

Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church

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Abstract

Pope Francis has spoken of his vision of synodality and of a synodal church in terms of “an inverted pyramid.” This essay examines the roots of such a vision in the vision of Vatican II, particularly two reversals made by the council regarding the nature of the church. Moreover, it shows the centrality of the *sensus fidei* of the people of God (the *sensus fidelium*) within that vision, and the need to make listening to the *sensus fidelium* a pervasive element at all levels in the life of the church *ad intra*.

Keywords

communio ecclesiology, *communio fidelium*, people of God, Pope Francis, synodality, Vatican II

One hundred and ten years ago, Pope Pius X wrote in an encyclical called *Vehementer Nos*:

The Church is essentially an unequal society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society

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and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors.¹

Three years ago, I was present in the piazza of St. Peter's, listening to Pope Francis's regular Wednesday audience address. He was continuing a catechesis he had been giving over several weeks on *Lumen Gentium*. This particular day he was focusing on article 4, on the Holy Spirit in the church. The church, the Pope said, is

the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Temple in which God works, the Temple in which, with the gift of Baptism, each one of us is a living stone. This tells us that no one in the Church is useless ... we are all necessary for building this Temple! No one is secondary. No one is the most important person in the Church, we are all equal in God's eyes. Some of you might say 'Listen, Mr Pope, you are not our equal'. Yes, I am like each one of you, we are all equal, we are brothers and sisters!²

So, what has happened here, in this 110-year period? Where has this different official understanding of the church come from? In a word—as is well known—Vatican II, and particularly its reception of three decades of *ressourcement* scholarship.³ The overwhelmingly hierarchical and juridical conception of the church that Pius X describes had been emerging over the previous millennium, in a process that the historian John O'Malley calls “the papalization of Catholicism;”⁴ after the council of Trent, Robert Bellarmine would develop a theology of the church that implies the church is a monarchy, with the pope ruling over the church, just like the King of France ruled.⁵ This shift had begun in the eleventh century, especially with Pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand) and the so-called Gregorian Reform.⁶ Much of this reform, within the

1. Pope Pius X, *Vehementer Nos* (February 11, 1906), 8, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html. This essay is a development of a keynote paper delivered at the annual conference of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain, September 5–8, 2016.

2. Pope Francis, “General Audience” (Vatican City, June 26, 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130626_udienza-generale.html.

3. *Ressourcement* refers to the approach of various renewal movements in the Catholic Church that turned to the biblical and patristic writings as sources for the renewal of the church away from the perceived aridity of neo-scholastic conceptions of the church. On various aspects of this *ressourcement* scholarship, see Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2011).

4. John W. O'Malley, “The Millennium and the Papalization of Catholicism,” in *Catholic History for Today's Church: How Our Past Illuminates Our Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 7–13.

5. Roberto Bellarmine, *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos*, 3 vols. (Ingolstadt: 1586–93), 4.3.2, 3.2.

6. See Klaus Schatz, “The Gregorian Reform and the Beginning of a Universal Ecclesiology,” in *Reception and Communion Among Churches*, ed. Hervé Legrand, Julio Manzanares,

historical context, was necessary and positive. However, it quickly led to, in the words of Yves Congar, a “hierarchology,”⁷ a view in which the church is fundamentally the pope and his agents, the bishops—“a wholly pyramidal conception of the Church as a mass totally determined by its summit.”⁸

The draft document on the church, prepared before Vatican II met (in the European autumn of 1962), captured much of this model. However, when, at the end of the first session, the council assembly was given an opportunity to review and comment on this preparatory draft, the vast majority of bishops quickly made clear their desire to move away from the kind of church it depicted. One speech in particular, by Bishop Joseph De Smedt, is famous for summing up the mind of the council majority. De Smedt called for the council to reject three basic failures of the draft schema: its promotion of *triumphalism*, *juridicism*, and *clericalism*. In speaking of the latter, De Smedt said:

The traditional picture of the Church predominates in the first chapters of the schema. You are familiar with *the pyramid*: pope, bishops, priests, each of them in charge; they teach, sanctify and govern with the accepted authority. Then, at the base, the Christian people are mostly receptive, and in a manner which accords with the place they seem to occupy in the Church ... [However] in the People of God we are all conjoined with one another and we have the same fundamental laws and duties. We all participate in the royal priesthood of the people of God. The pope is one of the faithful: bishops, priests, lay people, religious, we are all [the] faithful. We all approach the same sacraments, we are all in need of the forgiveness of sins, the eucharistic bread, and the word of God; we are all on the way to the same homeland, through the mercy of God ... We must take care [therefore] in speaking about the Church that we do not fall into a certain hierarchialism, a certain clericalism, a certain bishopolatry or popeolatry. What comes first is the People of God.⁹

The council went on to incorporate many of those ideas into its renewed vision of the church.

and Antonio García y García (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1997), 123–36. On “the Gregorian form of the church” of the second millennium, see Ghislain Lafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church: Structured Communion in the Spirit* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 37–64.

7. Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater, 2nd rev. ed. (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1965), 45.
8. Yves Congar, “Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality,” in “Church History: Election—Consensus—Reception,” ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Anton Weiler, *Concilium* 7 (1972): 43–68 at 60. The image of the pyramid had become common for describing preconciliar ecclesiology. Bonaventure Kloppenburg summarizes the notion: “We have been used to thinking of the Church as a pyramid: at the top, the pope, bishops, and priests, who preside, teach, sanctify, and govern, possessed of authority and power; at the base, the Christian people, passive recipients who seem to occupy a clearly inferior and secondary place.” Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1974), 311.
9. *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, 32 vols. (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970-99) I/4, 142–44.

Pope Francis and the Comprehensive Vision of Vatican II

Fast forward to October 17, 2015, halfway through the second synod of bishops on marriage and the family. At a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI's creation during Vatican II of the synod of bishops (called for by the council), Pope Francis in a carefully crafted speech speaks of "synodality" and of his desire for "a synodal church," using as a contrast image, the one De Smedt had used during the council, that of the pyramid:¹⁰

Synodality [is] a constitutive element of the Church ... In this Church, *as in an inverted pyramid*, the top is located beneath the base ... A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening 'is more than simply hearing'. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth', in order to know what [the Spirit] 'says to the Churches'.¹¹

Pope Francis, as we know, did not participate in the Second Vatican Council; he was ordained a priest four years and five days after its closing ceremony. But, while he does not regularly cite the council explicitly, Vatican II can be shown to be the backdrop to much of what he says.¹² He wants to take *the whole* of the council's vision, and

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10. Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis" (Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City, October 17, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html (hereafter cited as "October 17, 2015 Address").
 11. *Ibid.* The Pope is quoting here his own document *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171, along with John 14:17; Rev 2:7. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (hereafter cited as *EG*).
 12. Massimo Faggioli considers that appeals to the council in the pontificates of the post-conciliar period were often characterized by what he calls a "Vatican II nominalism": "a tendency to label with Vatican II much or everything that was being enforced in the Church by the magisterium." Massimo Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 333. According to Faggioli: "With Pope Francis ... 'Vatican II nominalism' is over ... In the pontificate of Francis, we see Vatican II going largely unnamed by the Pope, except on some particular occasions. This lack of direct mention of Vatican II by a post-Vatican II pope like Francis is not indicative of a dismissal of the council by the Argentine pope; on the contrary. It may have to do with the fact that when Vatican II is mentioned (especially in the English-speaking world), it is still captive to polarizing narratives. But the fact that Francis rarely mentions Vatican II has to do for sure with the *sensus ecclesiae* that he interprets as pope: the Church at fifty years from Vatican II has reached a point in the reception of the council when the conciliar trajectories need no labelling. Ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, an ecclesiology of the Church 'that goes forth,' a Church of mercy and for the poor—all this is unquestionably the theology of Vatican II in act. Vatican II was an act, and the reception of Vatican II is an act." *Ibid.*, 333–34.

for him, the whole is more than the sum of the parts. The various emphases of his pontificate—a church that is poor and for the poor, a merciful church, a missionary church, etc.—are attempts to name vital aspects of what he interprets as the comprehensive vision of the council. “A synodal church” is one such aspect, but one that, like the others, the council itself did not quite bring to neat formulation. “Synodality” is his catch-all phrase for how he believes the Second Vatican Council is envisioning the church *ad intra*—in its inner workings—without wanting to separate the church’s inner life with the effectiveness of its outward (*ad extra*) mission in the world. In this essay I would like to examine how what Pope Francis means by synodality is deeply rooted in the debates and documents of Vatican II, and how for Francis the *sensus fidelium*, and listening to the *sensus fidelium*, is fundamental for a church that is genuinely synodal, if it is to be not only a church more pneumatologically balanced in its self-understanding, but also a church more effective in the contemporary world of the twenty-first century.

The Vatican II documents never once use the word “synodality,” nor the adjective, “synodal.” The noun “synod” is found 136 times. In many of those instances, the council is referring to itself as a “sacred synod,” seeing “council” and “synod” as synonyms that are just Greek (*synodos*) and Latin (*concilium*) transliterations. So, by implication, “synodality” here means simply “conciliarity”: all bishops meeting with the bishop of Rome to govern and teach the church. Then, when the documents speak of smaller episcopal “synods” at the national, regional and international levels, these synods are still intended as instruments of episcopal and papal governance and teaching, i.e., expressions of episcopal collegiality.¹³ Here “synodality” equates to “collegiality” (between bishops and pope) exercised in a more collaborative way.¹⁴ Even diocesan synods and diocesan and pastoral councils at the local level appear to be extensions of episcopal collegiality exercised in a “downward” direction. There is little room in these texts for self-generating impulses in the other direction. In other words, strictly speaking, for Vatican II—when one looks at the explicit statements of the final texts—synodality is much more an element of its intention to balance papal primacy with episcopal collegiality (by calling for more dialogical and collaborative structures between the pope and the episcopal college) than it is a promotion of an “upward” direction in the teaching, sanctifying and governing aspects of the Catholic Church.

For Pope Francis, “synodality” is something much richer, more encompassing, and more radical. It is more than just an element of a primacy and collegiality exercised more collaboratively; he speaks of “episcopal collegiality within an entirely synodal

13. For an examination of the conciliar texts on synods, see Massimo Faggioli, “Vatican II and the Agenda for Collegiality and Synodality in the Twenty-First Century,” in *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 229–53.

14. For studies on synodality as a form of a more collaborative collegiality, see Winfried Aymans, *Das synodale Element in der Kirchenverfassung* (München: Max Hueber, 1970); Alberto Melloni and Silvia Scatena, eds., *Synod and Synodality: Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contact; International Colloquium Bruges 2003* (Münster: LIT, 2005).

church.” And to emphasize the deliberateness of his language, he immediately goes on to repeat his distinction between the “two different phrases: ‘episcopal collegiality’ and an ‘entirely synodal church’.”¹⁵ As one synod participant captured it, after listening to that October 17 speech: synodality now means “not some of the bishops some of the time but all of the Church all of the time.”¹⁶ Since the Pope is using “synodality” as a neat catch-all phrase for how Vatican II envisioned the church *ad intra* (with significant implications for how it envisioned the church *ad extra*), and in a way that goes beyond what the council explicitly stated regarding synods, a new theology of “synodality” within the Catholic Church needs to be more fully developed. Although the council never uses the exact term “synodality,” and although its references to synods are more about a specific notion of conciliarity and collegiality, such a new theology of synodality, as Pope Francis is now conceiving it, can nevertheless be shown to be grounded in the comprehensive ecclesiology of Vatican II, when all aspects of its vision are taken together as a whole. Such a comprehensive interpretation of the council and its documents should be based on an interpretation of (i) the debates from conflicting positions during the council, (ii) the final documents with their sometimes juxtaposed tensive statements on various issues, as well as (iii) the ever-shifting contexts of the receivers of the council event and its documents, a reception process that often raises new questions that the council participants probably never even thought of.¹⁷

I propose that Francis’s vision of a synodal church is faithfully grounded in two “reversals” made at Vatican II. These two reversals went on to be supported by several other deliberate decisions of Vatican II, as well as further elements of its teaching regarding a church that is participative and dialogic.¹⁸ But the two reversals I have chosen to highlight are key. One reversal is explicit; the other is implicit. One is apparent in the light of a hermeneutics of the authors; the other is apparent in the light of a hermeneutics of the final texts. The first concerns a key moment in the structuring of *Lumen Gentium*;

15. Francis, “October 17, 2015 Address.”

16. Archbishop Mark Coleridge, “From Wandering to Journeying: Thoughts on a Synodal Church,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 93 (2016): 340–50 at 348. Coleridge’s article is based on a talk delivered at the Catholic Leadership Centre (Melbourne, 16 May 16, 2016), the text of which is available at <https://gippslandordinariate.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/the-knox-lectur21.pdf>.

17. On these three interrelated hermeneutics, see Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist, 2004). See also Ormond Rush, “Toward a Comprehensive Interpretation of the Council and Its Documents,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 547–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056391207300303>.

18. These participative and dialogic aspects of the council’s vision are evident in the language it uses, as noted by John O’Malley: “Among the words [the council uses] are brothers/sisters, friendship, cooperation, collaboration, partnership, freedom, dialogue, pilgrim, servant (‘king’), development, evolution, charisma, dignity, holiness, conscience, collegiality, people of God, priesthood of all believers. Liberty, equality, and fraternity as well as other formerly unwelcome guests knocked at the door [of Vatican II] and gained entrance to the feast.” John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2008), 306.

the second concerns the proper way of ordering—in theological importance—the three dimensions of ecclesial *communio* that the council addresses across its documents. Taken together, these two reversals call for a church that is primarily baptismal in its orientation and in which ministry is exercised in service to the whole; is dialogic and participative at all levels; and is “synodal,” as Pope Francis is now describing it. Above all, both of these reversals foreground a much more pneumatological understanding of the church and, in particular, turn the spotlight on the Holy Spirit’s gift of *sensus fidei*, which accompanies the gift of *fides*, and which is a key category for understanding the nature and mission of the church as a community *of faith*.

The People of God and the Three Offices of Christ

The first reversal concerns a seemingly simple change in the order of two chapters during the drafting of *Lumen Gentium*. However, through it, the council affirmed the shared dignity and consequent equality of all the baptized in the church, despite differences in charisms and ministries. In deliberately moving away from the vision of church depicted in the preparatory schema *De Ecclesia*, one of the most significant decisions of Vatican II was therefore *not* to view the church, in the first instance, from the perspective of the pope and the bishops, the so-called “pyramidal” vision of the church.

After the assembly’s virtual rejection of the preparatory schema on the church at the end of the first session, the Coordinating Commission organized the drafting of a new version. From several unofficial texts already in circulation, the commission selected, and then refined, a text largely penned by the Belgian *peritus* Gérard Philips.¹⁹ This version would become the basic text to be submitted to the council in the second session and consisted of only four chapters: (i) the mystery of the church; (ii) the hierarchical constitution of the church and in particular the episcopate; (iii) the people of God and especially the laity; and (iv) the universal vocation to holiness and the religious. At the Coordinating Commission’s third meeting on July 4 and 5, 1963, Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens presented a report on the current state of the drafting process of the constitution on the church. He then suggested a change to the text that was being tabled: that the then third chapter in this draft be split into two separate chapters, one on the people of God and one on the laity; moreover, he suggested that the resulting new chapter on the people of God as a whole should precede that on the hierarchy. What is common to all should be treated before what differentiates all. “This change was accepted at once almost unanimously.”²⁰ According to Mathijs Lamberigts and

19. Philips’s draft had been chosen from several proposals which had been in circulation after the clear desire not to accept the original preparatory *De Ecclesia* in December, 1962. For some of the alternative texts proposed throughout December 1962 and January 1963 (by the German, Chilean, Italian, and French bishops and *periti*), see Giuseppe Alberigo and Franca Magistretti, *Constitutionis Dogmaticae Lumen Gentium: Synopsis Historica* (Bologna: Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, 1975), 381–428.

20. Gérard Philips, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: History of the Constitution,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), 1:105–37 at 110.

Leo Declerck, it was Suenens's assistant, the Belgian *peritus* and Rector of the Belgian College in Rome, Albert Prignon, who had earlier made these suggestions to Suenens.²¹

When the council opened for its second session a few months later in 1963, this basic text was put to the bishops for approval, and was adopted as the *textus receptus* for ongoing discussion. The council deliberated on the document for the next four weeks. At this stage, Suenens' suggestion regarding a new chapter and its placement had yet to be officially endorsed. When debate opened on September 30, 1963, one of the first to speak was the bishop of Bolzano-Bressanone, Giuseppe Gargitter. He proposed that the chapter on "the People of God and especially the laity" be divided up, with the general material on the people of God in a new chapter to be located before that on the hierarchy; and then after the hierarchy chapter should be a chapter specifically on the laity. This was more or less the same restructure that Suenens had suggested earlier in July to the Coordinating Commission.²² After two weeks of intense debate on the chapter on the hierarchy, the next two weeks were then devoted to the chapter on "the People of God and especially the laity" (still, at this stage, chapter 3). Other bishops requested that in the next version of the document, a chapter on the people of God as a whole be placed before that on the hierarchy. There was "fairly general agreement" among the assembly that the change should take place.²³ The revised version, presented to the council for debate the following session in 1964, had the chapters in the new ordering. The content of this chapter 2 on the people of God was debated and more or less accepted without major controversy.

This reversal in chapter order arguably constitutes a change as significant in the history of Vatican II as that to substitute "*est*" with "*subsistit in*" in *Lumen Gentium* 8.

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21. It seems that the idea of a chapter on the whole church before one on the hierarchy had also been raised in other quarters, as Lamberigts and Declerck acknowledge: "This idea had indeed been suggested in the circles of the Secretariat for the Unity (cf. e.g. the letter from Thijsen to Thils and the letter from Bea to Döpfner on January 23, 1963: 'In Sectio II [of the text Philips, by Bea indicated as the text De Smedt] wäre m.E. nicht an erster Stelle die Hierarchie zu setzen, sondern die 'Fideles', und zwar nicht nur die 'laici', sondern das ganze Kirchenvolk. [In Section II ... it would be better in my opinion not to put the hierarchy in the first place, but the 'Fideles', namely, not only the 'laici', but the whole church people.]') Still the credit for suggesting this at a crucial moment must go to Prignon." Mathijs Lamberigts and Leo Declerck, "The Role of Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens at Vatican II," in *The Belgian Contribution to the Second Vatican Council*, ed. Doris Donnelly et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 61–217 at 103n210.
22. Alberto Melloni notes that, although Suenens had already made the proposal back in July of that year, Gargitter's intervention was significant: "But it was only *after* the Bishop of Bolzano (who always maintained that he had not spoken with others) made his intervention in St Peter's that this proposal, rich in systematic value and doctrinal importance, was put on the agenda again and became a reality." Alberto Melloni, "The Beginning of the Second Period: The Great Debate on the Church," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 3, *The Mature Council: Second Period and Intersession, September 1963–September 1964*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), 3:1–115 at 44.
23. Philips, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: History of the Constitution," 119.

When compared with the dominant self-understanding characterizing the church across the whole of the second millennium, the change constitutes nothing less than a reconfiguration of the Catholic imagination regarding the nature of the church. As Jan Grootaers remarks:

The restructuring meant a fundamental reorientation of ecclesiology that would put an end to the pyramidal vision of the Church. It showed that bishops, laity, and religious were all part of the people of God, the description of which took precedence over the chapter on the episcopate. The first two chapters laid the foundations for membership in the Church in a spiritual dimension in which all members are equal by reason of their baptism, prior to any differentiation by the functions described in the next two chapters.²⁴

Yves Congar saw the structural change as highly significant: “We believe that this decision was one of the most important made, and that chapter 2 on the people of God, as it was finally drawn up and voted by the assembly, has the greatest promise for the theological, pastoral and ecumenical future of ecclesiology.”²⁵ Likewise, for the Belgian *peritus* Charles Moeller, the change “was a stroke of genius; this produced the first of the Copernican revolutions which marked the elaboration of the Constitution.”²⁶ According to historian John O’Malley, “the symbolism of the change was potent: the first reality of the church is horizontal and consists of all the baptized, without distinction of rank. Only then comes the vertical reality, hierarchy.”²⁷ Consequently, in the intratextual and intertextual interpretation of *Lumen Gentium* and indeed of all the conciliar documents, overall hermeneutical priority is to be given to the fundamental re-visioning of the church conveyed by this radical structural change.

Lumen Gentium’s chapter 2 on the people of God (articles 9–17) lays out the fundamental identity and mission of all in the church, no matter what their charism or ministry. Yves Congar highlights the significance of the chapter’s placement: “Indeed *what is common to all* is nothing less than Christian existence. Under these conditions, the Council committed itself not only to giving at least a quick look at what a Christian man is, but to recognizing the priority and even the primacy of the ontology of grace, which makes a man Christian, over organizational structures and hierarchical positions.”²⁸ Throughout Christian history, the term “the people” had often been used to name “the laity”—“the faithful” other than the pope, bishops, priests, and religious. The bishops at Vatican II, however, apply the terms “people” and “the faithful” in

24. Jan Grootaers, “The Drama Continues between the Acts: The ‘Second Preparation’ and Its Opponents,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, *The Formation of the Council’s Identity: First Period and Intercession, October 1962–September 1963*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 2:359–514 at 411.

25. Yves Congar, “The People of God,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John H. Miller (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966), 197–207 at 197.

26. Charles Moeller, “History of *Lumen Gentium*’s Structure and Ideas,” in Miller, *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, 123–52 at 127–28.

27. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 177–78.

28. Congar, “The People of God,” 198. Emphasis added.

chapter 2 to refer to all the baptized in the church, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful lay persons (*ab episcopis usque ad extremos laicos fideles*)” (*LG* 12).²⁹

Tellingly, the chapter does not name that common status of all the faithful as the “lay” state. The terms “layperson (*laicus*)” or “laity (*laicatus*)” do not appear at all in *Lumen Gentium* chapter 2 in reference to this common status of the *fideles* making up the people of God. There is the one instance of *laicus*, but only in the direct quote from St Augustine referring to lay people among the entire church—“from the bishops to the last of the faithful lay persons” (*LG* 12).³⁰ Chapter 4 of *Lumen Gentium* will go on to focus on lay persons (*laici*) in particular (as chapter 3 does of bishops, priests, and deacons in particular). But—equally as telling—the chapter on the laity describes the apostolate of the *laici* simply in terms of what has already been laid out in chapter 2 regarding *all individuals* in the church, and indeed, of *the church as a whole*:

The term “layman,” as understood in chapter 4 of *Lumen Gentium*, is a further specification of a wider and more general term: “Christian,” “believer,” “member of the people of God.” Before someone is looked upon as either layman or deacon or priest or bishop or even pope, he should be considered first of all as a Christian or member of God’s people. These terms express the *basic condition*, the *primal state*, the *common element*, the *most important aspect*, indeed the very reason why there exists a divine plan for the human creature. It is in this *common foundation* on which all else rests, that the greatness, dignity, and newness brought by Christ properly reside. Without it we would be nothing, whether we happened to be pope, bishop, priest, deacon, or layman.³¹

What Kloppenburg here calls “the basic condition,” “the primal state,” “the common element,” “the most important aspect,” or the “common foundation,” and what Congar calls “what is common to all,”³² Kenan Osborne calls “the common matrix for all Christians.”³³ The chapter following that on the people of God will speak of the role of the hierarchy in terms of *service* to the people of God.³⁴

29. *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 12, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter cited as *LG*), translation in Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents. Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2014), 17. Translation modified. The council is here quoting Augustine, *De Praed. Sanct.* 14.27 (Migne, *PL* 44.980).

30. Translation corrected.

31. Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, 309–10. Emphasis added.

32. Congar, “The People of God,” 198.

33. Kenan B. Osborne, *Ministry: Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church; Its History and Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 530.

34. As Bonaventure Kloppenburg remarks: “It is very important to grasp this basic point [regarding the common foundation of all the *fideles*] if we are to be able to see the Church and its varied membership as Vatican II does. This basic fact about the Church explains why the chapter on the hierarchy comes only in third place; it is also why those who make up the hierarchy (pope, bishops, priests, deacons) are deliberately and consistently presented as ‘servants of the people of God,’ nothing more. They are not the owners of

Lumen Gentium and the other documents use several overlapping terms to refer to all baptized members of the church: *populus* (the people); *fideles* (the faithful); *Christifideles* (the Christian faithful); *Christiani* (Christians); *credentes* (believers); *discipuli* (disciples); and *baptizati* (the baptized). Of those synonyms used to name the individuals within the people of God, that of *fidelis* is the most used, the singular and plural noun being found 249 times.³⁵ The title of *Lumen Gentium* chapter 2 uses the term *populus Dei*.³⁶ The word *populus* appears 282 times throughout the conciliar documents and is Vatican II's most used term for the church;³⁷ the terms are interchangeable: "the church or the People of God" (LG 13). The people of God are "those who believe in Christ" (LG 9), "all those, who in faith look towards Jesus" (LG 9), "the baptized" (LG 10), "all the disciples of Christ" (LG 10), "the whole body of the faithful (*universitas fidelium*)" (LG 12). *Lumen Gentium* 23 later speaks of "the whole company of the faithful (*multitudo fidelium*)."³⁸ Thus the church as the people of God is a *communio fidelium* (UR 2), a communion of the *fideles*.

A corollary of that decision to switch chapters in *Lumen Gentium* was another decision, during the drafting of the chapter on the people of God, to attribute to all the *fideles* participation in the so-called three offices of Christ, something formerly attributed to the hierarchy alone.³⁸ In its final form, *Lumen Gentium* teaches that, not just the

the Church, the diocese, the parish, the community; they are not masters to be served and glorified. The frequency and insistency with which the Constitution on the Church uses the words 'service,' 'ministry,' 'diakonia' in speaking of the action of the members of the hierarchy, indicates that the Council is here attempting to correct an outlook which is not quite evangelical but to which we had nonetheless become accustomed due to an unfortunate tradition dating back for centuries." Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, 310–11. See also Magnus Löhrer, "La gerarchia al servizio del popolo cristiano," in *La Chiesa del Vaticano II: Studi e commenti intorno alla Costituzione dogmatica 'Lumen Gentium'*, ed. Guilherme Baraúna (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1965), 699–712; Myriam Wijlens, "The Doctrine of the People of God and Hierarchical Authority as Service in Latin Church Legislation on the Local Church," *The Jurist* 68 (2008): 328–49, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jur.2008.0022>.

35. The other nouns are less regularly used: *Christianus* (79 times); *Christifidelis* (77 times); *credens* (42); *discipulus* (21 times in reference to individuals in the contemporary church); *baptizati* (3 times).
36. On the theological significance of the term, see Yves Congar, "The Church: The People of God," in "The Church and Mankind," ed. Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Concilium*, no. 1 (1965): 7–19; Congar, "The People of God"; Otto Semmelroth, "La Chiesa, nuovo popolo di Dio," in *La Chiesa del Vaticano II: Studi e commenti intorno alla Costituzione dogmatica 'Lumen Gentium'*, ed. Guilherme Baraúna (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1965), 439–52.
37. The *Relatio* presented to the assembly on chapter 2 noted that this chapter was a continuation of the biblical terms highlighting the mystery of the church, in this case, the term "people of God," and also that there is a second chapter only so that the first chapter would not become too large.
38. See the detailed study of the drafting and final texts regarding the threefold office, Peter De Mey, "Sharing in the Threefold Office of Christ, a Different Matter for Laity and Priests? The *Tria Munera* in *Lumen Gentium*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, *Apostolicam*

hierarchy, but the whole church (everyone together) participates in (i) the *prophetic* or teaching office, in (ii) the *priestly* or sanctifying office, and in (iii) the *kingly* or governing office. It is in this second chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, when it discusses in particular the prophetic or teaching office, that we find the famous text on the *sensus fidelium*. Article 12 affirms that “the whole body of the faithful (*universitas fidelium*)” participates in the prophetic or teaching office of the church.³⁹ Essential to that participation is “the entire people’s supernatural sense of the faith (*supernaturali sensus fidei totius populi*)” which the Spirit bestows.⁴⁰

This article *Lumen Gentium* 12 is among the passages of Vatican II most quoted by Pope Francis. In the famous interview with Antonio Spadaro in August 2013, the Pope said:

The image of the Church I like is that of the holy, faithful people of God. This is the definition I often use, which is the image of *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12. Belonging to a people has a strong theological value ... The people themselves are the subject. And the Church is the people of God on the journey through history, with joys and sorrows. *Sentire cum Ecclesia* [to sense, to feel with the Church], therefore, is my way of being a part of this people.⁴¹

The widespread reception in Argentina of Vatican II’s teaching on the people of God and the emergence there of the so-called “theology of the people” had had a strong impact on the future pope.⁴²

Actuositatem and *Ad Gentes*” (working paper, 2016). I am grateful to the author for making this text available to me. See also Peter De Mey, “The Bishop’s Participation in the Threefold *Munera*: Comparing the Appeal to the Pattern of the *Tria Munera* at Vatican II and in the Ecumenical Dialogues,” *The Jurist* 69 (2009): 31–58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jur.2009.0031>. Also on the history of the *tria munera*, see Ormond Rush, “The Offices of Christ, *Lumen Gentium* and the People’s Sense of the Faith,” *Pacifica* 16 (2003) 137–52, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1030570X0301600202>.

39. “The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office: it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips confessing his name. The whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from the holy one cannot be mistaken in believing (*in credendo*). It shows this characteristic through the entire people’s supernatural sense of the faith, when, ‘from the bishops to the last of the faithful,’ it manifests a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals. By this sense of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred magisterium which it faithfully obeys, receives not the word of human beings, but truly the word of God, ‘the faith once for all delivered to the saints.’ The people unflinchingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply through right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.” *LG* 12, translation modified.
40. For a detailed study of this text, see throughout Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church’s Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2009).
41. Pope Francis, *My Door Is Always Open: A Conversation on Faith, Hope and the Church in a Time of Change*; Pope Francis with Antonio Spadaro (London: Bloomsbury, in association with *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2014), 49.
42. For an exploration of the historical origins of Pope Francis’s regular reference to “the faithful people of God,” see Juan Carlos Scannone, “Pope Francis and the Theology of the People,”

And then again in *Evangelii Gaudium* 119, the Pope cites *Lumen Gentium* 12, highlighting its teaching on the *sensus fidei* of the people of God:

In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo* [in believing]. This means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation (*Lumen Gentium*, 12). 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, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression.⁴³

And then yet again, in the October 17, 2015 address on synodality, after once again summarizing the key points of *Lumen Gentium* 12 regarding the *sensus fidei* of the people of God, he ends with: “These are the famous words ‘infallible in believing’.”⁴⁴ Of course, the council’s teaching here on infallibility *in believing* on the part of the whole people of God (because of their *sensus fidei*) stands in dramatic tension with affirmations in the next chapter of *Lumen Gentium* that reassert Vatican I’s teaching on papal infallibility *in teaching*, and go on then to include the episcopate in that function. Vatican II does not resolve that tension between these two forms of infallibility (in *believing* and in *teaching*), leaving that synthesis for future generations.

But, with his notion of “a synodal church,” I believe Pope Francis is making moves towards such a synthesis. And for him, the linchpin linking the two infallibilities is listening to the *sensus fidelium*.⁴⁵ “A synodal Church,” he says,

is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing’. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and *all listening to the Holy Spirit*, the ‘Spirit of truth’, in order to know what [the Spirit] ‘says to the Churches’.⁴⁶

Theological Studies 77 (2016): 118–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563915621141>. Scannone traces the reception in Argentina of Vatican II’s notion of the people of God, especially in the “theology of the people” developed by Lucio Gera and Rafael Tello. Also, on their influence on Pope Francis, see Juan Carlos Scannone, *Le Pape du peuple: Bergoglio raconté par son confrère théologien, jésuite et argentin*, ed. Bernadette Sauvaget (Paris: Cerf, 2015). For a collection of Gera’s key writings on the topic, see Lucio Gera, *La teología Argentina del pueblo*, ed. Virginia Raquel Azcuy (Santiago de Chile: Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2015).

43. *EG* 119. Emphasis added.

44. Francis, “October 17, 2015 Address.”

45. Pope Francis prefers the term *sensus fidei* of the faithful. However, the term *sensus fidelium* (or more precisely, *sensus fidei fidelium*) is often used in the secondary literature to capture *LG* 12’s phrase “*sensus fidei totius populi*.”

46. Francis, “October 17, 2015 Address.” Emphasis added.

The people of God's intuition in the contexts of today regarding faith and morals should be a primary consideration in the process of the hierarchy's teaching, not only when it is claiming to do so infallibly, but at all levels of its exercise of teaching authority.

Thus, the *sensus fidelium*, and listening to the *sensus fidelium*, lie at the heart of Francis's dynamic notion of a synodal church. In that same address on the anniversary of the synod of bishops, he goes on to say:

Such was the conviction [regarding the *sensus fidei*] underlying my desire that the people of God should be consulted in the preparation of the two phases of the Synod on the family, as is ordinarily done with each *Lineamenta*. Certainly, a consultation of this sort would never be sufficient to perceive the *sensus fidei*. But how could we speak about the family without engaging families themselves, listening to their joys and their hopes, their sorrows and their anguish? Through the answers given to the two questionnaires sent to the particular Churches, we had the opportunity at least to hear some of those families speak to issues which closely affect them and about which they have much to say.⁴⁷

Those questionnaires, as we know, were inadequate, using at times language that the *fideles* being consulted would perhaps regard as perplexing.⁴⁸ But at least it is a start, and hopefully future pre-synodal soundings of the *sensus fidelium* will be more effective. Such participatory processes will be important elements in realizing the vision of a synodal church implied in Vatican II's decision to place the chapter on the people of God in *Lumen Gentium* before that on the hierarchy.

Dimensions of *Communio*

This first reversal by the council—considering the church as all the *fideles*, before considering the hierarchy who serves them—has wide-reaching consequences for interpreting Vatican II's notion of the church and its mission. Above all, it demands a more dynamic understanding of the church *ad intra*. Vatican II pointed the way to this new vision by means of its so-called "*communio* ecclesiology."⁴⁹ But this inchoate ecclesiology requires synthesis; the council documents do not present systematic treatises. Pope Francis's catch-all phrase of "a synodal church" can be also seen to bring

47. Ibid.

48. As Archbishop Coleridge participating in the 2015 synod described it: "The questionnaire that went out before the first Synod struck me as a worthy attempt—in principle at least. But it was dreadfully clumsy. It was good to consult as widely as possible before the gathering, and that too became a crucial methodological point as the process unfolded. But the questions were put in language that many found opaque, and the questionnaire seemed the work of people who simply weren't used to this sort of thing." Coleridge, "From Wandering to Journeying," 343.

49. See, for example, Antonio Acerbi, *Due ecclesiologie: Ecclesiologia giuridica ed ecclesiologia di comunione nella "Lumen Gentium"* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1975).

to synthesis a second (this time, implicit) and parallel reversal that the council makes, here within the dimensions of its *communio* ecclesiology.

Vatican II speaks of the church *ad intra* as a communion in basically three ways: the hierarchical *communio* within the college of bishops (*communio hierarchica*); the *communio* between local churches constituting the catholic church (*communio ecclesiarum*); and the *communio* among all the faithful (*communio fidelium*).

One of the great achievements of Vatican II is its teaching on episcopal collegiality. The doctrine attempts to complete the unfinished work of Vatican I, with its teaching on the jurisdictional “primacy” of the pope. Vatican II goes on to affirm that the bishops, in succession with the “college” of the apostles, likewise constitute a college. This college relates in a *communio hierarchica* with and under the bishop of Rome. This new notion of *communio hierarchica* enabled the council to avoid to some extent the traditional, juridical distinction between *ordo* and *iurisdictio* in the original *De Ecclesia*, and to reformulate it in the language of *communio*.⁵⁰ In addressing the issue of collegiality and the question whether a bishop receives his episcopacy from the pope or “from God,” *Lumen Gentium* 21 teaches that

the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred by episcopal consecration ... Episcopal consecration confers, together with the office of sanctifying, the offices also of teaching and ruling, which, however, of their very nature can be exercised only in hierarchical communion (*hierarchica communione*) with the head and members of the college. (*LG* 21)

The article that then follows reiterates the teaching: “A person is made a member of the episcopal body in virtue of the sacramental consecration and by hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college” (*LG* 22). The constitution later highlights the consequence of this teaching: “Nor are they to be regarded as vicars of the Roman Pontiff; for they exercise a power which they possess in their own right and are most truly said to be at the head of the people whom they govern” (*LG* 27).

Despite the gains made with the notion, the problematic nature of the phrase *communio hierarchica* was dramatically highlighted in the last week of the third session—*la settimana nera* (“the black week”), when *Lumen Gentium* was all but ready to be promulgated, as it would be at the end of the week. Coming from a “higher authority” (presumably Pope Paul VI, at the urging of the minority among the bishops), the non-conciliar *Nota Explicativa Praevia* was presented to the council as an instruction on how the doctrine of collegiality was to be interpreted, almost

50. For a canonical interpretation, that sees *communio hierarchica* “constituting” *communio catholica*, and that privileges the notion of *communio hierarchica* over other dimensions of *communio*, see Gianfranco Ghirlanda, “*Hierarchica communio*”: *Significato della formula nella “Lumen Gentium”* (Roma: Università Gregoriana, 1980). Ghirlanda’s approach can be found summarized in Gianfranco Ghirlanda, “Universal Church, Particular Church, and Local Church at the Second Vatican Council and in the New Code of Canon Law,” in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962–1987)*, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1989), 2:233–71.

reinforcing the pre-conciliar understanding of the pope's authority over the college of bishops.⁵¹ Tellingly, the document employs several times in defense of its argument the phrase *communio hierarchica*, bringing to the fore its problematic character.

The phrase thus has both strengths and weaknesses, as demonstrated by the *Nota Explicativa Praevia*: while certainly employing the notion of *communio*, it nevertheless can be used to advance a weakened interpretation of the doctrine of collegiality. Walter Kasper acknowledges the advance the phrase achieves, but highlights the problems it raises:

Communio hierarchica is ... a typical compromise formulation, which points to a juxtaposition of a sacramental *communio* ecclesiology and juristic unity ecclesiology. It has consequently been said that the Vatican II texts contain two ecclesiologies. The compromise proved useful at the council, since it made it possible for the minority to agree to the Constitution on the Church. But just to say this is not entirely satisfactory. The compromise indicates a deeper problem. For the Catholic principle about living tradition makes it impossible simply to eliminate the tradition of the second millennium. The continuity of tradition demands a creative synthesis of the traditions of the first millennium and the second. The synthesis brought about by the last council was highly superficial, and in no way satisfactory. But then it is not the function of councils to draw up theological treatises. A council presents the indispensable 'frame of reference'. The synthesis is then a matter for the theology that comes afterwards.⁵²

The notion of *communio hierarchica* is a compromise formula that attempts to broaden the juridical vision of the preparatory *De Ecclesia* which saw the church primarily in terms of a pyramid—with the pope as the primary juridical authority, and the bishops then as his juridical delegates. Taken alone, however, the formula would present a one-dimensional view of the church. Because of its weaknesses, the notion of *communio hierarchica* remains problematic, and needs to be interpreted intratextually and intertextually in the light of other notions of *communio* (and other conciliar teachings). In the vision of Vatican II, there are two other dimensions of the church's mystery as a *communio* that must balance that of *communio hierarchica*.

The first is the notion of the church as a *communio ecclesiarum* (a communion of churches). *Sacrosanctum Concilium* laid the foundations for a *communio* ecclesiology in general, and more specifically for a theology of *communio ecclesiarum*: it is in Eucharist in local churches above all that the church of Jesus Christ is manifest. While *Lumen Gentium* unfortunately fails to bring out the implications of, and develop, this

51. On "la settimana nera" and the *Nota Explicativa Praevia*, see Luis Antonio Tagle, "The 'Black Week' of Vatican II (November 14–21 1964)," in *History of Vatican II, vol. 4, The Church as Communion: Third Period and Third Intersession, September 1964–September 1965*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 387–452.

52. Walter Kasper, "The Church as Communion: Reflections on the Guiding Ecclesiological Idea of the Second Vatican Council," in *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 148–65 at 158. In referring to the thesis that *Lumen Gentium* is juxtaposing two ecclesiologies, Kasper cites Acerbi, *Due ecclesiologie*.

“Eucharistic ecclesiology,”⁵³ the later developments in *Lumen Gentium*, and then *Gaudium et Spes* and *Ad Gentes*, regarding a theology of local churches, do build on, or at least presume, the Eucharist ecclesiology of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. As with several themes in the council, here Vatican II—even over its four years of development—in some ways still marks a transition. But the trajectory towards the comprehensive vision is apparent: “In the council documents we have an undeveloped but nevertheless significant shift toward an ancient vision of the universal church as a *communio ecclesiarum*, a communion of churches.”⁵⁴ The fundamental direction is given.

Lumen Gentium does not use the precise term *communio ecclesiarum*. Nevertheless, in article 13—addressing the catholicity of the church and the Eastern Catholic churches—it states: “there are, legitimately, in ecclesiastical communion, particular churches (*in ecclesiastica communione legitime adsunt ecclesiae particulares*) which retain their own traditions, without prejudice to the Chair of Peter which presides over the entire assembly of charity” (*LG* 13). Moreover:

Between all the diverse parts of the church there are bonds of intimate communion (*vincula intimae communionis*) whereby spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal resources are shared. For the members of the people of God are called upon to share their goods, and the words of the apostle apply also to each of the churches, ‘according to the gift that each has received, administer it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God’ (1 Peter 4:10). (*LG* 13)

Article 23 later speaks of the church as a *corpus ecclesiarum* (“a body of churches”), and affirms that “it is in and from these [particular churches] that the one and unique catholic church exists.” Departing in significant ways from Pius XII’s *Mystical Corporis*, *Lumen Gentium*’s renewed “mystical body” ecclesiology is to be understood here in terms of a *communio* ecclesiology. Thus, the phrase *corpus ecclesiarum* in the following sentence can be taken as a synonym for *communio ecclesiarum*: “the whole mystical body [is] also a body of churches (*corpus ecclesiarum*)” (*LG* 23). It would seem that it is from these notions of the church as a *corpus ecclesiarum* and of the particular churches existing in *communio ecclesiastica* that the seeds of the richer notion of *communio ecclesiarum* grew.

The actual phrase *communio ecclesiarum* appears only twice in all the documents, both times in *Ad Gentes*, a document basically written fairly quickly in the last year of the council, and yet one of the richest ecclesiological documents in the conciliar corpus.⁵⁵ *Ad Gentes* was eventually promulgated a year after *Lumen Gentium* and on the last working day of the council. It thus had the advantage of drawing on the riches of

53. This is the thesis throughout Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012).

54. Richard R. Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum, Rediscovering Vatican II* (New York: Paulist, 2006), 64.

55. *Ad Gentes* (December 7, 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html (hereafter cited as *AG*).

the other documents, including the ones being drafted and discussed simultaneously, especially the almost-completed *Gaudium et Spes*. But *Ad Gentes* was not only able to draw on the developments of the earlier documents, it went on to develop them further in a new synthesis that these other documents did not quite accomplish.

The first instance of the term *communio ecclesiarum* is *Ad Gentes* 19. Significantly, the passage contains allusions to other conciliar themes: *communio hierarchica*, *sensus fidei*, *sensus Christi*, and the ancient advocacy of *sentire cum ecclesia*:

Bishops and their priests must think and live with the universal church, becoming more and more imbued with a sense of Christ and the church (*cum universali ecclesia sentiant atque vivant*). The communion of the young churches with the whole church (*ecclesiarum novellarum communio cum tota ecclesia*) should remain intimate, they should graft elements of its tradition on to their own culture and thus, by a mutual outpouring of energy, increase the life of the mystical body. To this end, those theological, psychological and human elements which would contribute to this sense of communion with the whole church (*sensus communionis cum ecclesia universali*) should be fostered. (*AG* 19)

The second instance of *communio ecclesiarum*, once again also implying *communio hierarchica*, is to be found in *Ad Gentes* 38:

All bishops, as members of the body of bishops which succeeds the college of the apostles, are consecrated not for one diocese alone, but for the salvation of the whole world. The command of Christ to preach the gospel to every creature applies primarily and immediately to them—with Peter, and subject to Peter (*cum Petro et sub Petro*). From this arises that communion and cooperation of the churches (*communio et cooperatio ecclesiarum*) which is so necessary today for the work of evangelization. Because of this communion (*communio*), each church cares for all the others, they make known their needs to each other, they share their possessions, because the spread of the body of Christ is the responsibility of the whole college of bishops. (*AG* 38)

In addition, article 22, without using the actual phrase, states: “So new particular churches, each with its own traditions, have their place in the communion of the church (*ecclesiastica communio*), the primacy of Peter which presides over this universal assembly of charity all the while remaining intact” (*AG* 22).

In these passages we can see that, despite the recurring appeals to the authority of the bishops and the authority of the pope, the particular strength of the notion of *communio ecclesiarum* is the way it balances the sole focus of *communio hierarchica* on the local bishop with an attention to the local church of which he is the bishop.⁵⁶ The notion of *communio ecclesiarum* thus brings to the fore the people of God in that place, to whom the local bishop is called in service.

56. On this imbalance in the documents, see Hervé Legrand, “Les évêques, les églises locales et l’église entière: Évolutions institutionnelles depuis Vatican II et chantiers actuels de recherche,” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 85 (2001): 461–509 at 462–72, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rspt.853.0461>.

Nevertheless, the notion of a church as a *communio ecclesiarum* also can, on its own or even in relationship with the *communio hierarchica*, give rise to a reductive view of the church, if not understood in relationship with a third dimension of the church's nature as a *communio*: the notion of the church as a communion of the faithful (*communio fidelium*). Here the focus is on the church as all those who profess faith in Jesus Christ and who, dispersed throughout the world in diverse places and cultures, are constituted the one community of faith by the Holy Spirit who binds them all together, with all their diversity.

The *communio fidelium* is the primary bond fashioning a common identity and unity between all who call Jesus Christ "Lord" in the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷ The church is, *in the first instance*, a community of faith, a community of flesh and blood believers who respond to God's offer of revelation and salvation in Christ through the Spirit. As well as *communio fidelium*, the council speaks similarly of the church as "the whole body of the faithful (*universitas fidelium*)" (e.g., LG 12); "the whole company of the faithful (*multitudo fidelium*)" (e.g., LG 23); and, of course, "the People of God." This emphasis on the whole church is not a false dichotomizing of the "universal" over the "local," but rather a concern to highlight the church as a community of *fides*, which is always found manifested in the concrete Christian life and "where two or three are gathered in my name" (Matt 18:20, NRSV, used throughout).⁵⁸

The precise phrase *communio fidelium* appears only once in the documents, in a passage evoking the image of the church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit:

It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe (*credentes*) and pervading and ruling over the entire church (*totam ecclesiam*), who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful (*communione fidelium*) and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the church's unity. (UR 2)

A few sentences earlier, this article had spoken of the Holy Spirit gathering the church "into a unity of faith, hope and charity" (UR 2). While not exactly using the precise

57. The notion of *communio fidelium* has certain similarities to the model of church Avery Dulles calls "the community of disciples" model. For Dulles, "this concept can be seen as a variant of the communion model. It precludes the impression that ecclesial communion exists merely for the sake of mutual gratification and support. It calls attention to the ongoing relationship of the Church to Christ, its Lord, who continues to direct it through his Spirit." Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded ed. (New York: Image, 2002), 198.

58. The documents cite or quote this passage in four places: *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), 7, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html; *Perfectae Caritatis* (October 28, 1965), 15, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html; *Unitatis Redintegratio* (November 21, 1964), 8, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html (hereafter cited as UR); *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (November 18, 1965), 18, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html (hereafter cited as AA).

phrase *communio fidelium*, *Lumen Gentium* 13 uses similar language: “All the faithful (*fideles*) scattered throughout the world are in communion (*communicant*) with each other in the Holy Spirit” (*LG* 13). Similarly, we read of “Christ’s faithful, gathered together in the church from all the nations (*Christifideles ex gentibus cunctis in ecclesia congregati*)” (*AG* 15).

In addition to “the faithful” or “the Christian faithful” (*fideles* or *Christifideles*), there are other collectives used in the documents to name those who constitute the group of Jesus’ followers at any one time throughout the world, and throughout history. *Lumen Gentium* 2 speaks of “those who believe in Christ (*credentes in Christum*)” (*LG* 2). Similarly, the church is

all those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, [and whom] God has gathered together and established as the church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity. (*LG* 9)

The word “disciple (*discipulus*)” is another synonym. Avery Dulles observes: “The term ‘community of disciples’ does not appear as such in the documents of Vatican II, but these documents more than twenty times refer to church members as disciples. From this it is but a short step to calling the Church the community of disciples.”⁵⁹

Other passages capture the sense of the church as a *communio fidelium*. *Ad Gentes* speaks of how, on the day of Pentecost,

was foreshadowed the union of all peoples in the catholicity of the faith (*unio populorum in fidei catholicitate*) by means of the church of the New Covenant, a church which speaks every language, understands and embraces all tongues in charity, and thus overcomes the dispersion of Babel. (*AG* 4)

Apostolicam Actuositatem 18 captures several of these collectives:

The faithful (*Christifideles*) are called as individuals to exercise an apostolate in their various situations. They must, however, remember that people are social by nature and that it has been God’s pleasure to assemble those who believe in Christ (*credentes in Christum*) and make of them the people of God (*populum Dei*), a single body (*unum corpus*) ... The group apostolate ... offers a sign of the communion and unity of the church in Christ (*communio et unitatis ecclesiae in Christo*). (*AA* 18)

The pastoral constitution on the church presents what could be a definition of the church as a *communio fidelium*:

As the firstborn of many, and by the gift of his Spirit, [Christ] established, after his death and resurrection, a new communion of sisters and brothers (*novam fraternam communionem*) among all who received him in faith and love (*inter omnes qui Eum fide ac caritate recipiunt*); this is the communion of his own body, the church, in which all as members one

59. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 198.

of the other would render mutual service in the measure of the different gifts (*dona diversa*) bestowed on each.⁶⁰

A further parallel notion is that of the “Eucharistic communion” of those who celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Because of their *communio* with Christ, believers are in communion with other Christians throughout the world church: “Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another (*ad communionem cum eo ac inter nos elevamur*)” (LG 7):

Christ left to his followers a pledge of this hope and food for the journey in the sacrament of faith, in which natural elements, cultivated by human beings, are changed into his glorified Body and Blood, as a supper of brotherly and sisterly communion (*communio*) and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet.⁶¹

We have examined three dimensions: the *communio hierarchica*, the *communio ecclesiarum*, and the *communio fidelium*. What is the proper way in which these three dimensions of *communio* are to be ordered, given the vision of Vatican II, when interpreted in a hermeneutically comprehensive way? Examination of the debates at the council and of its final documents shows that Vatican II, in wanting to complete Vatican I, started off with its focus clearly set on the first dimension (*communio hierarchica*), discovered the second dimension (*communio ecclesiarum*), and ended up placing a primary and pervasive emphasis on the third dimension (*communio fidelium*), albeit in a way that inextricably links all three dimensions. Walter Kasper calls the concept of *communio fidelium* “Vatican II’s great idea.”⁶² He believes that the fundamental nature of this ecclesial notion requires a reordering in importance of the three dimensions of *communio*: “the communion of the churches and the collegiality of the bishops is based on the more fundamental communion which is the church, the people of God itself.”⁶³

A comprehensive account of the *communio* ecclesiology of Vatican II, therefore, conceives the church in its basic sense as a *communio fidelium*, a communion of the faithful who, with various charisms and ministries, live out their mission in local churches united throughout the world as a *communio ecclesiarum*, each of which is a church led in humble service by a bishop who is bound in a *communio hierarchica* with all other local bishops, with and under the bishop of Rome. This reversal in order of the intrinsically interrelated dimensions of *communio* constitutes the second major shift by the council in its intention to reconfigure the pre-conciliar pyramidal image of

60. *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 32, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, translated in Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, 198.

61. *GS* 38, translation modified.

62. Kasper, “The Church as Communion,” 163.

63. *Ibid.*, 161.

the church. With his specific notion of synodality, the pope is, at least implicitly, retrieving Vatican II's ultimate ordering of the church as a *communio fidelium*, a *communio ecclesiarum*, and finally a *communio hierarchica*.

Just as both conciliar reversals we have examined reconfigure the place of the hierarchy in the Catholic ecclesial imagination, so too it is with Pope Francis's vision of a synodal church:

Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself ... the Church is nothing other than the 'journeying together' of God's flock along the path of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord.⁶⁴

Echoing a predominant theme of Vatican II, no longer is the hierarchy seen in terms purely of power and authority, but rather in terms of service:

Jesus founded the Church by setting at her head the Apostolic College, in which the Apostle Peter is the 'rock', the one who must confirm his brethren in the faith. But in this church, *as in an inverted pyramid*, the top is located beneath the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called 'ministers,' because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all. It is in serving the people of God that each bishop becomes, for that portion of the flock entrusted to him, *vicarius Christi*, the vicar of that Jesus who at the Last Supper bent down to wash the feet of the Apostles. And in a similar perspective, the Successor of Peter is nothing else if not the *servus servorum*.⁶⁵

Through this service, the hierarchy is called to facilitate the full participation by the whole body of the faithful in the prophetic, sanctifying and governing offices of Christ in the church. An essential element here is the obligation to listen to the *sensus fidelium* that emerges from the *communio fidelium*.

A Church Listening to God

Beyond bringing to synthesis these two reversals envisaged by Vatican II, Pope Francis believes that listening to the *sensus fidelium* is necessary for further reasons. We could call one "pedagogical," and the other "theological." First, in order to teach effectively and credibly, the church needs to speak the language of those to whom it is preaching and teaching: "how could we speak about the family without engaging families themselves, listening to their joys and their hopes, their sorrows and their anguish?"⁶⁶ Simply at the level of pedagogy, bishops need to listen to the *sensus fidelium* in order to communicate the Gospel effectively and credibly within changing cultural and social contexts. On the eve of the 2014 synod, the Pope said:

64. Francis, "October 17, 2015 Address."

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

To find what the Lord asks of his Church today, we must lend an ear to the debates of our time and perceive the ‘fragrance’ of the men of this age, so as to be permeated with their joys and hopes, with their griefs and anxieties. At that moment we will know how to propose the good news on the family with credibility.⁶⁷

But listening to the *sensus fidelium* is not just about effective pedagogy and credible communication.

Second, and more fundamentally, the *sensus fidelium* must be listened to because it is a *locus theologicus*, a place where the revealing God can be heard speaking to the church today. Why listen to the *sensus fidelium*?—“to find what the Lord asks of his Church today.”⁶⁸ The hierarchy have no exclusive access to that ongoing dialogue with God: “Let us trust in our People, in their memory and in their ‘sense of smell,’ let us trust that the Holy Spirit acts in and with our People and that this Spirit is not merely the ‘property’ of the ecclesial hierarchy.”⁶⁹ *Evangelii Gaudium* mentions “the signs of the times” three times.⁷⁰ Article 14 speaks of the need to be “attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who helps us together to read the signs of the times;” article 51 states: “I do exhort all the communities to an ‘ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times’ ... We need to distinguish clearly what might be a fruit of the kingdom from what runs counter to God’s plan.”⁷¹ In the October 17, 2015 address, the Pope reiterates something he was obviously deliberate in emphasizing the previous year, in a talk in St. Peter’s Square the night before the 2014 synod began:

On the eve of last year’s Synod I stated: ‘For the Synod Fathers we ask the Holy Spirit first of all for the gift of listening: *to listen to God*, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people *until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us*’.⁷²

In other words, the church needs to be synodal so that it can listen to God communicating at this time in history, in Christ through the Spirit. The Spirit is the conduit; and the Spirit’s instrument of communication is the *sensus fidei* in each believer, and in the church as a whole. But the church listens to the Spirit when all listen to one another: “The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each

67. Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis during the Meeting on the Family” (Vatican City, October 4, 2014), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141004_incontro-per-la-famiglia.html.

68. Ibid.

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

70. *EG* 14, 51, 108.

71. The Pope is here citing Paul VI *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 6, 1964), 50, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html. (The number of the article cited in the footnotes of *Evangelii Gaudium* is incorrect.)

72. Francis, “October 17, 2015 Address.” Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis during the Meeting on the Family.”

other, and *all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of Truth' (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he 'says to the Churches' (Rev 2:7).*" This last reference is to the first of seven invocations throughout the last book of the New Testament: "Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Discerning and determining the *sensus fidelium* requires care, but no less so than interpreting Scripture and tradition, as well as statements of the magisterium. A particular difficulty in discerning the *sensus fidelium* lies in the diffuse nature of people's sense of the faith, as Pope Francis recognizes: the people of God

... does not err in faith, *even though it may not find words to explain that faith ...* The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, *even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression.* (EG 119)

He goes on: "anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love" (EG 120). The *sensus fidelium* interprets revelation and expresses its insight more on the level of love.

Thus, the contribution of the *sensus fidelium* is not to be found in neat, systematic theological precision. That is the role of theologians who are called to listen to their local communities, and to bring to some synthesis the sense of the faithful in those communities. When addressing the International Theological Commission, the Pope stated:

Your mission is to serve the Church, which requires not only intellectual skills, but also spiritual dispositions. Among the latter, I would like to draw your attention to the importance of listening ... The theologian is first and foremost a believer who listens to the Word of the living God and receives it in his/her heart and mind. But the theologian must also humbly listen to "what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7), through the various manifestations of the faith lived by the People of God ... Indeed, together with the Christian people as a whole, the theologian opens his/her eyes and ears to the "signs of the times". He/she is called "to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word"—it is the Word of God that judges—"so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage" (GS 44).⁷³

Theologians, therefore, play an important part in the synodal process of discerning whether and how these diffuse senses of the faith faithfully express the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this or that context.

Beyond (but including) the work of theologians, a synodal church requires effective institutional structures for listening to and determining the *sensus fidelium*. As the

73. Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Members of the International Theological Commission" (Vatican City, December 5, 2014), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco_20141205_commissione-teologica-internazionale.html. On the role of the theologian in discerning the *sensus fidelium*, see Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 261–68.

Pope notes, synodal structures already exist in canon law for listening to the faithful, at the parish, diocesan, national, regional, and international level.⁷⁴ But these need to be further realized, not so much simply as papal and episcopal structures for governing and teaching the geographical peripheries of the church, but also as structures for enabling genuine participation of the peripheries in the governing and teaching of the whole church:

The Synod process *begins by listening to the people of God*, which ‘shares also in Christ’s prophetic office,’ according to a principle dear to the Church of the first millennium: ‘*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet* [what affects everyone must be deliberated by everyone]’.⁷⁵

What Pope Francis calls “the first level of the exercise of synodality” is the listening that happens within local churches in “organs of communion” such as the presbyteral council, the college of consultors, chapters of canons, the pastoral council, and the diocesan synod. “The second level” of listening happens at the level of ecclesiastical provinces and regions, particular councils, and at conferences of bishops. Renewal of these “intermediary instances of collegiality” is now needed if they are to be effective antennae of synodal listening. And “the last level” is at the level of the universal church, where the synod of bishops is “the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of the Church’s life.” It is “an expression of episcopal collegiality within an entirely synodal church.” Importantly, this centripetal movement from local to international structures is neither an attempt to pit, in a falsely dichotomously way, the universal church over against the local, nor an attempt to promote greater centralization on the part of the church of Rome. “The papacy and the central structures of the universal church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion ... Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary reach” (*EG* 32).

Such structures require particular spiritual dispositions on the part of all, if a synodal church is to be realized. Vatican II spoke of “a collegial spirit (*affectus collegialis*)” among the college of bishops (*LG* 23). In the end, synodality will only be fully realized when a genuine “synodal spirit” pervades all levels of the Catholic Church, from the single baptized to the pope. In his greeting to the bishops at the start of the 2014 synod, Pope Francis spoke of a “general and basic condition” for genuine synodality: the freedom to speak honestly.⁷⁶ “It is necessary to say with *parrhesia*

74. Francis, “October 17, 2015 Address.” On these canonical structures specifically as instruments for listening to and discerning the *sensus fidelium*, see Anthony Ekpo, *The Breath of the Spirit in the Church: Sensus Fidelium and Canon Law* (Strathfield: St Pauls, 2014).

75. Ibid. The Pope is quoting *LG* 12.

76. Pope Francis, “Greeting of Pope Francis to the Synod Fathers during the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops” (Vatican City, October 6, 2014), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141006_padri-sinodali.html.

(boldness) all that one feels.” However, this must be accompanied, he said, by another condition: listening with humility and with an open heart to what others say with honesty, what he calls “the gift of listening.”⁷⁷ “Synodality is exercised with these two approaches.”

The willingness to listen to viewpoints contrary to one’s own is therefore vital. One of the more striking passages in *Evangelii Gaudium* is when Francis appeals to the image of a polyhedron.⁷⁸ It appears in his discussion of one of his favorite axioms: “the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of all its parts” (EG 235). He makes a distinction between two possible models for understanding this relationship. The first is a *sphere* “which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the center, and there are no differences between them” (EG 236). He rejects this model. His preferred model is the *polyhedron*, “which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. Pastoral and political activity alike seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each” (EG 236).

With regards to listening to the *sensus fidelium*, he draws two conclusions from this model of the polyhedron: the importance of listening to *everyone* in the church (all of the facets constitute the polyhedron); and the importance of *diversity* for the health of the church (all sides are distinct, yet are part of the whole). With regard to the first, we have already quoted the Pope’s Wednesday address in St. Peter’s: “no one is useless in the church.” In this passage on the polyhedron in *Evangelii Gaudium*, he goes so far as to say “even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked” (EG 236). We are a long way here from the axiom oft-quoted at Vatican II from those who wanted to condemn atheists, other non-Christian believers, and other Christian believers: “error has no rights.”⁷⁹ Here his concern is attention to the “the whole”: “The Gospel has an intrinsic principle of totality” (EG 237). The “fullness and richness [of the Gospel] embrace scholars and workers, businessmen and artists, in a word, *everyone*” (EG 237). With regards to the second, diversity, here his concern is attention to “the parts.” If “the whole is greater than the part, [which] is also greater than the sum of its parts,” “there is no need, then, to be overly obsessed with limited and particular questions. We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all. But this has to be done without evasion or uprooting” (EG 235). Francis here envisages a church that seeks to prophetically listen to all cacophonous voices in a discernment of what is God’s will for the church in the twenty-first century.

For Pope Francis, synodality does not only have consequences for the dynamism of the church’s *inner* life. For him, it is not just about navel-gazing. Becoming a synodal church *ad intra*, he believes, is necessary in the church’s outreach *ad extra*. It is an important dimension for demonstrating the church’s credibility as it prophetically and

77. Francis, “October 17, 2015 Address,” quoting his address in St. Peter’s Square on October 4, 2014, the eve of the first synod.

78. A polyhedron is a round body with several flat sides or facets, much like a round diamond.

79. On the discussion of this during Vatican II, see O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 211–18.

provocatively reaches out in mission. At the very end of his October 17, 2015 address, the Pope concludes with a vision of a missionary and prophetic church turned *ad extra*:

Our gaze also extends to humanity as a whole. *A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations* in a world which—while calling for participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration—often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.⁸⁰

In other words, listening to the *sensus fidelium* within the church (*ad intra*) is vital for the credibility of the church’s mission in the world *ad extra*.

Synodality, and attention to the *sensus fidelium*, is, of course, just one dimension of Francis’s fuller vision for the church *ad intra* and *ad extra*, a vision that calls for deep conversion in all areas of the church’s life and mission. In terms of the church *ad extra*, Francis speaks of an ecumenical conversion, of a missionary conversion, and of an ecological conversion. In terms of the church *ad intra*, he calls for a mercy conversion, conversion to a church of the poor and for the poor, and now for, what we might call, *a synodal conversion*. It is just one part of the picture. But it is vital. Full implementation of Vatican II’s vision of a truly Trinitarian church would allow the breath of the Holy Spirit to blow through all dimensions of the church’s life. At the heart of the council’s implicit vision of a synodal, listening church is the special gift which the Spirit bestows on all the faithful, the *sensus fidei*. It is the privileged means through which the Spirit whispers divine guidance to the church regarding the meaning of the Gospel in an increasingly complex world.

Author biography

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80. Francis, “October 17, 2015 Address.” Emphasis added.