 'synodal', therefore, means moving forward in harmony, spurred on by the Holy Spirit"[54]. While synodal procedure and events have a beginning, a process and a conclusion, synodality offers a specific description of the historical development of the Church as such, breathes life into her structures and directs her mission. The Trinitarian, anthropological, Christological, pneumatological and Eucharistic dimensions of God's plan of salvation, which is at work in the mystery of the Church, are the theological horizon which has been the context for the development of synodality across the centuries.

2.2 The synodal path of the pilgrim and missionary People of God

49. Synodality manifests the 'pilgrim' character of the Church. The image of the People of God, gathered from among the nations (Acts 2,1-9; 15,14), expresses its social, historical and missionary character, which corresponds to the condition and vocation of each human person as homo viator. The path is the image that clarifies our understanding of the mystery of Christ as the Way that leads to the Father[55]. Jesus is the way from God to man and from man to God[56]. The grace-filled event whereby He made Himself a pilgrim by pitching His tent among us (John 1,14), goes on in the synodal path of the Church.

50. The Church journeys with Christ, through Christ and in Christ. He, the wayfarer, the Way and our homeland, gives His Spirit of love (Romans 5,5) so that, in Him, we may follow "the most perfect way" (1 Corinthians 12,31). The Church is called to retrace the footsteps of her Lord until He returns (1 Corinthians 11,26). She is the People of the Way (Acts 9,2; 18,25; 19,9) towards the Kingdom of heaven (Philippians 3,20). Synodality is the historical form of her journeying in communion towards final rest (Hebrews 3,7-4,44). Faith, hope and love guide and inform the pilgrimage of the assembly of the Lord "in sight of the future city" (Hebrews 11,10). Christians are "pilgrims and strangers" in the world (1 Peter 2,11), honoured with the gift and responsibility of proclaiming to all the Gospel of the Kingdom.

51. The People of God is journeying towards the end of time (Matthew 28,20) and towards the ends of the earth (Acts 1,8). The Church lives through space in the various local Churches and travels through the time of Christ's Passover until His parousia. She is a single historical subject; already present and working in her are the eschatological destiny of definitive union with God and the unity of the human family in Christ[57]. The synodal form of her journey expresses and promotes the exercise of communion in each of the local Churches and between them in the one Church of Christ.

52. The synodal dimension of the Church implies communion in the living faith of the various local Churches with each other and with the Church of Rome, both in a diachronic sense - antiquitas - and in a synchronic sense - universitas. The handing on and reception of the Symbols of faith and of the decisions of local, provincial and - in a specific and universal sense - ecumenical Synods, have expressed and guaranteed in a normative way that communion in faith professed by the Church everywhere, always and by everyone (quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est)[58].

53. Synodality is lived out in the Church in the service of mission. Ecclesia peregrinans natura sua missionaria est[59]; she exists in order to evangelise[60]. The whole People of God is an agent of the proclamation of the Gospel[61]. Every baptised person is called to be a protagonist of mission since we are all missionary disciples. The Church is called, in synodal synergy, to activate the ministries and charisms present in her life and to listen to the voice of the Spirit, in order to discern the ways of evangelisation.

2.3 Synodality as an expression of the ecclesiology of communion

54. The dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium offers the essential principles for a correct understanding of synodality in the perspective of the ecclesiology of communion. The order of its first chapters expresses an important step forward in the way the Church understands herself. The sequence - the Mystery of the Church (chapter 1), the People of God (chapter 2), the Hierarchical Constitution of the Church (chapter 3) - stresses that the ecclesiastical hierarchy is at the service of the People of God in order that the Church may carry out her mission in conformity with God's plan of salvation, in the logic of the priority of the whole over its parts and of the end over the means.

55. Synodality means that the whole Church is a subject and that everyone in the Church is a subject. The faithful are σύνοδοι, companions on the journey. They are called to play an active role inasmuch as they share in the one priesthood of Christ[62], and are meant to receive the various charisms given by the Holy Spirit in view of the common good[63]. Synodal life reveals a Church consisting of free and different subjects, united in communion, which is dynamically shown to be a single communitarian subject built on Christ, the corner-stone, and on the Apostles, who are like pillars, built like so many living stones into "a spiritual house" (cf. 1 Peter 2,5), "a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2,22).

56. All the faithful are called by virtue of their baptism to witness to and proclaim the Word of truth and life, in that they are members of the prophetic, priestly and royal People of God[64]. Bishops exercise their specific apostolic authority in teaching, sanctifying and governing the particular Church entrusted to their pastoral care at the service of the mission of the People of God.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is manifested in the sensus fidei of the faithful[65]. "In all the baptised, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelisation. The People of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible in credendo. This means that it does not err in faith, even when it cannot find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of His mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith - sensus fidei - which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively"[66]. This connaturality shows itself in a "sentire cum Ecclesia: to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the People of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their 'walking together'"[67].

57. Taking up the ecclesiological perspective of Vatican II, Pope Francis sketches the image of a synodal Church as "an inverted pyramid" which comprises the People of God and the College of Bishops, one of whose members, the Successor of Peter, has a specific ministry of unity. Here the summit is below the base.

"Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself…. Jesus founded the Church by setting at her head the College of Apostles, in which the Apostle Peter is the 'rock' (cf. Matthew 16,18), the one who must "confirm" his brethren in the faith (cf. Luke 22,32). But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located below the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called 'ministers', because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all"[68].

2.4 Synodality in the dynamic of Catholic communion

58. Synodality is a living expression of the Catholicity of the Church as communion. In the Church, Christ is present as the Head united to His Body (Ephesians 1,22-23) in such a way that she receives from Him the fullness of the means of salvation. The Church is Catholic also because she is sent to all, in order to gather the entire human family in the richness of the plurality of cultural forms, under the Lordship of Christ and in the unity of His Spirit. The synodal path expresses and promotes her Catholicity in two ways: it shows the dynamic way in which the fullness of faith is shared by all members of the People of God and it assists in handing it on to all people and all peoples.

59. The Church, insofar as she is Catholic, makes the universal local and the local universal. The particularity of the Church in one place is fulfilled at the heart of the universal Church and the universal Church is manifested and made real in the local Churches, and in their communion with each other and with the Church of Rome.

"Each individual Church that would voluntarily cut itself off from the universal Church would lose its relationship to God's plan…. But, at the same time, a Church toto orbe diffusa would become an abstraction if she did not take body and life precisely through the individual Churches. Only continual attention to these two poles of the Church will enable us to perceive the richness of this relationship"[69].

60. The intrinsic correlation of these two poles can be expressed as the way the universal and the local are present in each other in the Church of Christ. In the Church as Catholic, variety is not mere co-existence but bonding in mutual correlation and dependence: an ecclesiological perichoresis in which trinitarian communion sees its ecclesial reflection. The communion of Churches with each other in the one universal Church illuminates the ecclesiological meaning of the collegial "we" of the episcopate gathered in unity cum Petro et sub Petro.

61. Local Churches are communitarian subjects that make the one People of God real in a novel way in different cultural contexts, and they share their gifts in a reciprocal exchange in order to promote "bonds of close communion"[70]. The variety of local Churches - with their own ecclesiastical disciplines, liturgical rites, theological heritage, spiritual gifts and canonical norms - "is splendid evidence of the Catholicity of the undivided Church"[71]. The ministry of Peter, the centrum unitatis, "protects legitimate differences, while at the same time assuring that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute toward it"[72]. The Petrine ministry is there to serve the unity of the Church and guarantees the distinct character of each local Church. Synodality describes the path to follow to promote the Catholicity of the Church with the discernment of the paths to be taken together in the universal Church and distinctly in each local Church.

2.5 Synodality in the traditio of apostolic communion

62. The Church is apostolic in three senses: inasmuch as she has been and continues to be built on the foundations of the Apostles (cf. Ephesians 2,20); inasmuch as, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, she preserves and hands on their teachings (cf. Acts 2,42; 2 Timothy 1,13-14); inasmuch as she continues to be led by the Apostles through the College of Bishops, their successors and Pastors in the Church (acts 20,28)[73]. We are focusing here on the relationship between the synodal life of the Church and the apostolic ministry that is made real in the ministry of Bishops in collegial and hierarchical communion with each other and with the Bishop of Rome.

63. Lumen Gentium teaches that Jesus appointed the Twelve "after the manner of a college (collegium) or a stable group (cœtus), over which he placed Peter chosen from among them"[74]. It affirms that apostolic succession comes about through the consecration of Bishops, which confers on them the fullness of the sacrament of Orders and incorporates them into collegial and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the College[75]. It declares, therefore, that the ministry of Bishops, which corresponds to and derives from the ministry of the Apostles, is collegial and hierarchical. It illustrates the link between the sacramentality of the

episcopate and episcopal collegiality, going beyond the interpretation that uncouples episcopal ministry from its sacramental root and weakens its collegial dimension, something confirmed by Tradition[76]. In this way, in the context of the ecclesiology of communion and collegiality, it complements the doctrine of Vatican I on the Bishop of Rome as "visible principle and foundation of unity of both the Bishops and of the faithful"[77].

64. It is possible to go deeper into the theology of synodality on the basis of the doctrine of the sensus fidei of the People of God and the sacramental collegiality of the episcopate in hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome.

This ecclesiological vision invites us to articulate synodal communion in terms of "all", "some" and "one". On different levels and in different forms, as local Churches, regional groupings of local Churches and the universal Church, synodality involves the exercise of the sensus fidei of the universitas fidelium (all), the ministry of leadership of the college of Bishops, each one with his presbyterium (some), and the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome (one). The dynamic of synodality thus joins the communitarian aspect which includes the whole People of God, the collegial dimension that is part of the exercise of episcopal ministry, and the primatial ministry of the Bishop of Rome.

This correlation promotes that singularis conspiratio between the faithful and their Pastors[78], which is an icon of the eternal conspiratio that is lived within the Trinity. The Church thus "constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her"[79].

65. The renewal of the Church's synodal life demands that we initiate processes for consulting the entire People of God. "The practice of consulting the faithful is not new in the life of the Church. In the Medieval Church a principle of Roman law was used: Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet (what affects everyone should be discussed and approved by all). In the three domains of the life of the Church (faith, sacraments, governance), 'tradition combined a hierarchical structure with a concrete regime of association and agreement', and it was considered to be an apostolic procedure or tradition"[80]. This axiom should not be understood in the sense of conciliarism on the ecclesiological level or of parliamentarianism on a political level. It is more helpful to think in terms of exercising synodality at the heart of ecclesial communion.

66. In the Catholic and apostolic vision of synodality there is a reciprocal relationship between the communio fidelium, the communio episcoporum and the communio ecclesiarum. 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.

2.6 Participation and authority in the synodal life of the Church

67. A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. In exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one's calling, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops headed by the Pope. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit. The authority of Pastors is a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ the Head for the upbuilding of the entire Body, not a delegated and representative function of the people. On this point it is worth clarifying two things.

68. The first is about the significance and value of consulting everyone in the Church. The distinction between deliberative and consultive votes must not allow us to underrate the opinions expressed and votes made in various synodal assemblies and councils. The expression votum tantum consultivum, which indicates the weight of evaluations and proposals in such august assemblies, is inadequate if it is understood according to the mens of civil law in its various expressions[81].

The consultation that takes place in synodal assemblies is actually different, because the members of the People of God who take part in them are responding to the summons of the Lord, listening as a community to what the Spirit is saying to the Church through the Word of God which resonates in their situation, and interpreting the signs of the times with the eyes of faith. In the synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will. So, in coming to formulate their own decisions, Pastors must listen carefully to the wishes (vota) of the faithful. Canon law stipulates that, in certain cases, they must act only after having sought and obtained the various opinions according to juridically established procedures[82].

69. The second clarification regards the function of governing proper to Pastors[83]. There is to be no distance or separation between the community and its Pastors - who are called to act in the name of the only Pastor - but a distinction between tasks in the reciprocity of communion. A synod, an assembly, a council cannot take decisions without its legitimate Pastors. The synodal process must take place at the heart of a hierarchically structured community. In a diocese, for example, it is necessary to distinguish between the process of decision-making through a joint exercise of discernment, consultation and co-operation, and decision-taking, which is within the competence of the Bishop, the guarantor of apostolicity and Catholicity. Working things out is a synodal task; decision is a ministerial responsibility. A correct exercise of synodality must contribute to a better articulation of the ministry of the personal and collegial exercise of apostolic authority with the synodal exercise of discernment on the part of the community.

70. To sum up, in the light of its normative sources and its theologal foundations, which we have recalled in chapters 1 and 2, we can conclude with a precise description of synodality as an essential dimension of the Church.

a. First and foremost, synodality denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church's ordinary way of living and working. This modus vivendi et

operandi works through the community listening to the Word and celebrating the Eucharist, the brotherhood of communion and the co-responsibility and participation of the whole People of God in its life and mission, on all levels and distinguishing between various ministries and roles.

b. In a more specific sense, which is determined from a theological and canonical point of view, synodality denotes those structures and ecclesial processes in which the synodal nature of the Church is expressed at an institutional level, but analogously on various levels: local, regional and universal. These structures and processes are officially at the service of the Church, which must discover the way to move forward by listening to the Holy Spirit.

c. Finally, synodality designates the programme of those synodal events in which the Church is called together by the competent authority in accordance with the specific procedures laid down by ecclesiastical discipline, involving the whole People of God in various ways on local, regional and universal levels, presided over by the Bishops in collegial communion with the Bishop of Rome, to discern the way forward and other particular questions, and to take particular decisions and directions with the aim of fulfilling its evangelising mission.

CHAPTER 3

IMPLEMENTING SYNODALITY:

SYNODAL SUBJECTS, STRUCTURES, PROCESS AND EVENTS

71. The theological understanding of synodality in the perspective of the ecclesiology of Vatican II invites us to reflect on practical ways of putting it into practice. It is a matter of reviewing, in broad brush-strokes, what is currently stipulated canonically to bring out its meaning and possibilities, and to give it new energy, at the same time discerning the theological outlook for developing it correctly. This chapter takes its cue from the synodal calling of the People of God , goes on to describe synodal structures at local, regional and universal levels, and indicates the various subjects involved in synodal processes and events.

3.1 The synodal calling of the People of God

72. The entire People of God is challenged by its fundamentally synodal calling. The circularity of the sensus fidei with which all the faithful are endowed, the discernment carried out at the various levels on which synodality works and the authority of those who exercise the pastoral ministry of unity and governance shows the dynamic of synodality. This circularity promotes the baptismal dignity and co-responsibility of all, makes the most of the presence in the People of God of charisms dispensed by the Holy Spirit, recognises the specific ministry of Pastors in collegial and hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome, and guarantees that synodal processes and events unfold in conformity with the depositum fidei and involve listening to the Holy Spirit, for the renewal of the Church's mission.

73. In this perspective, the participation of the lay faithful becomes essential. They are the immense majority of the People of God and there is much to be learnt from their participation in the various forms of the life and mission of ecclesial communities, from popular piety and generic pastoral care, as well as their specific competency in various sectors of cultural and social life[84].

Consulting them is thus indispensable for initiating processes of discernment in the framework of synodal structures. We must, therefore, overcome the obstacles created by the lack of formation and recognised spaces in which the lay faithful can express themselves and act, and by a clerical mindset which runs the risk of keeping them on the edges of ecclesial life[85]. This requires a priority commitment in the task of forming a mature ecclesial sense, which, at the institutional level, needs to be transformed into a regular synodal process.

74. There also needs to be a decisive promotion of the principle of co-essentiality between hierarchical gifts and charismatic gifts in the Church on the basis of the teaching of Vatican II[86]. This entails involving communities of consecrated women or men, the movements and new ecclesial communities. All of these, many of which have come into being spurred on by charisms given by the Holy Spirit for the renewal of the Church's life and mission, can offer significant experiences of synodal approaches in the life of communion and of the dynamics of communal discernment at the centre of their lives, as well as stimuli to discovering new methods of evangelisation. In some cases, they also offer examples of integrating different ecclesial vocations in the perspective of the ecclesiology of communion.

75. In the Church's synodal vocation, the charism of theology is called to offer a specific service: it involves listening to the Word of God, understanding faith in sapiential, scientific and prophetic ways, discerning the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel and being in dialogue with society and cultures, all at the service of the proclamation of the Gospel. Together with the faithful People's experience of faith and contemplation of the truth, and with the preaching of the Pastors, theology contributes to an ever deeper penetration into the Gospel[87]. Furthermore, "As is the case with all Christian vocations, the ministry of theologians, as well as being personal, is also both communal and collegial"[88]. Ecclesial synodality therefore needs theologians to do theology in a synodal way, developing their capacity to listen to each other, to dialogue, to discern and to harmonise their many and varied approaches and contributions.

76. The synodal dimension of the Church must be brought out by enacting and directing discernment processes which bear witness to the dynamism of communion that inspires all ecclesial decisions. Synodal life is expressed in structures and processes which lead, through various phases (preparation, celebration, reception), to synodal events in which the Church is called together in accordance with the various levels of implementing her essential synodality.

This task demands listening carefully to the Holy Spirit, fidelity to the teaching of the Church and, at the same time, creativity, in order to discover and set in motion the most suitable instruments for the ordered participation of all, for the mutual exchange of gifts,

for an incisive reading of the signs of the times, for effective planning for mission. To this end, implementing the synodal dimension of the Church must integrate and update the heritage of the ancient ordering of the Church by means of the synodal structures inspired by Vatican II, and must be open to the creation of new structures[89].

3.2 Synodality in the local Church

77. The first level on which synodality is exercised is the local Church. Here "the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of all God's holy People in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which the Bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers"[90].

The historical, linguistic and cultural links that mould interpersonal communication in the local Church and describe its particular features facilitate the adoption of a synodal style in its daily life and are the basis for effective missionary conversion. In the local Church Christian witness is embodied in specific human and social situations, which allows for an incisive initiation of synodal structures which serve mission. As Pope Francis has emphasised, "only to the extent that these organisations keep connected to the 'base' and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape"[91].

3.2.1 Diocesan Synods and Eparchial Assemblies

78. Diocesan Synods in Latin-rite Churches and Eparchial Assemblies in eastern-rite Churches[92] are the "highest of all diocesan structures of participation in the Bishop's governance"[93]. They are actually a grace-filled event in which the People of God living in a particular Church is called together and gathers in the name of Christ, under the presidency of the Bishop, in order to discern pastoral challenges, to seek together the ways to go in mission and, listening to the Spirit, to co-operate actively in making appropriate decisions.

79. Being at the same time "an act of episcopal governance and an event of communion"[94], a Diocesan Synod or an Eparchial Assembly renews and deepens the People of God's awareness of co-responsibility. They are both called to give a real profile for the participation of all the members of the People of God in mission according to the logic of "all", "some" and "one".

The participation of "all" is put in motion through consultation in the process of preparing the Synod, with the aim of reaching all the voices that are an expression of the People of God in the local Church. Those who take part in Assemblies or Synods ex officio, and those who are elected or are appointed by the Bishop are the "some" whose task it is to celebrate the Diocesan Synod or Eparchial Assembly. It is essential that, taken as a whole, the participants give a meaningful and balanced image of the local Church, reflecting different vocations, ministries, charisms, competencies, social status and geographical origin. The Bishop, the successor of the Apostles and Shepherd of his flock who convokes and presides over the local Church Synod[95], is called to exercise there the ministry of unity and leadership with the authority which belongs to him.

3.2.2 Other structures serving synodal life in the local Church

80. In the local Church, it is laid down that there should be various permanent organisms whose task it is to assist the ministry of the Bishop in various ways in his ordinary pastoral leadership of the Diocese: the Diocesan Curia, the College of Consultors, the Chapter of Canons and the Financial Council. Vatican Council II stipulated that the Council of Priests and the Diocesan Pastoral Council[96] be set up as permanent bodies for the exercise and promotion of communion and synodality.

81. The Council of Priests was presented by Vatican II as a "council or senate of priests who represent the presbyterium" and its aim is "to help the Bishop in governing the Diocese". The Bishop is, in fact, called to listen to the priests, to consult them and to dialogue with them "about the pastoral needs and the good of the Diocese"[97]. The presbyterium has a specific place in the local Church's overall synodal dynamic, whose spirit animates it and whose style shapes it.

The Diocesan Pastoral Council's task is to offer a qualified contribution to the overall pastoral approach promoted by the Bishop and his presbyterium; on occasions it also becomes a place for decisions under the specific authority of the Bishop[98]. Given its nature, the frequency of its meetings, its procedure and the objectives to which it is committed, the Diocesan Pastoral Council is proposed as the most appropriate permanent structure for implementing synodality in the local Church.

82. In various local Churches, to boost the implementation of the teaching of Vatican II, there are Assemblies which express and promote communion and co-responsibility and contribute to integrated pastoral planning and its evaluation. These Assemblies are of great significance in the ecclesial community's synodal journey, as the setting and ordinary preparation for enacting the diocesan Synod.

3.2.3 Synodality in the life of the parish

83. The parish is the community of the faithful which incarnates the mystery of the Church in a visible, immediate and everyday form. The parish is where we learn to live as disciples of the Lord in a network of fraternal relationships and experience communion in the variety of vocations and generations, charisms, ministries and competencies, forming a genuine community where everyone jointly lives out his or her mission and service, harmonising the specific contributions of them all.

84. In the parish there are two structures which have a synodal character: the parish pastoral council and the financial council, with lay participation in consultation and pastoral planning. In this sense it seems necessary to review the canonical norm which at present only suggests that there should be a parish pastoral council and to make it obligatory, as the last Synod of the Diocese of Rome did[99]. Bringing about an effective synodal dynamic in a local Church also requires that the Diocesan Pastoral Council and parish pastoral councils should work in a co-ordinated way and be appropriately upgraded[100].

3.3 Synodality in local Churches on a regional level

85. The regional level in the exercise of synodality is the one experienced in groupings of local Churches present in the same region: a Province, as happened above all in the Church of the first centuries, or a country, a continent or part of one. These were "organically united" groupings, where bishops "pooled their abilities and their wills for the common good", moved "by the communion of fraternal charity and zeal for the universal mission"[101]. Shared historical origins, cultural homogeneity, the need to face up to similar challenges in mission gave them a new way of making the People of God present in various cultures and contexts. To live synodality at this level enhances the journey local Churches make together, strengthens their spiritual and institutional connections, contributes to the exchange of gifts and harmonises their pastoral choices[102]. In particular, synodal discernment can inspire and encourage shared choices which will mean "sparking new processes for evangelising culture"[103].

86. Since the first centuries, both in the East and in the West, Churches founded by an Apostle or one of his co-workers have played a specific role in their Province or Region, inasmuch as their Bishop was recognised, according to circumstances, as their Metropolitan or Patriarch. This has brought about specific synodal structures, in which the Patriarchs, Metropolitans and Bishops of individual Churches are explicitly called to promote synodality[104]; this task becomes greater through a growing awareness of episcopal collegiality, which must be expressed on the regional level, too.

87. Regional synodal structures in the Latin-rite Catholic Church include: Provincial and General Councils, Episcopal Conferences and groupings of Episcopal Conferences, sometimes at a continental level; in the Eastern-rite Catholic Church: Patriarchal and Provincial Synods, the Assembly of Hierarchs of various eastern Churches sui iuris[105] and the Council of Eastern Catholic Patriarchs. Pope Francis has referred to these ecclesial structures as intermediate organs of collegiality and has repeated Vatican II's hope "that such bodies would help increase the spirit of episcopal collegiality"[106].

3.3.1 Particular Councils

88. Particular Councils celebrated on a regional level are the specific structure for the exercise of synodality in a grouping of local Churches[107]. Actually, they envisage the participation of the People of God in the processes for discerning decisions in a way that expresses collegial communion not only between Bishops, "but with all the components of that portion of the People of God entrusted to them" and, consequently, "communion between the Churches", making them "a fitting place for decisions of greater importance, especially regarding the faith"[108]. As well as confirming the extent to which exercising synodal discernment is in the areas of doctrine and policy is appropriate in these Councils, the Code of Canon Law stresses their pastoral character[109].

3.3.2 Episcopal Conferences

89. National or regional Episcopal Conferences are a recent institution, which emerged in the context of the rise of nation states and as such were given a higher profile by Vatican II[110] in the perspective of the ecclesiology of communion. They demonstrate episcopal collegiality and their principal objective is co-operation between Bishops for the common good of the Churches entrusted to them, to support their mission in their respective nations. Their ecclesiological importance has been re-stated by Pope Francis, who has called for a doctrinal study of their characteristics, too[111]. The way to do this is to reflect on the ecclesiological nature of Episcopal Conferences, on their canonical status and on their specific features, with reference to the exercise of episcopal collegiality and to the establishment of a more coherent synodal life on the regional level. In this perspective, it is necessary to pay attention to experiences built up over the last decades, as well as the traditions, theology and law of the Eastern Churches[112].

90. The importance of Episcopal Conferences in promoting the synodal journey of the People of God lies in the fact that "the individual Bishops represent each his own Church"[113]. The development of an effective methodology of participation, with appropriate procedures for consulting the faithful and acceptance of different ecclesial experiences in the phase of working out the pastoral orientations that have come from Episcopal Conferences, with lay people participating as experts, helps to enhance these structures of episcopal collegiality to assist in the implementation of synodality. Ecclesial conventions organised by Episcopal Conferences, for example the ten-yearly conventions of the Church in Italy, are important for initiating synodal processes on a national level[114].

91. On the level of the universal Church, a more precise procedure in the preparation of the Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops allows Episcopal Conferences to contribute more productively to synodal processes involving the entire People of God, through consultation of the lay faithful and experts in the preparatory phase.

3.3.3 Patriarchates in the Eastern Catholic Churches

92. In the Eastern Catholic Churches, a Patriarchate is a synodal structure that gives expression to communion between the Churches in a province or region which have the same theological, liturgical, spiritual and canonical heritage[115]. In Patriarchal Synods, the exercise of collegiality and synodality demands harmony between the Patriarch and the other Bishops inasmuch as they represent their Churches. A Patriarch promotes unity in diversity and Catholicity through the communion of the faithful in one and the same Patriarchal Church, in communion with the Bishop of Rome and the universal Church.

3.3.4 Regional Councils of Episcopal Conferences and Regional Councils of the Patriarchs of Eastern Catholic Churches

93. The same reasons that led to the birth of national Episcopal Conferences led to the creation of Councils of Episcopal Conferences at the level of macro-regions or continents and, in the case of Eastern rite Catholic Churches, of the Assembly of Hierarchs of Churches sui juris and of the Council of Patriarchs of Eastern Catholic Churches. These structures encourage consideration of the inculturation of the Gospel in different contexts, keeping in mind the challenge of globalisation, and play their part in manifesting "the beauty of the varied face of the Church" in its Catholic unity[116]. Their ecclesiological significance and canonical status should be studied in depth, bearing in mind the fact that they can encourage processes of synodal participation in "each major socio-cultural region"[117], starting from the specific conditions of life and culture that mark the Churches which are part of them.

3.4 Synodality in the universal Church

94. Synodality as an essential dimension of the Church is expressed on the level of the universal Church in the dynamic circularity of the consensus fidelium, episcopal collegiality and the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. On this basis, the Church is asked from time to time to respond - in fidelity to the depositum fidei and in creative openness to the voice of the Spirit - to particular circumstances and challenges; she is called to set in motion a process of listening to all the subjects who together form the People of God in order to agree in discerning the truth and on the missionary path to take.

95. This ecclesiological context is the background of the specific ministry of the Bishop of Rome concerning the exercise of synodality on the universal level. "I am persuaded" - said Pope Francis - "that, in a synodal Church, greater light can be shed on the exercise of the Petrine primacy. The Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptised, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time - as Successor of Peter - to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches"[118].

96. The College of Bishops carries out an irreplaceable ministry in the exercise of synodality on the universal level. In fact, inasmuch as it intrinsically contains within itself its Head, the Bishop of Rome, and acts in communion with him, it is "the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church"[119].

3.4.1 Ecumenical Councils

97. An Ecumenical Council is the fullest and most solemn event giving expression to episcopal collegiality and ecclesial synodality on the level of the universal Church: for this reason, Vatican II defines it as Sacrosancta Synodus[120]. It gives expression to the exercise of the authority of the College of Bishops united to its Head, the Bishop of Rome, in the service of the whole Church[121]. The formula "una cum Patribus" used by Blessed Paul VI in promulgating the documents of Vatican II is a clear sign of the intimate communion of the College with the Pope who presides over it as subject of pastoral ministry to the universal Church.

98. An Ecumenical Council is the specific form of representation of the one Catholic Church in the sense of the communion of the local Churches: "individual Bishops represent each his own Church, but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church"[122]. The fact that such a Council represents the entire People of God through the College of Bishops, with the Pope at its head, derives from the fact that episcopal ordination makes a Bishop president of a local Church and sacramentally makes him part of the apostolic succession and the College of Bishops. This means that an Ecumenical Council is the supreme instance of ecclesial synodality in the communion of the Bishops with the Pope, which represents communion among local Churches through their Pastors, gathered in unum to discern the way the universal Church must go.

3.4.2 The Synod of Bishops

99. The Synod of Bishops, instituted by Blessed Paul VI as a permanent synodal structure, is one of the most precious legacies of Vatican II. The Bishops who compose it represent the whole Catholic episcopacy[123], so that the Synod of Bishops is evidence of the participation of the College of Bishops, in hierarchical communion with the Pope, in care for the universal Church[124]. It is called to be an "expression of episcopal collegiality within an entirely synodal Church"[125].

100. Every synodal assembly evolves in successive phases: preparation, celebration and implementation. The history of the Church bears witness to the importance of the process of consultation, which aims to receive the opinions of Pastors and the faithful. Pope Francis has suggested a line of approach to achieve this: to listen more broadly and more attentively to the sensus fidei of the People of God by putting in place procedures of consultation on the level of local Churches, in such a way that the Synod of Bishops can "be the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of the Church's life"[126].

Through the process of consulting the People of God, the ecclesial representation of the Bishops and the presidency of the Bishop of Rome, the Synod of Bishops is a privileged structure for implementing and promoting synodality at every level of the Church. Through consultation the synodal process has its point of departure in the People of God and, through the phase of inculturated implementation, it has its point of arrival there, too.

The Synod of Bishops is not the only possible way for the college of Bishops to share in pastoral care for the universal Church. The Code of Canon Law makes this clear: "It is for the Roman Pontiff, according to the needs of the Church, to select and promote the ways by which the College of Bishops is to exercise its function collegially regarding the universal Church"[127].

3.4.3 Structures at the service of the synodal exercise of primacy

101. The College of Cardinals, originally composed of the Priests and Deacons of the Church of Rome and the Bishops of the suburbicarian dioceses, is the historical synodal Council of the Bishop of Rome, to assist him in the exercise of his specific ministry. This function has developed over the centuries. In its current configuration, it reflects the face of the universal Church, assists the Pope in his ministry on its behalf and with this aim is called together in a Consistory. This function is carried out in a unique way when the College is called together in Conclave to elect the Bishop of Rome.

102. The Roman Curia is a permanent service to the Pope's ministry in favour of the universal Church[128] which, by its nature, is intimately related to episcopal collegiality and ecclesial synodality. In asking for its reform in the light of the ecclesiology of communion, Vatican II emphasised some elements that could promote an increase of synodality, such as: including diocesan Bishops to "report more fully to the Supreme Pontiff the thinking, the desires and the needs of all the Churches" and consulting the laity so that "so that they will have an appropriate role in the life of the Church"[129].

CHAPTER 4

CONVERSION TO RENEW SYNODALITY

103. Synodality is established to energise the life and evangelising mission of the Church in union with and under the guidance of the Lord Jesus, who promised: "where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18,20); "look. I am with you always; yes, to the end of the world" (Matthew 28,20). The synodal renewal of the Church happens through the re-vitalisation of synodal structures, of course, but expresses itself first and foremost in response to God's gracious call to live as His People, who journey through history towards the fulfilment of the Kingdom. This chapter points out some specific elements of this response: formation for the spirituality of communion and the practices of listening, dialogue and communal discernment; its relevance for the ecumenical journey and for prophetic diakonia in building a social ethos based on fraternity, solidarity and inclusion.

4.1 For a synodal renewal of the life and mission of the Church

104. "Every renewal of the Church is essentially grounded in increase of fidelity to her own calling"[130]. So, in carrying out her mission, the Church is called to constant conversion, which is a "pastoral and missionary conversion", too; this involves renewing mentalities, attitudes, practices and structures, in order to be ever more faithful to her vocation[131]. An ecclesial mentality shaped by synodal thinking joyfully welcomes and promotes the grace in virtue of which all the baptised are qualified and called to be missionary disciples. The great challenge for pastoral conversion that follows from this for the life of the Church is to intensify the mutual collaboration of all in evangelising witness based on everyone's gifts and roles, without clericalising lay people and without turning the clergy into lay people, and in any case avoiding the temptation of "an excessive clericalism which keeps them [lay people] away from decision-making"[132].

105. Pastoral conversion for the implementation of synodality means that some paradigms often still present in ecclesiastical culture need to be quashed, because they express an understanding of the Church that has not been renewed by the ecclesiology of communion. These include: the concentration of responsibility for mission in the ministry of Pastors; insufficient appreciation of the consecrated life and charismatic gifts; rarely making use of the specific and qualified contribution of the lay faithful, including women, in their areas of expertise.

106. In the perspective of communion and implementing synodality, some basic lines of orientation in pastoral action can be indicated:

a. the implementation in the local Church and on every level of the circular relationship between the ministry of Pastors, the participation and co-responsibility of lay people, the stimulus coming from the charismatic gifts according to the dynamic circular link between "one", "some" and "all";

b. the integration of the exercise of collegiality by Pastors and the synodality lived by the whole People of God as an expression of communion between local Churches within the universal Church;

c. the exercise of the Petrine ministry of unity and leadership of the universal Church by the Bishop of Rome in the communion of all local Churches, in synergy with the collegial ministry of Bishops and the synodal journey of the People of God;

d. the openness of the Catholic Church towards other Churches and ecclesial communities in the irreversible commitment to journeying together towards complete unity in the reconciled diversity of their respective traditions;

e. social diakonia and constructive dialogue with men and women of different religious confessions and convictions in order to bring about together a culture of encounter.

4.2 The spirituality of communion and formation for synodal life

107. The ethos of the Church, the People of God gathered together by the Father and led by the Holy Spirit to become, in Christ, "like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race"[133], bursts forth from and is nourished by personal conversion to the spirituality of communion[134]. All the Church's members are called to accept this conversion as a gift and pledge of the Spirit to be lived out in deference to His guidance, and to learn to live in communion the grace received in baptism and brought to fulfilment in the Eucharist: the paschal transition from "I" understood in a self-centred way to the ecclesial "we", where every "I", clothed in Christ (cf. Galatians 3,27), lives and journeys with his or her brothers and sisters as a responsible and active agent of the one mission of the People of God.

Hence the need for the Church to become "the home and school of communion"[135]. Without conversion of heart and mind and without disciplined training for welcoming and listening to one another the external instruments of communion would be of hardly any use; on the contrary, they could be transformed into mere heartless, faceless masks. "While the wisdom of the law, by providing precise rules for participation, attests to the hierarchical structure of the Church and averts any temptation to arbitrariness or unjust claims, the spirituality of communion, by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the People of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul"[136].

108. The same dispositions that are required to live and bring to maturity the sensus fidei, with which all believers are endowed, are also required to put it to use on the synodal path. This is an essential point in forming people in a synodal spirit, since we live in a culture where the demands of the Gospel and even human virtues are not often the object of appreciation or sufficient preparation[137]. It is worth remembering these dispositions: participation in the life of the Church centred on the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation; listening to the Word of God in order to enter into a dialogue with it and put it into practice; following the Magisterium in its teachings on faith and morals; the awareness of being members of each other as the Body of Christ and of being sent to our brothers and sisters, first and foremost to the poorest and the most excluded. It is about attitudes summed up in the formula sentire cum Ecclesia: "to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church" which "unites all the members of the

People of God as they make their pilgrim journey" and is "the key to their 'walking together'"[138]. In reality, it is about revealing the spirituality of communion as "the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up"[139].

109. The Eucharistic synaxis is the source and paradigm of the spirituality of communion. In it are expressed the specific elements of Christian life that are called to mould the affectus synodalis.

a. The invocation of the Trinity. The Eucharistic synaxis starts from the invocation of the Blessed Trinity. Gathered by the Father, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the Church becomes the living sacrament of Christ: "Where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18,19). The unity of the Blessed Trinity in the communion of the three divine Persons is revealed in the Christian community, which is called to live "the unity of God's sons in truth and charity"[140], in the exercise of the various gifts and charisms received from the Holy Spirit for the common good.

b. Reconciliation. The Eucharistic synaxis paves the way for communion by means of reconciliation with God and our brothers and sisters. The confessio peccati celebrates the Father's merciful love and expresses the desire to follow not the way of division caused by sin but the path to unity: "If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you…, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering" (Matthew 5,23-24). Synodal events presume that we recognise our frailties and request forgiveness from each other. Reconciliation is the way to live the new evangelisation.

c. Listening to the Word of God. In the Eucharistic synaxis we listen to the Word in order to accept its message and let it illuminate our path. We learn how to hear God's voice by meditating on Scripture, especially the Gospel, by celebrating the sacraments, above all the Eucharist, and by welcoming our brothers and sisters, especially the poor. Whoever exercises pastoral ministry and is called to break the bread of the Word along with the Eucharistic bread needs to be familiar with the life of the community, in order to communicate God's message in the here and now of its life. The dialogical structure of the Eucharistic liturgy is the paradigm of community discernment: before listening to each other, disciples must listen to the Word.

d. Communion. The Eucharist "creates communion and fosters communion"[141] with God and with our brothers and sisters. Generated by Christ through the Holy Spirit, communion is shared by men and women who, as baptised people, have equal dignity and receive different vocations from the Father and live them out responsibly - vocations which spring from baptism, confirmation, Holy Orders and from specific gifts of the Holy Spirit - to form a single Body from many members. The rich and free convergence of this plurality in unity is what is set in motion in synodal events.

e. Mission. Ite, missa est. Communion made real in the Eucharist spurs us on to mission. Whoever partakes of the Body and Blood of Christ is called to share the joyous experience of it with everyone. Every synodal event prompts the Church to go outside the camp (cf. Hebrews 13,13) in order to bring Christ to people who are waiting to be saved by Him. Saint Augustine says that we need "to be of one heart and one mind on our journey towards God"[142]. The unity of the community is not real without this inner télos which guides it along the paths of time towards its eschatological goal, "that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15,28). We must always face up to the question: how can we truly be a synodal Church unless we live "moving outwards" towards everyone in order to go together towards God?

4.3 Listening and dialogue for communal discernment

110. The synodal life of the Church comes about thanks to the implementation of genuine communication of faith, life and missionary commitment among all its members. It gives expression to the communio sanctorum which lives from prayer, is nourished by the Sacraments, flourishes in love of each other and of everyone, grows by sharing the joys and trials of the Bride of Christ. Communication needs to become explicit through the community listening to the Word of God in order to know "what the Spirit is saying to the Churches" (Apocalypse 2,29). "A synodal Church is a Church which listens…. The faithful People, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other; and all listening to the Holy Spirit"[143].

111. Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to get the better of the others or counters their positions with brusque arguments, but about expressing whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful for communal discernment, at the same time being open to accepting whatever has been suggested by the same Spirit in other people's positions, "for the general good" (1 Corinthians 12,7).

The criterion according to which "unity prevails over conflict" is of particular value in conducting a dialogue, managing different opinions and experiences and learning "a style of constructing history, a vital field where conflicts, tensions and opposites can reach a pluriform unity which generates new life", making it possible to "build communion amid disagreement"[144]. Actually, dialogue offers the opportunity to acquire new perspectives and points of view in order to shed light on the solution of the matter in question.

It is a matter of adopting "a relational way of viewing the world, which then becomes a form of shared knowledge, vision through the eyes of another and a shared vision of all that exists"[145]. For the Blessed Paul VI true dialogue is spiritual communication[146], which requires specific attitudes: love, respect, trust and prudence[147]; "Dialogue thrives on friendship, and most especially on service"[148]. Because truth - as Benedict XVI emphasised - "is lógos which creates diá-logos and hence communication and communion"[149].

112. An essential attitude in synodal dialogue is humility, which inclines each one to be obedient to God's will and obedient to each other in Christ[150]. The Apostle Paul, in the Letter to the Philippians, illustrates what it means and how it works in relation to the life of communion to be "of a single mind (φρόνησις), one in love (ἀγάπη), one in heart and one in mind" (2,2). He homes in on two temptations which undermine the life of the community: The spirits of jealousy (ἐριθεία) and vanity (κενοδοξία) (2,3a). By contrast, the attitude to have is humility (ταπεινοφρυσὐνη): either by seeing others as more important than ourselves, or by putting the

common good and interest first (2,3b-4). Here Paul recalls Him in whom, through faith, we became a community: "Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus" (2,5). The φρόνησις of the disciples must be that which we receive from the Father if we are living in Christ. The kenosis of Christ (2,7-10) is the radical form of His obedience to the Father and for the disciples it is the call to feel, think and discern together with humility the will of God in following the Master and Lord.

113. Exercising discernment is at the heart of synodal processes and events. That is the way it has always been in the synodal life of the Church. The ecclesiology of communion and the specific spirituality and praxis that follow on from it involve the mission of the entire People of God, so that it becomes "necessary today more than ever (…) to be formed in the principles and methods of a way of discernment that is not only personal but also communitarian"[151]. It is a matter of the Church, by means of the theologal interpretation of the signs of the times under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, travelling the path that is to be followed in service of God's plan brought to eschatological fulfilment in Christ[152], which also has to be fulfilled in every kairós throughout history[153]. Communal discernment allows us to discover God's call in a particular historical situation[154].

114. Communal discernment implies carefully and courageously listening to "the groans" of the Spirit (cf. Romans 8,26) which emerge through the explicit or sometimes silent cry that goes up from the People of God: "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"[155]. A disciple of Christ must be like a preacher, who "has to contemplate the Word, but he also has to contemplate his people"[156]. Discernment must be carried out in a space of prayer, meditation, reflection and study, which we need to hear the voice of the Spirit; by means of sincere, serene and objective dialogue with our brothers and sisters; by paying attention to the real experiences and challenges of every community and every situation; in the exchange of gifts and in the convergence of all energies in view of building up the Body of Christ and proclaiming the Gospel; in the melting-pot of feelings and thoughts that enable us to understand the Lord's will; by searching to be set free by the Gospel from any obstacle that might weaken our openness to the Spirit.

4.4 Synodality and the ecumenical journey

115. Vatican II teaches that the Catholic Church, in which subsists the one, universal Church of Christ[157], for many reasons sees herself united with all those who have been baptised[158] and that "the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church"[159]. Hence the commitment of the Catholic faithful to journey together with other Christians towards full and visible unity in the presence of the Crucified and Risen Lord, who alone is able to heal the wounds inflicted on His Body throughout history, and to reconcile differences with the gift of the Holy Spirit, according to the truth, in love.

Ecumenical commitment marks out a journey involving the whole People of God and demands conversion of heart and openness to each other in order to demolish the walls of diffidence which have separated Christians from each other for centuries and in order to discover, share and rejoice in the many riches that unite us as gifts of the one Lord in virtue of the baptism we share: from prayer to hearing the Word and experiencing the love we have for each other in Christ, from witnessing to the Gospel to serving the poor and outcasts, from commitment to a society of justice and solidarity to a commitment to peace and the common good.

116. It is important to acknowledge with joy that, in our time, ecumenical dialogue has come to recognise synodality as something that reveals the nature of the Church, something essential to its unity in the variety of its manifestations. There is convergence on the notion of the Church as koinonía, which is realised in each local Church and in its relation with the other Churches, by means of specific synodal structures and processes.

In the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, the recent Chieti Document states that, in the First Millennium, in East and West, ecclesial communion, with firm roots in the Blessed Trinity[160], developed "structures of synodality inseparably linked with primacy"[161]; the theological and canonical legacy of these structures is "a necessary reference-point…. to heal the wound of their division at the beginning of the Third Millennium"[162].

The document of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order, The Church. Towards a Common Vision, emphasises that "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the whole Church is synodal/conciliar, at all levels of ecclesial life: local, regional and universal. The quality of synodality or conciliarity reflects the mystery of the trinitarian life of God, and the structures of the Church express this quality so as to actualise the community's life as a communion"[163].

117. Consensus on this vision of the Church allows us to focus our attention, serenely and objectively, on the important theological knots that still need to be untied. In the first place, there is the question concerning the relationship between participation in synodal life by all the baptised, in whom the Spirit of Christ arouses and nourishes the sensus fidei and the consequent competence and responsibility in the discernment of mission, and the authority proper to Pastors, which derives from a specific charism that is conferred sacramentally; in the second place, there is the interpretation of communion between the local Churches and the universal Church expressed through communion between their Pastors and the Bishop of Rome, with the determination of how much pertains to the legitimate plurality of forms expressing faith in various cultures and what belongs to its perennial identity and its Catholic unity.

In this context, the implementation of synodal life and a deeper appreciation of its theological significance are a challenge and an enormous opportunity in continuing on our ecumenical journey. In creative fidelity to the depositum fidei and consistent with the criterion of the hierarchia veritatum[164], the horizon of synodality actually shows us how promising that exchange of gifts is, by which we can enrich each other as we journey towards unity: the reconciled harmony of the inexhaustible riches of the mystery of Christ, reflected in the beauty of the face of the Church.

4.5 Synodality and social diakonia

118. The People of God journeys through history in order to share with all the leaven, the salt, the light of the Gospel. That is why "evangelisation also involves the path of dialogue"[165] which we take with our brothers and sisters of the various religions, world-

views and cultures which search for truth and commit themselves to build up justice, in order to open everyone's hearts and minds to recognise the presence of Christ who walks beside us. Initiatives involving encounter, dialogue and co-operation win credence as precious stages on our common pilgrimage and the synodal journey of the People of God shows itself to be a school of life where we acquire the ethos needed to practise dialogue with all - without irenicism or compromise. In fact today, when growing awareness of the interdependence between peoples forces us to think of the world as our common home, the Church is called to demonstrate that her Catholicity and the synodal way in which she lives and works are a catalyst of unity in diversity and of communion in freedom. This is a significant contribution that the life and synodal conversion of the People of God can make to the promotion of a culture of encounter and solidarity, respect and dialogue, inclusion and integration, gratitude and gift.

119. The Church's synodal life presents itself, in particular, as diakonia in the promotion of a social, economical and political life of all peoples under the banner of justice, solidarity and peace. "God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between them"[166]. The practice of dialogue and the search for effective joint solutions by which we commit ourselves to peace and justice are an absolute priority in a situation where there is a structural crisis in the procedures of democratic participation and a loss of confidence in its principles and inspirational values, with the threat of authoritarian and technocratic aberrations. In this context, it is an important obligation and a criterion of all social action of the People of God to hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth[167], and to draw attention urgently, in determining society's choices and plans, to the place and the privileged role of the poor, the universal destination of goods, the primacy of solidarity and care for our common home.

CONCLUSION

JOURNEYING TOGETHER IN THE PARRHESIA OF THE SPIRIT

120. Pope Francis teaches that "to walk together is the constitutive way of the Church; the figure that enables us to interpret reality with the eyes and heart of God; the condition for following the Lord Jesus and being servants of life in this wounded time. The breath and pace of the Synod show what we are, and the dynamism of communion that animates our decisions; only in this way can we truly renew our pastoral ministry and adapt it to the mission of the Church in today's world; only in this way can we address the complexity of this time, thankful for the journey accomplished thus far, and determined to continue it with parrhesia"[168].

121. The parrhesía of the Spirit required the People of God on its synodal journey is the trust, frankness and courage to "enter into the expanse of God's horizon" in order to "ensure that a sacrament of unity exists in the world and that man is therefore not destined for dispersion and confusion"[169]. The lived and enduring experience of synodality is, for the People of God, a source of the joy promised by Jesus, a catalyst of new life, the springboard for a new phase of missionary commitment.

May Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, who "joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1,14), and thus made possible the missionary outburst which took place at Pentecost"[170], accompany the synodal pilgrimage of the People of God, pointing the way and teaching us the beautiful, tender and strong style of this new phase of evangelisation.

Notes

[1] Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015, AAS 107 (2015) 1139.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Cf. G. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon, Oxford (Clarendon Press) 1968, 1334-1335.

[4] Ἐκκλησίασυνόδουέστινόνομα (Exp. In Psalm., 149, 1: PG 55,493); cf. Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, AAS 107 (2015) 1142.

[5] Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum 1; Constitution on the Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium 1.

[6] CIC 439,1; 440,1.

[7] CIC 337,1.

[8] CIC 342.

[9] CIC 460.

[10] The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (1990) mentions, on the one hand, the Ecumenical Council (CCEO 50), on the other the Synod of Bishops (CCEO 46,1), the Synod of Bishops of the Patriarchal Church (CCEO 192), the Synod of Bishops of the major archiepiscopal Church (CCEO 152), the Metropolitan Synod (CCEO 133,1) and the Permanent Synod of the Patriarchal Curia (CCEO 114,1).

[11] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion 1 (28 May 1992), which states, referring to Vatican II (Cf. Lumen Gentium 4, 8, 13-15, 18, 21, 24-25; Dei Verbum 10; Gaudium et Spes 32; Unitatis Redintegratio 2-4, 14-15, 17-19, 22) and the Final Report of the Second Extraordinary Assembly of Bishops in 1985 (cf. II, C, 1): "The concept of communion (koinonia), which appears with a certain prominence in the texts of the Second Vatican Council, is very suitable for expressing the core of the Mystery of the Church, and can certainly be a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology".

[12] Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium 21 November 1964, 1.

[13] Cf. Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, 6 January 2001, 44: AAS 93 (2001) 298.

[14] Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015, AAS 107 (2015) 1141.

[15] International Theological Commission, Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church (2014), 91.

[16] Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 24 November 2013, 120: AAS 105 (2013) 1070.

[17] Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Ephesios IX, 2; F.X. Funk (ed.), Patres apostolici I, Tubingen, 1901, p. 220.

[18] Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Smyrnaeos VIII, 1-2 (Funk, I, p. 282); Ad Ephesios V, 1 (Funk, I, p. 216); III, 1 (p. 216); Ad Trallianos IX, 1 (Funk, I, p. 250).

[19] Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Ephesios IV (Funk, !, p. 216).

[20] Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Trallianos III, 1 (Funk, I, p. 244).

[21] Didache IX, 4 (Funk, I, p. 22). Later on this procedure was to a certain extent institutionalised. Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Smyrnaeos VIII, 1-2 (Funk, I, p. 282); Cyprian, Epistula 69, 5 (CSEL III, 2, p. 720); De catholicae ecclesiae unitate 23 (CSEL III, 1; p. 230-231); John Chrysostom, In Iohannem homiliae 46 (PG 59, 260); Augustine, Sermo 272 (PL 38, 1247f.).

[22] Cyprian, Epistula 14,4 (CSEL III, 2, p. 512).

[23] Cyprian, De catholicae ecclesiae unitate 5 (CSEL III,1, p. 214).

[24] Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, Bologna 2002, pp. 8-9.

[25] Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, Bologna 2002, p. 32.

[26] Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta, Bologna 2002, pp. 99-100.

[27] Canons of the Apostles (Mansi, Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio I, 35).

[28] As early as the 2nd century, Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Romanos IV, 3 (Funk, I, pp. 256-258); Irenaeus, Adversus haereses III, 3, 2 (SCh 211, p. 32).

[29] Clement of Rome, 1 Clementis V, 4-5 (Funk, I, pp. 104-106).

[30] Cf. Synod of Sardica (343), canons 3 and 5, DH 133-134.

[31] Cf. Ecumenical Council of Nicea II, DH 602.

[32] In Africa there is evidence of the procedure of the Roman Senate and Concilia municipalia (for example the Council of Carthage in 256). Use was made in Italy of the procedural methods known through the way the imperial government worked (cf. the Council of Aquileia in 381). In the Kingdom of the Visigoths and then in that of the Franks the way Synods were organised tends to reflect the political procedure known there (cf. the seventh century Ordo de celebrando Concilio).

[33] On the presence of lay people at local synods, cf. Origen, Dialogus cum Heraclio IV, 24 (SCh 67, p. 62); for the procedure used in North Africa cf. Cyprian, Epistula 17, 3 (CSEL III, 2, p. 522); Epistula 19, 2 (CSEL III, 2, p. 525-526); Epistula 30, 5 (CSEL III, 2, p. 552-553). Regarding the Synod of Carthage in 256 it is said that it took place "praesente etiam plebis maxima parte" (Sententiae episcoporum numero LXXXVII, CSEL III, 1, p. 435-436). Epistula 17,3 shows that Cyprian intends to make his decision in agreement with the whole plebs, at the same time acknowledging the special value of his coepiscopi.

[34] Their convents were arranged in provinces and were subject to a Superior General, whose jurisdiction extended to all members of the Order. Furthermore, the Superiors of the Order – the general, the provincial and those of individual convents – were elected by representatives of the members of the Order for a determined period and were assisted in the exercise of their authority by a Chapter or Council.

[35] Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution De Ecclesia Christi Pastor Aeternus, DH 3059; Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 18.

[36] Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution De Ecclesia Christi Pastor Aeternus, DH 3074; Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 25.

[37] "What it excludes is the theory that such a definition requires this consent, antecedent or consequent, as a condition for its authoritative status" (International Theological Commission, Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church (2014), 40).

[38] Blessed Pius IX, Encyclical Letter Ubiprimum nullus (1849), n. 6.

[39] Pius XII, Encyclical Letter Deiparae Virginis Mariae, AAS 42 (1950), 782-783.

[40] International Theological Commission, Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church (2014), 41.

[41] Blessed Paul VI, Motu proprio Apostlica sollicitudo, 15 September 1965: AAS 57 (1965), 776.

[42] Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, 6 January 2001, 44; AAS 93 (2001), 298.

[43] Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass for the Inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Aparecida 13 May 2007, AAS 99 (2007), 435: "This is the method by which we operate in the Church, whether in small gatherings or great ones. It is not only a question of procedure: it is a reflection of the Church's very nature as a mystery of communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit"…. "To the Holy Spirit and to us".

[44] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 2-4; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church Ad Gentes 7 December 1965, 2-4.

[45] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 51; Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum 2; Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium 6.

[46] Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 4, 8, 13-15, 18, 21, 24-25; Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum 10; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 7 December 1965, 32; Decree on Ecumenism Unitatis Redintegratio, 21 November 1964, 2-4, 14-15, 17-18, 22.

[47] Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes 24.

[48] Catechism of the Catholic Church 750.

[49] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 49.

[50] Ibid., 39-42.

[51] Ibid., 4, 12b; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Iuvenescit Ecclesia, 15 May 2016, 12-18.

[52] General Instruction of the Roman Missal 16.

[53] Cf. Vatican II, Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium 10, 14.

[54] J. Ratzinger, "Le funzioni sinodali della Chiesa: l'importanza della comunione tra I Vescovi", in L'Osservatore Romano, 24 January 1996, 4.

[55] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I, 2; III, prol.

[56] Cf. Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Redemptor Hominis 7-14.

[57] Cf. International Theological Commission, Select Themes of Ecclesiology (1984), II

[58] Cf. Vincent of Lérins, Commonitorium II, 5; CCSL 64, 25-26, p. 149.

[59] Vatican II, Decree Ad Gentes 2.

[60] Blessed Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, 8 December 1975, 14, AAS 68 (1975) 14.

[61] Vatican II, Decree Ad Gentes 35.

[62] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 10.

[63] Ibid., 12, 32.

[64] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church 783-786.

[65] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 12a.

[66] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 119, AAS CV (2013) 1069-1070.

[67] International Theological Commission, Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church (2014) 90.

[68] Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, AAS 107 (2015) 1139, 1141-1142.

[69] Blessed Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi 62, AAS 68 (1975) 52; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church On Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion chapter II.

[70] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 13c.

[71] Ibid. 23.

[72] Ibid. 13c.

[73] Catechism of the Catholic Church 857.

[74] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 19.

[75] Ibid. 21

[76] Ibid. 22a: "Just as in the Gospel, the Lord so disposing, St. Peter and the other apostles constitute one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are joined together".

[77] Ibid. 23a.

[78] Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum 10.

[79] Ibid. 8.

[80] International Theological Commission, Sensus Fidei in the life of the Church (2014) 122.

[81] Cf. F. Coccopalmerio, La 'consultività' del Consiglio pastorale parrocchiale e del Consiglio per gli affari economici della parrocchia, in "Quaderni di Diritto ecclesiale" 1 (1988) 60-65.

[82] The Code of Canon Law specifies: "When the law prescribes that, in order to perform a juridical act, a Superior requires the consent or the advice of some college or group of persons, the college or group must be convened in accordance with Canon 166… For the validity of the act, it is required that the consent be obtained of an absolute majority of those present, or that the advice of all be sought." (canon 127 §1) (cf. also canons 166-173).

[83] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 27.

[84] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 126, AAS 105 (2013) 1073.

[85] Ibid. 102.

[86] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 4; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter Iuvenescit Ecclesia 10.

[87] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum 8.

[88] International Theological Commission, Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria (2012) 45.

[89] Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, AAS 107 (2015) 1143.

[90] Vatican II, Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium 41; cf. Decree Christus Dominus 11.

[91] Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, AAS 107 (2015) 1143.

[92] Cf. CIC canons 460-468; CCEO canons 235-243. In the Eastern tradition the term 'Synod' is used of assemblies of Bishops; cf. Congregation for Bishops - Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, Istruzione sui sinodi diocesani (1997); Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Apostolorum Successores (2004) 166-176.

[93] Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Apostolorum Successores (2004) 166.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Cf. Vatican II, Decree Christus Dominus 11b.

[96] Cf. ibid. 27.

[97] Vatican II, Decree Presbyterorum Ordinis 7.

[98] Cf. Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of Lay People in the Church Christifideles Laici, 1988, 25, AAS 81 (1989) 437.

[99] Libro del Sinodo della Diocesi di Roma - secondo Sinodo Diocesano, 1993, p. 102.

[100] Cf. Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici 27, AAS 81 (1989) 441.

[101] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 23c; Decree Christus Dominus 36.

[102] Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte 29, AAS 93 (2001) 285-286.

[103] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 69, AAS 105 (2013) 1049.

[104] "That duty, insofar as the metropolitan see is the head of the Ecclesiastical Province, stands out through time as a stable and distinctive sign of synodality in the Church" (Francis, Motu Proprio Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus, Criterion V: AAS 107 [2015] 960). In

Eastern rite Catholic Churches, there are two kinds of metropolitan institutions: the province as part of a Patriarchal Church and the Metropolitan Church sui iuris (cf. CCEO canons 133-139 and 155-173 respectively); the ius se regendi of the latter is a specific indicator of synodality and could be a stimulus for the whole Church (cf. Unitatis Redeintegratio 16; Orientalium Ecclesiarum 3 and 5).

[105] The Latin Church is mentioned in canon 332 of the CCEO. It is a question, therefore, of a broad form of inter-ritual synodality.

[106] Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, AAS 107 (2015) 1143.

[107] The 1917 Code of Canon Law envisaged the celebration of a provincial Council at least once every 20 years (canon 283); it suggested that it could be celebrated "whenever it seems appropriate" (canon 440).

[108] Saint John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Bishop as Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World Pastores Gregis, 16 October 2003, 62.

[109] Cf. CIC canons 753 and 445. On Particular Councils: canons 439-446.

[110] Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 23; Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium 37-38; Decree Christus Dominus 36, 39.

[111] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 32, AAS 105 (2013) 1033-1034.

[112] Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 23; Orientalium Ecclesiarum 7-9.

[113] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 23.

[114] Cf. Francis, Address of the Holy Father at the Meeting with the Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church, AAS 107 (2015) 1286.

[115] CCEO canon 28.

[116] Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte 40, AAS 93 (2001) 295.

[117] Vatican II, Decree Ad Gentes 22.

[118] Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, AAS 107 (2015) 1144.

[119] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 22.

[120] cf. ibid. 1, 18.

[121] Cf. ibid. 25; Decree Christus Dominus 4; CIC canon 337 §1.

[122] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 23a.

[123] Blessed Paul VI, Motu Proprio Apostolica sollicitudo I and Ib, AAS 57 (1965) 776; cf. Vatican II, Decree Christus Dominus 5; CIC canons 342-348.

[124] Vatican II, Decree Christus Dominus 5.

[125] Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, AAS 107 (2015) 1143.

[126] Ibid. 1140.

[127] CIC canon 337 §3.

[128] "The universal nature of the Curia's service… wells up and flows out from the catholicity of the Petrine ministry" and explains its "diaconal primacy" (Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, 21 December 2017).

[129] Vatican II, Decree Christus Dominus 10.

[130] Vatican II, Decree Unitatis Redintegratio 6.

[131] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 25-33, AAS 105 (2013) 1030-1034; V General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean, Final Document of Aparecida, 365-372.

[132] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 102, AAS 105 (2013) 1062-1063.

[133] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 1. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Fraternal Life in Community. "Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor", 2 February 1994, 9: "In her pilgrimage through this world, the Church, one and holy, has constantly been characterised by a tension, often painful, towards effective unity…. The Second Vatican Council has brought out, perhaps as never before, this mysterious and 'communional' dimension of the Church".

[134] Cf. Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte 43, AAS 93 (2001) 297.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid. 45.

[137] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 64 and 77, AAS 105 (2013) 1047, 1052.

[138] International Theological Commission, Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church (2014) 90.

[139] Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte 43, AAS 93 (2001) 297.

[140] Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes 24.

[141] Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 17 April 2003, 40, AAS 95 (2003) 460.

[142] Augustine of Hippo, Regula I,3: PL 32, 1378.

[143] Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, AAS 107 (2015) 1140.

[144] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 228, AAS 105 (2013) 1113.

[145] Francis, Encyclical Letter on Faith Lumen Fidei, 29 June 2013, 27, AAS 105 (2013) 571.

[146] Blessed Paul VI, Encyclical Letter Ecclesiam Suam, 6 August 1964, 83, AAS 56 (1964) 644.

[147] Ibid. 83-85.

[148] Ibid. 87.

[149] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, 29 June 2009, 4, AAS 101 (2009) 643.

[150] Benedict of Norcia, Rule 72, 6.

[151] Saint John Paul II, Address to the Italian Church at the Celebration of its III Ecclesial Convention, 23 November 1995.

[152] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum 4.

[153] Cf. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes 4, 11.

[154] Cf. Saint John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis, 25 March 1992, 10, AAS 82 (1992) 672.

[155] Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, AAS 107 (2015) 1141.

[156] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 154, AAS 105 (2013) 1084.

[157] Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium 8.

[158] Cf. ibid. 15.

[159] Vatican II, Decree Unitatis Redintegratio 3.

[160] Cf. Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: towards a common understanding in service to the unity of the Church, Chieti, 21 September 2016, 1.

[161] Ibid. 20.

[162] Ibid. 21.

[163] World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order, The Church: towards a common Vision (2013) 53.

[164] Cf. Vatican II, Decree Unitatis Redintegratio 11c.

[165] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 238, AAS 105 (2013) 1116.

[166] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2 April 2004, 52; Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 178, AAS 105 (2013) 1094.

[167] Cf. Francis, Letter on the Care of our Common Home Laudato sì, 24 May 2015, 49, AAS 107 (2015) 866.

[168] Francis, Address at the Opening of the 70th General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference, 22 May 2017.

[169] Francis, Address to the Congregation of Bishops, 27 February 2014.

[170] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium 284, AAS 105 (2013) 1134.