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Notes on the Biblical Foundation of the Document of the International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church”

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Abstract: The document of the International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” (2018), sanctions an idea that has been gaining ground in recent decades: synodality is a structural dimension of the church. This essay assesses the biblical foundation that this document offers in terms of this constitutive rather than operational understanding of synodality. To fit all the theological pieces of the synodality puzzle together and give them biblical consistency, this article takes two steps. The first focuses on exploring the theological welding between the church understood from the Trinitarian Mystery (LG 1–8) and the church as the people of God (LG 9–17). Second, this propaedeutic operation builds a solid framework that allows us to justify why the ITC document brings up certain biblical quotations, to fit them into a coherent reflection and at the same time to present other passages that are absent in the document.

Keywords: people of God; Trinitarian mystery; International Theological Commission; “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church”; sensus fidei; communion



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1. Introduction: “Synod Is the Name of the Church”

In his speech on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of bishops, Pope Francis affirmed that “synodality is one of the most precious legacies of Vatican II”, “new in its intuition, but very ancient in its inspiration” (Francis 2015, p. 1139; Ruggieri 2017, p. XXIV). The pontiff quotes a phrase of Saint Chrysostom—“Synod is the name of the church”¹—which he uses not only to validate this thesis, but also to endorse the fact that synodality is a constitutive aspect of the ecclesial fabric.

Although the revaluation of synodality is the fruit of the doctrinal fermentation of Vatican II, the term is surprisingly not found in any of the council documents. Its first use goes back to the canonist Klaus Mörsdorf in 1966 (Mörsdorf 1966, p. 230; 1967, pp. 568–84). But it was a disciple of his, Eugenio Corecco, who would more clearly establish that synodality is not reducible to an operative praxis but is “an ontological dimension of the ecclesial constitution” (Corecco 1977, pp. 1466–95). This conclusion was sanctioned fifty years later by a document of the International Theological Commission (ITC), “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” (2018). However, up to this point, the maceration of Vatican II’s ecclesiology of communion on this point has gone through various phases, the milestones of which I trace back to three items (Fantappiè 2023, pp. 23–60).

The first is the necessary articulation of two concepts: synodality and collegiality (Rovira 1997, p. 17). Collegiality—key in Congar’s ecclesiology (Congar 1951, p. 446; 1953)—would become one of the hermeneutical pillars of Vatican II. Its practical realisation was channelled into the regular holding of universal synodal assemblies,² but also national and regional assemblies.³ This led to a gradual shift from the concept of collegiality to that of synodality.⁴ Thus, from 1978 to 1993, theology—and particularly the canonist side—was engaged in the task of clarifying the distinction.⁵

In general, synodality is circumscribed by the co-responsibility of the whole people of God. Collegiality, on the other hand, is considered to be a proper exercise of the episcopal ministry at the service of the local church, and of communion between churches and with the universal church (Fantappiè 2023, pp. 36–38). In this way, synodality will be associated with the common priesthood and thus with the *sensus fidei* (cf. LG 12) (Chantraine 1992, pp. 55–62; Fantappiè 2023, pp. 39–40). However, some authors advocate the integration of one concept into the other (Pié-Ninot 1993, pp. 13, 69; 2001, pp. 565–75). In this way, one avoids incurring the ecclesiological ballast that Vatican II sought to avoid.⁶ In fact, the category of the people of God designates not the laity but the totality of the faithful. That is, lay people and ordained ministers.

The second item, closely linked to the previous one, consists of completing the process of separating the term “synod” from the adjective “synodal” and the noun “synodality” (Dourtel-Claudot 1984, p. 38). The former defines a concrete event in which some members of the church come together to address a topic. The second describes a particular style of life and mission of the church. This vision will be reflected in number 70 of the 2018 ITC document: first of all, synodality refers to a style of life and mission (*modus vivendi et operandi*); in a specific sense, this term refers to *ecclesial structures and processes* of an institutional character; finally, it designates “the punctual realisation of *synodal events*” (ITC 2018, no. 70).

A third aspect worth mentioning is the gradual theological deepening of this reality of synodality, which recently culminated in the ITC document, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” (2018). This document constitutes a transcendental milestone.⁷ For it takes up the whole kinetic of ecclesial renewal imprinted by Vatican II and championed, most recently, by Pope Francis.⁸ Furthermore, the document delves into the biblical, patristic, theological and canonical sources that underpin synodality, providing an enormous amount of data and offering a solid and articulated systematisation.

Even so, synodality continues to arouse misgivings and suspicions.⁹ In spite of great efforts, it still requires further theological clarification to avoid falling into a multi-faceted and useless “pansynodalism”, or synodality becoming a “mantra” or simply a sociological concept. This will be one of the objectives of this article, which focuses on making some annotations on the biblical foundation of the document of the International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church”. Between numbers 12–23, this document collects a considerable number of biblical quotations and builds a framework that weaves together passages, while stitching together the history of salvation from the perspective of synodality.

The document gives the pericope from Acts 15 a privileged place (ITC 2018, nos. 21–23). For the so-called “Jerusalem Council” is set up as an icon of the synodal assembly. On the other hand, the connection of the biblical passages that are brought up with the reality of synodality understood as a *modus vivendi et operandi* and, therefore, as a structural and identifying part of the church, is not so explicit in the document. This is the purpose of this essay.

In order to do this, I am going to take five steps. The first two focus on exploring the theological welding between the church understood from the Trinitarian Mystery and the church described from the category of God’s people, present in chapters 1 and 2 of *Lumen Gentium*, respectively. This propaedeutic operation allows for the construction of a solid framework that justifies why the ITC document brings up certain biblical quotations, while at the same time allowing for the exploration of other biblical passages that are not present in the document. The last three steps focus on this work. To organise their content, I draw on the previous reflection and thus on the idea outlined to some extent in number 43 of the ITC document: the Trinity as the origin of the synodal vocation of the people of God, and the Trinity as the goal and form of the journey towards the communion of the people of God.

2. “De Trinitate Plebs Adunata”

The first section of chapter II of the ITC document, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” is devoted to unpacking “the theological foundations of synodality”. Number 43—quoted above—succeeds in fusing two ecclesiological models which are key to Vatican II and which appear respectively in chapters I and II. That is, the description of the mystery of the church from the Trinitarian analogy (cf. LG 1–8) and its definition from the biblical category of the people of God (cf. LG 9–17): “The Church is *de Trinitate plebs adunata*, called and qualified as the People of God to set out on her mission to God, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit” (ITC 2018, no. 43).

On the one hand, taking the definition of Saint Cyprian (*de unitate Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti plebs adunata*), LG 4 relegates the concept of church-institution and subordinates it to that of church-mystery. On the other hand, conceived as the people of God (LG 9),¹⁰ the notion of the “Mystical Body” (LG 7)¹¹ but also the biblical metaphor of the church as the body of Christ (1Cor 10:17; 12:1–13) and of Christ as its head (Col 1:15–18; Eph 1:22–23)¹² is discarded. This Pauline vision is marginalised by that of the people of God, which better underlines the equal dignity of all the baptised. For some theologians the ecclesiology becomes more pneumatological, to the detriment of a more christological one (Fantappiè 2023, pp. 45–56).

In principle, these two chapters of *Lumen Gentium* were not conceived consecutively. In fact, neither the first schema of P. Tromp—discussed on 27 October 1960—nor the second—presented on 23 November 1962—contained these items. Due to the general dissatisfaction, and the subsequent rejection of the *De Ecclesia* schema, a sub-commission was set up to redraft a new text on the basis of the criteria given by the conciliar assembly.

This sub-commission adopts the so-called “Philips scheme”, that of a theologian aligned with the ecclesiology of Congar, Rahner, Ratzinger, etc. From January to September 1963 the sub-commission worked hard. The new scheme was severely criticised by the more conservative wing. Nevertheless, it achieved a large majority in the vote of the conciliar assembly. Even so, at the proposal of Cardinal Suenens (9 October 1963), a change of order was brought about that would provoke a “Copernican revolution”.

In Philips’ outline, the first chapter was devoted to the church as mystery. The second dealt with the hierarchical constitution of the church. And the third was devoted to the doctrine of the people of God and the laity. Cardinal Suenens not only proposed to divide chapter III into two chapters—the people of God and the laity—but proposed that the chapter devoted to the people of God should occupy the second chapter of the conciliar constitution. That is to say, to reorganise the scheme from a new logic: mystery (chapter 1); people of God (chapter 2); hierarchy (chapter 3); laity (chapter 4); holiness (chapter 5).¹³

The change of order manages to break with a conception deeply rooted for a millennium: the difference between *Ecclesia docens* and *Ecclesia discens*. Or between clergy and laity. An unequal society (*societas inaequalium*) conceived as a pyramidal structure or “hierarchology”, to use Congar’s nomenclature. In this sense, the category of the people of God becomes an indispensable theological instrument for the ecclesiological renewal of Vatican II. For with it, a pyramidal structure can be reversed in favour of a more circular understanding based on the equal dignity of all the baptised. In fact, LG 10–12 lays the foundations for the doctrine of the common priesthood and the *sensus fidei*.

The historical background to this outcome certainly explains how this radical turn came about and why the balance of chapter II tips towards the next three chapters. Hence, the chapter on the people of God stands as the necessary preamble and hermeneutical key to the chapters on hierarchy, laity, holiness and consecrated life. However, this fact should not make us forget the importance of welding the first two chapters together theologically. For the church conceived from the mystery of the Trinity and the church as the people of God are not two juxtaposed ecclesiological categories.

There has been no shortage of attempts to make the link. Some of them have emphasised the historical aspect, as if the chapters formed a diptych. In contrast to the timeless schema of neo-scholasticism, *Lumen Gentium* opts for a historical–salvific vision

of revelation (Madrigal Terrazas 2023, pp. 580–85). In fact, the International Theological Commission holds that “the people of God is the historical subject of the mystery”. Consequently, as regards the eternal dialectic of the transcendent and immanent church, invisible and present, *Lumen Gentium* overturns it with its distribution: its reflections on the transcendent aspect is conveyed starting from the term *mystery* (chapter 1); while the historical and immanent aspects start from the category of the people of God (chapter 2) (Geremia 1971).

Other authors, without losing the historical–salvific horizon, maintain that “in economic terms, Trinity and Church are coextensive and correlative” (Silanés 1981, p. 123). The document “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” is along these lines and points out “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” (ITC 2018, no. 43). One could then say, “the Trinity manifests itself to the world *per Ecclesiam*: the church proceeds from the Trinity, is structured in the image of the Trinity and walks towards the Trinitarian fulfilment of history (...) thus three fundamental relationships are drawn: origin, form and destiny” (Madrigal Terrazas 2023, pp. 565–66). That is, the Trinity is the starting point (*origin*), but also the horizon of the people of God (*destiny*) and the historical mode of its “journey” (*form*). I will use this idea to structure Sections 4–6. But before I do so, I would first like to clarify this reflection by setting out some theological–biblical reflections on the mystery of the Trinity and the ecclesial dimension of synodality.

3. The Mystery of the Trinity and Synodality

After the journey through the OT (ITC 2018, nos. 12–14), no. 15 of the ITC document ends with Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the culmination of the revelation of who God is: “a communion of love who, in His grace and mercy, wishes to embrace the whole of humanity in unity”. An “embrace” which, according to no. 15, is one of the fruits of the Paschal Mystery, since the Risen One “gathers in unity all who by faith believe in Him” and “conforms to Himself by Baptism and the Eucharist”. Moreover, the document states that the “work of salvation is the unity that Jesus asks of the Father”. This unity is described from the perspective of John 17:21: “you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us”.

In my opinion, the document lays the Trinitarian foundations for ecclesial synodality. First, God is by essence a communion of love. Secondly, as a consequence of the above, God wants to embrace humanity in order to integrate it into the unity that the Father has with the Son. Theology has given this very special communion the technical name of *περιχώρησις*.

3.1. God Is a Communion of Love

“God is love” (1 John 4:8). Thus in one stroke John’s epistle outlines the profound identity of God and condenses into a single term the five terms of his OT counterpart: “God of tenderness and grace, slow to anger, rich in mercy and faithfulness” (Exod 34:6). Many centuries later, in a scholastic exercise of precision and terminological maturation, Thomas Aquinas defines the concept of the divine person as a “subsistent relationship”.¹⁴ This means that it is not that God is first a person and then relates, but that he is relationship, structural and total openness to the other (Ladaria 1998, pp. 266–70). This understanding of the divine person, in my view, is the main analogy that underlies the understanding of synodality as a structural aspect of the church. Just as relationship is structural to the essence of God, so it must be for the church.

The “subsistent relationship” entails that each person lives in self-giving wholly, and although Scripture does not use this technical term, one of the oldest Christological hymns presents God in this light. I refer to Phil 2:5–11 (Gnilka 1972, pp. 229–38). The passage, answering the objection of Gen 3, corrects the distortion of the first human being who suspects that God “eagerly grasps his divine condition” so that man does not become like

him. The hymn proclaims that God's own is not "withholding" but "emptying himself", "pouring himself out" (Phil 2:6). Thus, the participle ὧν (Phil 2:5) should be translated not as a concessive sentence ("in spite of his divine condition"), but as a causal subordinate: "precisely because he was God, he did not hold on to his condition". An option not only syntactically possible but theologically more correct (García Fernández 2021, pp. 111–14). For the unmistakable sign of God is to share his life, to make us sharers in it.

This same idea is hidden behind the imagery of light used in John's prologue (cf. John 1:4) which, in turn, is a re-reading of Genesis. As the first thing that God creates (cf. Gen 1:3), light will become the theophany par excellence. In this, Israel is no different from other religions. In fact, the first logogram of God was a star. The Sumerian (**digir**) and later Akkadian (**ilum**) languages chose this sign because light (*nūrum*) was the unmistakable sign of divinity.¹⁵ In their conception, the gods emanated an "incandescent radiance" (*melammu*) as they enjoyed vital autarchy (García Fernández 2018, pp. 43–44). That is, they possess life whose essence, like that of light, is to give itself without exhausting itself.

However, there is another biblical conception which, while expressing that God is total self-giving, preserves the idea of relationship and is thus more suggestive of synodality, whose main instrument for generating communion is listening and dialogue. I refer to God conceived as word, Logos or Memra. The Hebrew term *dābar* (דבר) simultaneously expresses both word and deed, and this fact ties together a reflection that leads to the same consideration as above; the essence of God is self-giving. Performativity derives from the fact that *dābar* (דבר) is a "word-event". Then, the word performs what it says because God breathes in speaking and thus gives his spirit. In other words, by speaking he communicates himself (cf. DV 2). God not only accomplishes what he says, he gives himself in what he says, he gives his flesh in the word. Or in the words of Henri Meschonnic "language becomes entirely me" (Meschonnic 2007, p. 211).

In this way, human language is conferred a very high dignity, since it is capable of being a vehicle for carrying the flesh of God. By affirming that God is Logos, the evangelist lays the foundations of what we might call an "ontology of dialogue" (John 1:14).¹⁶ Like the bread of the last supper, God takes our language into his hands to make it "wholly I" and "to consign his flesh to the word". Thus, speaking will be a form of giving oneself totally in the word and listening an act of total openness. The only "reasonable worship" (Rom 12:1–2) in the face of the gift of the other is dialogue. Dialogue will not only be an activity but a way of living. This eucharistic dynamism of giving and receiving in the word is the kind of dialogue to which a synodal church aspires that wants to be a reflection of Trinitarian intercommunication.

3.2. "As You, Father, Are in Me and I Am in You, May They Also Be in Us" (John 17,21)

God is a communion of love. And this way of being in communion is the model towards which synodality must tend. But how does this unity between the three trinitarian persons come about? The ITC document records a quotation from John 17:21: "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me". No. 15 thus culminates with the idea with which it began. For "wishing to embrace the whole of humanity in this unity" is explained in John 17:21. Its purpose: "that they also may be in us". And also the manner: "as you, Father, are in me and I am in you". Therefore, it is not just any form of unity but that form of communion which later theological reflection calls by the technical term *περιχώρησις*.

The clarification of Trinitarian dogma had to contend with subordinationism and monarchism. The attempt to explain unity in diversity without falling into categories of superiority and inferiority was not an easy task. For, by adopting the classical categories of "sending" and "procession", one tends to reproduce a pyramidal scheme. That is, the Father sends the Son, and the Father and the Son send the Spirit. Consequently, the Son proceeds from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Therefore, the Father is the Source of love, the Son the Beloved who receives everything from the Father and the Spirit the person-gift (Ladaria 1998, pp. 250–54).

However, the fountainhead of the Father unconsciously leads to a pyramidal scheme. In an attempt to correct this possible strabismus, Bruno Forte points out that we tend to think that receiving is of a lower rank than giving. But in order to receive infinite love, the Son must be infinite. That is to say, consubstantial with the Father. The consubstantiality of the Son implies that he accepts the love of the Father and corresponds perfectly to it. That is, sonship. “The receptivity of love has in God an infinite consistency, to accept love is no less personalising than to give love [...] To receive is also divine” (Forte 1988, p. 109).

Currently, the Trinitarian concept of *περιχώρησις* has been revalued, the biblical foundation of which is based on statements of Jesus such as “the Father is in me and I in the Father” (John 14:10–11; 17:21) or “the Father and I are one and the same” (John 10:30.38). However, this is a word that has two meanings. The first is that of “a permanent mutual presence, of reciprocal indwelling, a state of co-inherence of the divine persons” or of “mutual interpenetration without this entailing the loss of their personal properties”. The second meaning is “a rotating circular movement of differentiation” or a dance of communion (Cordovilla Pérez 2013, p. 164). In my opinion, the two possibilities of understanding *περιχώρησις* underline an important aspect of synodality.

With regard to the first nuance of interpenetration and inhabitation, it can be said that the text of Deut 6:4–5, in correspondence to God’s uniqueness, calls for monolatry of the heart. That is, the unification of all affective forces to love him. Its New Testament counterpart points to a greater challenge (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32). For it is not only a matter of loving him “with all the heart” but “with one heart”. The dream of such a perichoretic unity is the work of the Spirit. *Sentire cum Ecclesia* is to live at all times inhabited by the ecclesial community. The experience of catholicity brings about this mutual “interpenetration” whereby “the universal is in the local and the local in the universal” (Tillard 1989, pp. 273–76; ITC 2018, no. 58).

The challenge is to move from a “church of subjects” to a “church-subject” (Borrás 2014, pp. 643–66) in which, *ad intra*, communion is the mortar of a “differentiated convergence” and not a phagocytosed convergence of believers and, *ad extra*, the church acts as a single body for the mission. The “relational way of seeing the world”—of which the ITC document speaks in no. 111—could also be understood as a form of *περιχώρησις*.¹⁷ For “ecclesial indwelling” implies never losing the presence of the other and the sense of the body. Moreover, this deep solidarity between all the baptised finds its inspiration in the unity of Trinitarian action by which all persons are active and present, even if only one of them is present.

The second nuance of *περιχώρησις* as a “rotating circular movement of differentiation” or dance of communion makes it possible to draw an imaginary Trinitarian cohesion that is less pyramidal and more circular. This was also the aim of the ecclesiological category of the people of God. On the other hand, the rotating character of this suggestive notion injects a more real dynamism of communion. That is, of a unity that is always being made, being premiered, being sought. The ITC document in the same number 111 specifies that “tensions and opposites can reach a pluriform unity that engenders new life, making possible the development of a “communion in differences” (ITC 2018, no. 111). In contrast to a more static understanding of communion, synodality imprints a dynamic and circular character, because the Trinitarian unity which it models is “perichoretic”.

In conclusion, although synodality is a properly ecclesiological category, it must have the Trinitarian mystery as its point of reference. The church has as its horizon this intra-Trinitarian way of relating to one another, based on the concept of God as a communion of love and on the technical term *περιχώρησις* that seeks to describe the quality of this particular form of unity: “as you are in me and I in you”.

4. Trinity, Origin of the Synodal Vocation of the People of God

The main architect of the schema of *Lumen Gentium*, G. Philips, comments that the Latin preposition “de”—used in LG 4 and taken from Cyprian’s formula (*de unitate Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti plebs adunata*)—expresses that “the unity of the church cannot

be understood without that of the Trinity". It is not an imitation but a true and proper participation in the Trinitarian unity (Philips 1969, p. 116). Trinitarian life, therefore, is not only a reference point for synodality, but also its origin insofar as, by making the people of God sharers in its very life, it gives rise to the perichoretic dynamism of communion.

The first point of the ITC document—devoted to the biblical foundation—begins by recalling that “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)” (ITC 2018, no. 12). In the first creation story, God imprints his imprint on our flesh. According to the text, the first explanation of what it is to be *imago Dei* is that the human being is born as a distinct community (Gen 1:27).

In contrast, the second creation account defines the human being as a *nefeš hayyâh* (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה; Gen 2:7). Literally, “living throat”. While it is true that this same expression is also used in reference to animals, the metaphor is very expressive. For to define the human being as *nefeš hayyâh* is to affirm that the human race is a being structurally open to God. “Turned towards” the one who breathes him. Referenced and oriented towards the source of life, like the word towards (πρός) the Father (John 1:1). This kind of “metaphysical openness” is also directed towards one’s neighbour. In fact, the text continues to work on this question and leads to the consideration that Adam is not conceived to “be alone” (Gen 2:18). Indeed, he discovers who he is when someone like him appears (Gen 2:21–24). Therefore, his neighbour is the bearer of his own truth.

Furthermore, in both creation narratives God leaves something of himself in the human being. While Gen 1 uses the terminology of “image and likeness”, in Gen 2 God communicates himself through his breath. One could say that ‘making us participants’ is a form of performativity in two senses. For, God not only produces what he says, but he imprints on human beings the imprint of what he himself is (*imago Dei*). This divine imprint is not a remote and inert vestige but a living organ that enables us to participate in the very life of God (*capax Dei*). From the biblical perspective *imago Dei* and *capax Dei* would be practically synonymous.

And this consideration is the biblical basis for the doctrine of the *sensus fidei* (LG 12)¹⁸. So, from the metaphor of the throat it is easy to move on to that of smell. Pope Francis has spoken of a “sheep’s sense of smell” (EG 31)¹⁹ and *Lumen Gentium* 12 of *sensus fidei*. A biblical idea condensed in John 10:27: “my sheep will listen to my voice”. The human being is thus conceived as a diviner of God, capable of finding him. We are beings with God’s instinct, able to listen for his footprint and ‘smell’ his passage through history.

The sense of faith functions as a kind of propaedeutic knowledge that makes us discriminate what God is and what God is not. It is an imprint that enables us to recognise him. Thus, Ps 22 presents God as a midwife who extracts the baby from the mother’s womb (Ps 22,10–11). In ancient times, it was thought that the gods attended this special moment. In this context, the first thing the newborn baby sees is God, and this image is engraved forever in his or her eyes (García Fernández 2014, pp. 128–30). This explains why human beings spend the rest of their lives searching for him. But the cycle does not end with recognising him. It is necessary to adhere.

To believe—in Latin, *credere*—is derived from the same Indo-European root (*kréd-*) as heart—in Latin, *cor*; *cordis*—and this fact points to the nature of revelation, understood as self-communication (DV 2). From this derives the necessary articulation of the *sensus fidei* to the *consensus fidei* (cf. LG 12) and also to the infallibility *in credendo* (cf. EG 109)²⁰. First, if God does not deliver a doctrine but his whole person, the only reasonable worship is that of “loving him with all one’s heart, with all one’s mind, with all one’s strength” (Dt 6,5). That is, the “shema” (Dt 6,4) demands the total adherence of the person (*consensus fidei*). Secondly, if God gives himself in what he says, the oblation of himself can only contain truth, since in total self-giving there can never be a lie²¹. In this sense, LG 12 affirms that the church cannot err when it believes²².

The ITC document in the section on biblical foundation does not explicitly address the question of *sensus fidei* or *consensus fidei*. Only in number 14, in a passing manner, does it link “conversion of heart” not only to human effort, but to the reception of “a new heart and a new spirit”. In this context, the document brings up the so-called “new covenant” texts that are characterised by the gift of an inner element that enables Israel to respond. In this sense, the response is also understood as a gift. God enables the human being to recognise him, but also to adhere to him from the heart.

Up to this point I have tried to link two anthropological categories (*imago Dei* and *capax Dei*) with two ecclesiological categories (*sensus fidei* and *consensus fidei*). But we have remained at the level of the personal response. Between no. 12 and no. 13 of the ITC document there is a qualitative leap. For while no. 12 affirms that the human being is constitutively a “social being” who cannot fulfil himself alone, no. 13 implies that he is a “synodal being” who seeks God, but cannot find him alone either. And the reason is none other than that God has called a people. Or that vocation and convocation are two intrinsically united realities: “קָהַל / קְהָלָה (*qahal*—‘edah) is the original form in which the synodal vocation of the People of God is manifested”.

The Sinai covenant (Ex 19–24) and the “Shema” Israel (Dt 6:4) are perhaps the most emblematic texts. Israel is born of listening, but not of individual listening, but as the people of God (Dt 6:4). And, furthermore, it is born of a free consent given by each and every one (Ska 2003, pp. 67–68). Thus, the Sinai covenant is flanked by a phrase that is repeated at the beginning and at the end: “we will do as the Lord has said” (Ex 19:8; 24:7). The choice of a people irremediably obliges the Israelites to walk together in the search.

God then calls not a person but a people to be forged in his image and likeness as a community of love. In a sense, the origin of the “subject-church” is to be found in the subject-Trinity. The love that causes the three persons to act as one and to be one God will become the model and origin of any community in which communion is not phagocytisation, mixing, confusion or elimination of diversity. The search for God and the response, though personal, is not conceived as an individual action. To be forged as a people of God who love with one heart will become an arduous task, and synodality will be the most appropriate instrument to nurture the sinew of communion.

This fact implies the necessary correlation between *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium* (Fambrée 2016, pp. 167–85; Fontbona Misse 2021, pp. 70–74). And, ultimately, between *consensus fidei* and *consensus fidelium*. The problem is to explain how the sense of faith of each believer is articulated with the sense of faith professed as the people of God. And how to make the transition from a personal adherence to a communal adherence. That is, from loving him “with the whole heart” (Dt 6,4–5) to loving him “with one heart” and as one people (Acts 2,42–47; 4,32). The following section is devoted to this task.

5. Towards Trinitarian Communion, the Destiny of God’s People

Origin and destiny are intimately connected. For we conceive origin not in a chronological sense but as that which, being structurally present, leads teleologically to the end. Hence, if the origin is in a God who is a communion of love, the end coincides with full participation in this unity. But how do you get there?

The unity of the Father and the Son is realised in the Spirit. Therefore, the third person of the Trinity forges this unity, as well as ecclesial unity. The anointing of the Holy Spirit belongs to all the faithful through baptism. Thus, the Spirit shapes hearts and precipitates the passage from a “church of subjects” to “a church-subject”, from a *sensus fidei* to a *sensus fidelium*. But his action, though certain and effective, is neither automatic nor with lightning speed. It works over time and requires our collaboration.

The ITC document, following a salvation–historical outline, in numbers 17 and 18 unpacks the New Testament biblical theology that underlies both the doctrine of the common priesthood and the necessary diversification of ministries in the function of the building up of the body of Christ. However, it hardly touches on the richness of OT theology. For this reason, I would like to complete the exposition by contributing keys from

the OT that enrich this vision of synodality as a way to reach the “destiny” of communion and drawing some current conclusions from them.

5.1. Some Notes on the Equality of All the Faithful (ITC 2018, No. 17)

The constitution *Lumen Gentium* upheld that the equality of all the faithful is rooted in this sacrament. Participation in the common priesthood entails the responsibility of the whole people of God for the building up of the church and its mission (cf. LG 9–12; 32). These conciliar affirmations are deeply rooted in biblical theology. No. 17 of the ITC document defines ἐξουσία as “the grace that makes us children of God”, which the apostles received from the Risen One and is communicated through baptism. The anointing of the Holy Spirit means that all believers are “taught by God” (John 6,45) and “guided to the complete truth” (John 16,13).²³

For the OT, the fact that God reveals himself to a people implies that he makes everyone a sharer in the gift, and therefore no one has exclusive knowledge nor the prerogative of access to him. This conception was not common in the ancient world. Most religions had a range of “professionals” knowledgeable in divinatory techniques, charged with mediating and interpreting the divine will.²⁴

An important biblical passage is that of the covenant at Sinai. The pact is sealed with the sprinkling of blood (Exod 24:5–8). To give blood means to make Israel a sharer in the very life of God. And this gesture explains the meaning of the gift of the law. In fact, the feast of the Jewish Pentecost celebrated precisely this event, which would later merge with the outpouring of the Spirit through which all will prophesy (cf. Joel 3:1–2) (Pérez del Agua 2023, pp. 207–15). Blood and spirit are equivalent to the outpouring of God’s life.

Also, for some of the new covenant texts, the inner gift consists of instruction and knowledge. They will no longer need an outside teacher because the law will be written on their hearts. (Jer 31:31–33). But this promise is only the full realisation of what is already present. All Israel is the people of hearing and, consequently, can discern who is speaking to them from God and who is not. That is, the ability to discern between the true and the false prophet presupposes knowledge of God and delves into the concept of equality and process.

For the Bible, access to truth has nothing to do with the office one holds. Scripture is replete with examples of simple people who have a better grasp of who God is than the competent authority. But neither is truth determined by consensus or broad majorities. A small remnant is enough to leaven the whole mass.²⁵ It is arrived at in a slow and winding process that is not without problems and tensions.

The consequence for synodality of this understanding is obvious: by making us sharers in the Spirit, it is God who gives us the sharing. Thus, the origin of the synodal vocation lies in God. Participation is not born of a condescending concession of authority. It is up to authority to channel this modality. In line with *Lumen Gentium* 12, the pastors have the obligation to recognise the subject status of the people of God in the processes of reception guided by the *sensus fidei* (Congar 1972, pp. 57–85; González de Cardedal 2006, pp. 51–75). According to this point of the conciliar constitution, the church is in a continuous process of discernment. This process of adhesion is known as reception.²⁶ *Lumen Gentium* invited pastors to take into account these vital, secular and often latent processes of ecclesial discernment.

The deepening of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, the maceration of its principles and the experiential journey over sixty years, however, have led to a further step. For, while reception is certainly already an active form of discernment, the faithful are asking for greater participation in matters that concern the faithful and in decision-making.²⁷ The greater the involvement, the greater the sense of belonging and the greater the willingness to accept the directives that emanate from the church. At present, participation is often channelled through consultations, but the exercise of synodality should not be reduced to this instrument. New paths need to be explored.

5.2. Articulating the Co-Responsibility of Synodal Dynamism (ITC 2018, No. 18)

At the end of the previous section, we have already introduced the problem of how to manage the co-responsibility of synodal dynamism. In this regard, the ITC document in no. 18 recalls the New Testament theology of the plurality of gifts or charisms for the building up of the body of Christ. Moreover, it speaks of an “objective $\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$ ” which sees to it that the fruits intended for the benefit of all develop in harmony. In this context it places in the first place the apostles and within them Peter, whose mission is to guide the Church in the *depositum fidei*. But the document immediately recalls the gratuitousness of the free initiative of the Spirit who can raise up charisms in view of the common good and places charity as the supreme and regulating gift of all.

Also, the OT envisages four institutions—king, priests, judges and prophets—in the service of the Torah, whose functions are detailed in Deut 17–18. In this “objective $\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$ ” prophethood occupies a special place. In fact, it is at the institutional apex (Bovati 2008, pp. 25–26). Firstly, because prophethood is considered essential to Israel’s salvific economy, since it alone is linked to Horeb (Deut 18:16) and, moreover, only the word of the prophet is equated with the “word of God”, inasmuch as the prophet speaks the word of God. Secondly, because the request of a king to Nathan is understood as a failure of the sovereignty of the Spirit and thus of the prophetic regime (1Sam 8). An attempt to become like other peoples and to be guided by a king instead of by the word of God.

The monarchy produces security for Israel, since the figure of the king is recognisable through a ceremony of consecration. The prophet, on the other hand, claims to speak for God, but there is no external or tangible evidence to legitimise him. The fact that God’s will does not always come to God’s people through a legitimately constituted figure is paradoxical. For, although prophethood is at the institutional apex, in reality, it is the apex of an “inverted pyramid” (Francis 2015, p. 1139; ITC 2018, no. 57). As the prophet is the figure who speaks on behalf of God, he has no recognisable external sign, no ceremony to legitimise him, and no coercive means to enforce his word (Bovati 2008, pp. 32–35).

This is the classic distinction between “power” and “authority”.²⁸ Power does not have a negative connotation. It is a necessary instrument for the exercise of an office. Thus, for a decree to be carried out, the king needs the necessary means to carry it out. The prophet, not being legitimised by an office, lacks power, but not authority. This is what the people recognise in Jesus: “they were amazed at his teaching because he did it with authority ($\xi\acute{\xi}\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$), not like the learned” (Mk 1:22). In other words, the most transcendental figure of all human history says in the hymn of the Philippians that he passes “as one of many” (Phil 2:7) and he is legitimised by his authority ($\xi\acute{\xi}\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$), not by his power.

However, power and authority do not have to be in confrontation. In fact, charism and institution are not opposed to each other in the Bible (García Fernández 2023, pp. 43–46). The fact that the model of authority is prophetic does not exclude holding an office or ministry. For example, Isaiah came from a priestly family. It would be as ridiculous as dismissing the prophetic character of Monsignor Romero’s life simply because he was a bishop. This horizon engenders a model of authority and obedience. Of authority, because, even if one has the power to exercise an office, in the exercise of authority one must tend towards the prophetic model. That is to say, legitimisation must be based not so much on power as on authority ($\xi\acute{\xi}\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$), which emerges as the fruit of coherence of life. Of obedience, since the people of God are obliged to participate actively in the search for truth and cannot evade their responsibility by objecting that they have obeyed what they have been commanded (García Fernández 2023, pp. 82–95).

The “objective $\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$ ” enunciated in no. 18—and coming from the study of the NT—leads to the three pronouns in no. 64 of the ITC document. They are intended to articulate the co-responsibility of dynamism on three levels: “all”, “some” and “one” (Madrigal Terrazas 2021a, p. 36).²⁹ These same pronouns could well be applied to the people of Israel: “all” listen to the word of God; “some” perform a specific service in favour of the construction of this community of listening (priests, judges; king); only “one” (the prophet) has a special function. Although we identify the law with Moses, for the OT Moses

is fundamentally a prophet as there has never been and never will be (Deut 34:10–11). In his person, the law and the prophets are sutured together. And this makes him the ideal figure to watch over the *depositum fidei*, which in his case is the Torah.

The diptych formed by chapters 11 and 12 of the book of Numbers is interesting in this regard. It is observed that, although the spirit of Moses is given to seventy elders, Eldad and Meldad—who had not been there—also prophesy. The consequence is clear: prophethood is not restricted to Moses, who is considered the author of the Torah (Num 11:29). All Israel is called to be prophets (Joel 3:1). However, Num 12 corrects the perspective by anticipating a possible misinterpretation of Num 11. Thus, Num 12:6–8 underlines the unique function of Moses in reference to revelation (Exod 33:11.23; 34:5–7; Deut 34:10). His paradigmatic role is concretised in that the authenticity of the divine inspiration of the prophets is measured in relation to the Torah. Consequently, the law is the objective criterion for verifying the inspiration of the other two parts of the OT (prophets and writings) (Barbiero 2013, pp. 49–51).

For Christianity, it is the person of Jesus Christ. In Rev 1:10, the prophet is weeping, and suddenly he hears a voice speaking to him from behind, thus understanding that the only prophecy is Christ. The book of Revelation re-reads Isa 30:18–26 in which a disciple hears the voice of a master—possibly dead—pointing to the future: “this is the way, go ye in it” (Is 30:21) (García Fernández 2015, pp. 93–104). This voice speaks from behind because it comes from the past, although it is in the present pointing to the future, because it is the origin. The pneumatological and Christological dimensions are not only not antagonistic but necessarily correlative: “Jesus Christ in-stitutes, the Spirit with-stitutes” (J. Zizoulas). “The Christian community must preserve this double seal of identity, its pneumatological dimension and its Christological dimension” (Madrigal Terrazas 2021b, p. 60). The origin, understood as arche, is teleologically directed towards the end. In this sense, the prophetic guidance of the Spirit refers back to Christ.

Well, the suture that the OT makes between the Torah and prophethood in the person of Moses is important in order to avoid the trap of confronting charism and institution. The doctrine deployed in *Dei Verbum* is along these lines. Access to truth is no one’s prerogative. The magisterium, like the rest of the faithful, is not above the word but at its service (DV 9). But in order to reach it as the people of God, it is essential to seek it together and in communion. *Dei Verbum* defines this circularity between faithful and pastors as “marvellous concord” (DV 10). In other words, these two groups are not at odds with each other. Nor should the magisterial function be read in terms of superiority. If in the Trinitarian framework receiving is as divine as giving, even the service of authority does not diminish the equality conferred by baptism. All the faithful work together with the Spirit in a differentiated manner in the arduous task of amalgamating hearts. Synodality “offers a more adequate interpretative framework for understanding hierarchical ministry in the service of truth” (ITC 2018, no. 9). God is the origin of participation, but authority has the ministry of ensuring unity and guiding God’s people towards that end which is Trinitarian communion.

The ITC document unfolds an inspiring panorama: the Christianity of the first centuries. In addition to the synodal experiences recorded in Scripture—such as the emblematic passage of Acts 15—this document retrieves countless examples. Number 25 cites two pioneering maxims formulated by Cyprian of Carthage: in the local church “nothing is done without the bishop and nothing without the advice of the presbyters and without the consent of the people”;³⁰ “the episcopate is unique, in which each one shares entirely”.³¹ These formulas intertwine the episcopal principle with the synodal principle. Ignatius of Antioch beautifully expressed that we are all “fellow travellers (σύνοδοι), by virtue of baptismal dignity and friendship with Christ”.³² Perhaps dusting off this bold legacy of the first centuries will enlighten the church in the face of this new kairos of synodality.

6. “Walking with”: A Way of Being Church

Pope Francis has injected a particular missionary stamp on the question of synodality (Bueno 2018, pp. 201–2). The implementation of a synodal church seeks to provoke a new missionary impulse. In this way, it avoids the endogamous temptation of an inward-looking renewal or an understanding of synodality limited to the intra-ecclesial dimension. In the pontiff’s ecclesiological vision, synodality is perfectly aligned with the proposal to be a “church on the way out”.³³

The book of Acts defines Christians as “disciples of the way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22). Also in the OT, the identity of Israel is summed up in “going after (הלך אהרי אהר) Yahweh”. Similarly, the NT reserves technical terms from the semantic field of the way to indicate the condition of the believer: the verb “to follow” (ἀκολουθῶ) or the locution “behind me” (ὀπίσω μου). Moreover, Israel is born in the wilderness and the disciple nucleus is forged on the road from Galilee to Jerusalem. Unlike the other nations, the people of God are not defined by a territory or a political regime but by their status as pilgrims, as *homo viator*. It is no coincidence that the father of the believers is an emigrant. Abraham leaves never to return, for the promise places him in the condition of a nomad: “Abraham’s religion is not intended to provide infallible means of securing one’s own salvation; for Abraham, salvation lies beyond, long before, in the journey to a land whose name only God knows” (Ska 2004, p. 95).

The pilgrim status of God’s people ultimately refers back to the nature of God. From the biblical perspective, one could speak not only of *homo viator* but also of *Deus viator*. The experience of God as the companion of Israel’s journey is concentrated in the wilderness wanderings. This will be the natural setting for the four books of the Pentateuch and the theological context in which Israel is born and forged as a people. In the NT, likewise, the Incarnation is conceptualised in terms of this semantic field. Jesus “goes out” from the Father, divests himself of his divine condition and “enters” the world to “encamp among us”, displaying the epithet of “God-Emmanuel”, in profound solidarity with the joys and sorrows of humanity. A God “on the way out” in deep solidarity with the joys and sorrows of humanity.

According to Scripture, “walking with” is neither circumstantial nor some kind of divine concession; it expresses God’s way of being God and God’s way of saving us. The ITC document in no. 16 defines Jesus as “the pilgrim” who not only announces the way of God, but who is himself the way (John 14,6). However, in my opinion, it is still more significant that the first thing Jesus does is to call a handful of men and women to follow him. From a theological point of view, God could have saved us alone. And from an operational point of view, it would have seemed an even more effective decision. For the disciple group constantly shows signs of not understanding the message of Jesus, and at the most decisive moment of their lives, they abandon him. One could see in this fact the germ of synodality as the form that God takes in passing through this world: walking with.

God from the very first pages of Genesis—in which he delegates to human beings the care of the garden that he himself has planted—offers unmistakable signs of working in a “shared mission” (García Fernández 2023, pp. 95–106). Indeed, it could be said that this theological category illuminates an important aspect of synodality. Of what it means to choose to walk together and not to walk alone, even if it might be more effective. The CIVCSVA document, “For new wine, new wineskins”, defines identity as a “process of shared growth” (CIVCSVA 2017, no. 33). “Walking with”, as a “shared mission”, is not an operational dimension. One’s own identity is gestated on a shared path with others: “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” (ITC 2018, n° 16). Therefore, origin, goal and form are intrinsically linked.

The Bible is full of examples of how God’s truth comes through marginalised and outcast characters in the religious world, given their origin or their incompetence in the matter, or from another religion: King Cyrus, the prophet Balaam, the Samaritan, etc. Pagans, the sick and sinners will be the bearers of a truth from God for Israel or will be set

as models (García Fernández 2023, pp. 95–106). In this sense, the Syro-Phoenician passage is subversive (Mk 7:24–30; Matt 15:21–28). Jesus does not present himself as a know-it-all God who has much to teach us and little to learn. The woman rectifies his perspective on the fact that he has come to save the lost sheep of Israel by becoming, why not, a mediation that broadens his vision and reveals to him the breadth of his mission (Estévez López 2008, pp. 283–312; Alonso Vicente 2011). The conclusion is obvious, if Jesus has lived like this, God’s people must listen without prejudice and be open to the voice of God that comes through unsuspected channels.

“Journeying with” humanity is a constitutive part of the ecclesial vocation. This is what *Gaudium et Spes* 1 proclaims in that precious declaration of intent: “The joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the people of our time, especially the poor and those who suffer, are at the same time the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of Christ’s disciples. There is nothing truly human which does not find an echo in his heart (...) the Church therefore feels herself to be in intimate and true solidarity with the human race and its history”.

The church also forges its identity by walking with humanity. For it shares their life and destiny, a profound form of solidarity. In this way, we are invited to develop a possible form of “perichoretic”: that of living “inhabited”. That is, not to lose the presence of the other at any time. Something that goes far beyond having them in front of us, because it means letting the face of the other, known or unknown, question our way of possessing, of living, of spending, of passing through this world. ³⁴ The encyclical *Laudato Si’* (2015) takes this line, blaming the loss of the sacramentality of the earth on the blurring of the face of the brother. But it will be the exhortation *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) that captures the most genuine part of this dream. The synodal church is a church that goes out with humanity without feeling like or living as the protagonist, but rather, humbly collaborating with men and women of good will in the construction of the great dream of universal brotherhood.

Synodality, therefore, is not limited to the preserve of intra-ecclesial relations. It also implies a way of relating to the world, of living in it, of opening oneself to the truth that comes in unsuspected ways. Synodality is a *modus vivendi et operandi* of becoming neighbours and brothers and sisters on the path of the search for truth with all humanity in order to enter together into God’s eternal embrace.

7. Conclusions

The synodal vocation has its origin in God insofar as he has made us sharers in his life through the Spirit. This participation is configuration and empowerment. Identity configuration because he has created us beings open to relationship (social beings). And empowerment because we have received an organ capable of recognising him (*sensus fidei*) and responding to him (*consensus fidei*) (synodal beings). Now, insofar as God is a Trinity, participation in his life is an invitation to enter into a community of love that lives in unity without eliminating differences. The intra-Trinitarian way of relating to one another is the mirror in which the articulation of the co-responsibility of the synodal dynamism must be inspired. This Trinitarian origin inscribed in the identity of the people of God is the destiny towards which it is moving. But the passage from a “church of subjects” to a “church-subject”, even if it is the work of the Spirit, requires our efforts. Synodality is therefore also the form and the instrument with which the differentiated cohesion of the ecclesial body is forged. Synod being “the name of the church”, “walking with” is understood as a process of growth shared also with the whole of humanity and therefore not only an intra-ecclesial but also a missionary category.

At the end of the trial, there are many conclusions that could be drawn. I would like to highlight just three aspects that I consider important to underline. The first emerges from the methodological difficulties when it comes to the biblical foundation of synodality. If synodality is understood as a structural dimension of the church and is not to be confined to the operative ecclesial sphere, it is necessary to link it to its natural habitat, which is God. Although historically, chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium* on the people of God was conceived as

the hermeneutical framework for the following chapters, the conciliar intuition of situating the mystery of the church consecutively seen from the Trinitarian horizon (chapter 1) and subsequently defined from the biblical category of the people of God (chapter 2) should be further developed. In my opinion, this would have three important consequences for biblical deepening. First, there would be no need to follow a historical–salvific exposition that relegates or omits important texts of the OT. Second, it would make it possible to discover other texts that can shed light on some aspect of synodality. Thirdly, the internal cohesion between the different elements could be improved.

The second noteworthy element is the concept of perichoresis. Being a technical term to describe intra-trinitarian communion, it is illuminating when applied to the reality of synodality. Its two possible meanings of interpenetration and circularity describe by analogy the sinew of ecclesial communion and the deep solidarity of the church with the whole of humanity. For *ad intra* clarifies what this unity of hearts consists in, the passage from a church of subjects to a church-subject or from the *sensus fidei* to the *sensus fidelium* without this communion undermining or detracting from the difference. The dynamism of this differentiated convergence is maintained in a continuous rotating and circular movement. *Ad extra*, the perichoretic communion with the world is an expression of the profound solidarity that consists in never losing the presence of the brother by letting his face challenge our way of living and dwelling and by having him as normative and not our needs and desires. This prophetic way of living is perfectly in line with evangelical radicalism.

Finally, and linking with the above, synodality should not be limited to the intra-ecclesial dimension; the missionary spirit that the current pontiff has injected into this category is very suggestive and needs to be further explored theologically. If synodality is a constitutive dimension of the church, it is also a way of living in the world and, therefore, a way of being and of contributing to the construction of the great dream of universal brotherhood. In my opinion, and as was already the case at the Second Vatican Council, the great transformation of the church will come through this channel and to the extent that the church lives as a way of going out and understands itself as a companion on the path of humanity.

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Notes

¹ “ἐκκλησίᾳ συνόδου ἐστὶν ὄνομα”. Chrysostom, *Exp. In Psalm*. 149,1: PG 55, 493.

² A praxis inaugurated by Paul VI in 1967 and faithfully followed by his successors. (Cf. Alcalá 1996, 2002; ITC 2018, no. 41).

³ The decree of Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, no. 36 had recommended the promotion of both regional and provincial synods. In the opinion of Carlo Fantappiè, especially in Central Europe, they will be decisive, since the laity will actively participate on an equal footing (Fantappiè 2023, pp. 19–23).

⁴ In addition to the synods whose celebration is intensifying towards the year 2000, John Paul II already spoke explicitly of the “synodal method” (cf. John Paul II 1994, p. 168). And Benedict XVI in his homily at the inaugural mass of the 5th Latin American and Caribbean Bishops’ Conference in Aparecida (Brazil, 13 May 2007) stressed that synodality is not so much an operative process as a particular way of living and acting.

⁵ A significant contribution in this respect will be that of Bernard Franck (Franck 1978, pp. 64–78).

⁶ In the opinion of Carlo Fantappiè, the Spanish theologian Pié-Ninot conceives synodality as synonymous with collegiality, which has three forms of expression: the co-responsibility of the whole People of God; the cooperation of the priests with the bishop; and episcopal collegiality (Fantappiè 2023, p. 47). The document of the International Theological Commission also considers: “the concept of synodality is broader than that of collegiality” (ITC 2018, no. 66).

⁷ In the words of Professor Santiago Madrigal: “this is a document that deals for the first time in an organic and programmatic way with synodality and offers a theological clarification of this concept in relation to the concepts of collegiality and communion” (Madrigal Terrazas 2019, p. XII).

- 8 In fact, the ITC document is clearly marked by the vision of the current pontiff who outlines his ecclesial design mainly in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013). A vision that is repeated in numerous papal interventions and made operational in the new procedures implemented for the synods of 2014 and 2015 (Bueno 2018, p. 203; Madrigal Terrazas 2021a, pp. 25–26).
- 9 “Are we facing a new talismanic word in ecclesiology, like people of God or communion before? Is the attribute synodal a new property of the Church alongside the notes of unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity? What relationship is to be established between collegiality and synodality? Does this concept not undermine the function of the authority of the hierarchical ministry *iure divino*? Is it the return of conciliarism, of ecclesial parliamentarism or of populism? In short, what do we mean when we say ‘synodality’” (Madrigal Terrazas 2021a, pp. 22–23).
- 10 Severino Dianich stresses that the people of God expresses “the fundamental form of the Christian community”. And, furthermore, he affirms that the category of the people of God “cannot be applied to the church as a comparison but as the expression of its very being” (Dianich 1993, p. 248).
- 11 A concept to which Pius XII dedicated an encyclical *Mystici Corporis* in 1943.
- 12 Some exegetes such as Jean Noël Aletti point to a kind of evolution of the metaphor in that in the Pauline letters the church is compared to a body, while in the Deuteropauline letters this image becomes the Head of the body of the church (Aletti 2010, p. 23).
- 13 Although there were other changes and adjustments, the most far-reaching was this one. From the end of 1963 until 14 September 1964 work was done on the redrafting of *Lumen Gentium*, which was finally put to the vote and promulgated on 21 November 1964. For a more exhaustive presentation of the drafting (Madrigal Terrazas 2023, pp. 535–55).
- 14 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* q. 29, art. 4.
- 15 In fact, the word “deus” in Latin comes from an Indo-European root *deiw meaning to shine (Roberts and Pastor 1996, p. 34).
- 16 Pope Benedict XVI stressed that “truth is *logos* which creates *dialogues* and thus communication and communion” (Benedict XVI 2009, no. 4).
- 17 “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” (ITC 2018, no. 111).
- 18 The International Theological Commission devoted a document to this issue (International Theological Commission 2014).
- 19 Hence the conclusion recently expressed by Pope Francis: “the *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between *Ecclesia docens* and *Ecclesia discens*, since the flock also has its *nose* for new paths that the Lord opens up for the Church” (Francis 2015, p. 1039).
- 20 “The totality of the faithful who have the anointing of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1John 2:20,27) cannot err in the faith (LG, n. 12; cf. EG, n. 119)” (Francis 2015, p. 1039).
- 21 We start from the premise outlined by Professor Pietro Bovati: the antonym of truth for the Bible is not error but lies (Bovati and Basta 2012, pp. 278–79).
- 22 “Faith and tradition are transmitted by the whole Church; the universal Church is the only adequate subject, under the sovereignty of the Spirit who has been promised to it and who dwells in it. *Ecclesia universalis non potest errare*” (Congar 1972, p. 68). Professor Santiago Madrigal also expresses himself in these terms: “this promise of indefectibility, which rests on the supernatural sense of faith (*sensus fidei*) of the people of God, extends from the bishops to the last of the lay faithful” (Madrigal Terrazas 2021b, p. 46).
- 23 “The Apostles receive this $\epsilon\acute{\xi}\theta\omicron\varsigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ 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)” (ITC 2018, no. 17).
- 24 We are so familiar with the fact that God speaks and speaks in a human way (cf. Heb 1:1). But if we compare this phenomenon with other religions of the Ancient Middle East, we observe that it is not so usual. In fact, there was a colourful and diversified world of ministers skilled in deciphering the language of the gods and entering the divine sphere to “wrest” an oracle from them. In biblical prophecy, on the other hand, God speaks and does so without being asked. It moves from “a word sought by man to a word sent by God” (Sicre 1992, p. 65).
- 25 I refer to the theology of the rest present particularly in Isaiah, but also throughout the Bible (Ramis Darder 2012).
- 26 For example, when a council promulgates certain provisions, not everything penetrates the depths of the ecclesial heart in the same way and at the same time. Some aspects are abandoned as soon as they are introduced. Others, having been enthusiastically welcomed, are later relegated. Some are slow to be incorporated because of historical circumstances or because of a lack of theological, spiritual or pastoral maturity. And there are those which, imposed by the competent authority but, being externally obeyed, do not manage to overcome the threshold of time for lack of cordial adherence (García Fernández 2023, pp. 51–57).
- 27 The importance given to the local churches as real drivers of change, together with the new protagonism of the laity in the mission of the church and the fact that democracy is being consolidated in many European countries, will also have repercussions on the approach to synodality (Fantappiè 2023, pp. 41–45). Thus, for example, in contrast to a pyramidal conception, Jean-Marie Tillard advocates a construction “from below”. That is, from the local churches to the universal (Tillard 1989, pp. 273–76).

- 28 “A distinction has often been made between power and authority. Power is juridical; it is a right; it has been defined as «the possibility for an individual to make his idea and will prevail over that of others in a given social system». Authority is spiritual or moral; it is an efficacy of eradication and attraction. It is possible to have power without authority, but it is also possible to have and exercise authority without *power* [...] Ideally, the two dimensions should be united” (Congar 1972, p. 77).
- 29 “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)” (ITC 2018, no. 64).
- 30 “Nihil sine episcopo, nihil sine consilio vestro et sine consensu plebis” (Cyprian, *Epistula* 14,4. CSEL III/2, 512).
- 31 “Episcopatus unus est cuius a singulis in solidum pars tenetur” (Cyprian, *De catholicae ecclesiae unitate*, 5. CSEL III/1, 214).
- 32 Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Ephesios*, IX, 2. F.X. Funk. 1901. *Patres apostolici*. Tübingen. Vol. 1, p. 220.
- 33 On the derivation of the theology of the people of God in the context of Latin America and the vision of Pope Francis, (cf. Scannone 2017).
- 34 The tenth commandment of the Decalogue and all prophetic literature is along these lines. For the spirit of the whole normative is that the brother has the right to a dignified life (García Fernández 2023, pp. 82–88).

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