

SYNODALITY IN ACTION: A SYNTHESIS OF THE FIRST SYNODAL REPORT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

*The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2021-2024) reflects Pope Francis's reconfiguration of synodality in line with *Episcopalis Communio* (2018). This study reviews the synthesis report from the Synod's first session, which focuses on three themes: "The Face of the Synodal Church," "All Disciples, All Missionaries," and "Weaving Bonds, Building Communities." Key discussions include enhancing lay participation in Church decision-making, fostering unity while respecting diversity, and addressing poverty within a growing Church in the global South. Emphasis is placed on ecclesial communion, interfaith dialogue, and the need for stronger representation of African and local concerns within the synodal framework. The paper discusses various pastoral and doctrinal issues relevant to Nigeria's Church, including ecumenical engagement, the unique challenges of Christian initiation, and the role of women and lay associations. Additionally, it examines the interplay between Eastern and Latin traditions and the Church's position on Eucharistic hospitality. A significant focus is on the active role of laypersons, particularly women, and the collaboration between bishops, priests, and deacons in fostering a mission-oriented Church. This study concludes that the synodal emphasis on dialogue, unity, and adaptability presents an opportunity for the Church in Nigeria to deepen its synodal practices and address the unique socio-cultural and spiritual needs of its rapidly growing community.*

Keywords: Synodal Report, Missionaries, Church in Nigeria, Ecclesial Communion, Dialogue

Introduction

The 16th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of bishops that began in 2021-2024, a four-year Synod, is unique for several reasons. It was a Synod that

conveyed the tenets in the reconfiguration of the Synod of Bishops according to the changes in *Episcopalis communio* (2018)¹ of Francis. Since the inception of the Synod of bishops in 1966, brought about by the Motu-proprrio, *Apostolica sollicitudo* (1965)² of Paul VI, the Synod has always been a one-session assembly in the three categories – Ordinary, extraordinary and special³. However, this 16th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops portrays the fact that *Episcopalis communio* adopts the methodological structure of an ecumenical council.

As a result, this study intends to review the synthesis of the report of the first session held from the 4th to the 29th of October, 2023. Accordingly, this report is treated in three parts with various chapters. The first part is entitled “*The Face of the Synodal Church*”, with seven chapters. The Second part is entitled “*All Disciples, All Missionaries*” and contains six chapters. This part is significant because it more or less represented the resume of the *Lumen gentium* of the Second Vatican Council, with particular emphasis on chapters two and three on the People of God⁴, and Hierarchical structure of the Church, particularly on the Episcopate, and this is without prejudice⁵ to the other chapters in *Lumen gentium*. The Third part bears the title “*Weaving Bonds, Buildings Communities*”⁶. It has seven chapters. Here, synodality is presented mainly as a set of processes and as a network of bodies enabling exchange between the Churches and dialogue with the world⁷.

On this basis, the relevance of this study is to review its significance within the context of the Nigerian Church. The study will essentially concentrate on the different areas of adaptation in Nigeria so as to delineate how the magisterium of the last phase of the second and early period of the third millennium has imparted the Church.

The methodology adopts the three essential parts, outlining the various chapters and examining the areas of interest, as already portrayed above, inter alia.

¹ Francis, Apost. Const. *Episcopalis communio*, 15th September 2018, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19th September 2018, 4-6.

² Paul VI, Motu proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo*, 25 September 1965, in *AAS* 57 (1965) 775-780

³ Paul VI, Motu proprio *Apostolica sollicitudo*, n. IV.

⁴ Cf. Vatican II, dogmatic constitution, *Lumen gentium*, nn. 9-17.

⁵ Cf. Vatican II, dogmatic constitution, *Lumen gentium*, nn. 18-29.

⁶ XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report*”, Vatican City, 2023, 3.

⁷ WALTER KASPER, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives* New York: Paulist Press, 2015, 49.

1. Part One: The face of the Synodal Church

The first part treated seven chapters in this format⁸; 1. Synodality, experience and understanding; 2. Gathered and sent by the Trinity; 3. Entering the community of Faith; Christian initiation; 4. People in poverty, Protagonists of the Church's journey; 5. A Church out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation; 6. The Eastern Churches and Latin Church tradition; 7. On the road towards Christian unity. From the above outline, the chapters that are core and of interest to the Nigeria Church can be deduced from chapters one, three, four, five, and seven, without prejudices to chapters two and six.

(a) In the first chapter, which is titled Synodality Experience and Understanding, the crux rests on the inclusion of the entire Christ faithful in the decision-making process. Hence, it linked the theme to the New Testament and its recommendation from the conciliar fathers of Vatican II. It accounts for the reason why Francis has adopted it since the inception of his pontificate. Francis' program document *Evangelii gaudium* espoused on this theme. It calls for the ever-watchful nature of the Church⁹. Sr. N. Becquart, delineating the theme of synodality, states that there are particularly four principles that convey the theme of synodality: (a) time is greater than space, (b) unity prevails over conflict, (c) realities are more important than ideas, and (d) the whole is better than the part¹⁰. However, this study tends to disagree with her fourth principle because the whole may not necessarily be better than a part in ecclesial issues, as this may be subscribing to the error of conciliarism. B. Tierney, a medieval expert in ecclesiastical history, captures this point appropriately, as the Council cannot be greater than the Pope¹¹.

In some of its proposals, the report emphasised the need to expand participation¹². The essential question is: How poignant are the various structures of participation by the lay faithful in the Church? The fact remains that in some cases, they are well utilised, but not in all parishes. Therefore, there is an urgent need for at least a legislation that possesses the required two-thirds majority votes of the Catholic Bishops Conference so as to obtain the required *recognition* in

⁸XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report*“, Vatican City, 2023, chap 1-7.

⁹FRANCIS, Apost exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 51.

¹⁰<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2023-11/evangelii-gaudium-ten-years-anniversary-poor-solidarity.htm> (accessed 9/30/2024)>

¹¹Cf. B. TIERNEY, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory*, Cambridge England, 1955, 15-20.

¹²Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 1. M.*”

accordance with *Apostolic suos* (1998)¹³ of John Paul II, and again, this is without prejudice to the universal law. However, a national legalisation will bring about conformity by ecclesiastics in the useful implementation and adherence to the canonical structures of participation in the Church.

(b) In chapter two, gathered and sent: The synthesis reports manifested one of the themes of the Second Vatican Council, which is communion. Its force is the trinitarian dimension. In his program document, *Ecclesiam suam* (1964), Paul VI refers to the communication and synergy among the Baptised as conversation. It will enable relations with people of the same faith but separated and with those of other faiths. The Church in Nigeria soon engaged in this conversation through some diocesan commissions, such as inter-religious dialogue.

(c) On chapter three, Entering the Community of Faith: Initiation, draws the Christian into Trinitarian and ecclesial communion¹⁴, and brings about the gradual discernment of one's vocation and participation in the *munere* of Christ¹⁵ that comes through baptism¹⁶. The aforesaid confirms the intrinsic nature of equality of the people of God in the *ad gentes missio* entrusted to her members by Christ. This implies the *sensus fidei* stated in *Lumen gentium*¹⁷. It corresponds to the Synodal Fathers' reports on the necessity to manifest the obligations bestowed through baptism¹⁸.

As a result, there is a need to evaluate the practice of Christian initiation thus far. The renewal posited by *Sacrosanctum concilium* (1963)¹⁹ brought about two baptism rites – one for children and the other for adults- that should never be confused or mistaken. With the promulgation of the aforesaid document, Paul VI began the renewal and changes. Hence, the rites for baptism of infants differ from that of adults. For infant (1969, 1973)²⁰ the rites state three procedures: (a) baptism, (b) First holy communion, and (c) Confirmation. And the rites of adult (1972, 1974)²¹ is (a) Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. It simply means that for licit and valid reception of the Sacraments, especially on the rites for adult

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic letter Apostolica suos*, 21 May, 1998, nn. 8-12.

¹⁴ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 3. a.*”

¹⁵ VATICAN II, *Lumen gentium*, n. 10.

¹⁶ Cf. can. 205 CIC/1983.

¹⁷ VATICAN II, *Lumen gentium*, n. 12.

¹⁸ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 3. H.*”

¹⁹ Cf. VATICAN II, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, nn. 5-13.

²⁰ *Ordo baptismi parvulorum* (OBP) – 1969, 2nd edition or emendata, 1973.

²¹ *Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum* (OICA) - 1972 Reimpressio emendata 1974.

initiation, the format in the RCIA should be followed. Just as it would be a misnomer to utilise the rite for infants in the baptism of adults. The fundamental question lies if there is uniformity and what is the level of adherence to these rites:

(d) In chapter four, People in Poverty, protagonists of the Church's Journey: The geometric growth of the Church in the Near South, by this, we refer to most countries in the third world is not in doubt. However, in concomitance to this growth is the spread of poverty. Accordingly, the report outlined that what those in poverty require is a show of affection and love towards²². One fundamental pillar of the Church's social teaching is the preferential option for the poor²³.

To put in context this chapter, one need not enumerate the avalanche of poverty amongst the majority of the lay faithful. While the Church continue to receive grants from the Holy See and other charitable church organisations from the West, there is a need to confront this epidemic headlong. It is the reality. Earlier, Benedict XVI, in the second post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Africae munus* (2011)²⁴ from the second special assembly of the Synod for Africa affirms the need for the African Church to search inward in issues of ecclesiastical goods and the spread of the collaboration²⁵. The canonical injunction on collaboration in the diocese enshrined in the Code should be fostered by the relevant authority²⁶. This will enable the Church to provide for the needs of the clergy²⁷ and in turn, to fulfil the three conditions why the Church acquires ecclesiastical goods – for the care of the clergy, care of the poor and maintenance of the Church²⁸. The urgency for contextualisation and better comprehension is core to ameliorating poverty²⁹.

(e) A Church of every tribe, tongue, people and nation: One of the pivotal reasons why John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council hinges on inculturation. The Church exists within a culture, manifested in the sacraments and the Word. The various innovations brought about by the Council were the promotion of this fact. There is unity in diversity. John Paul II wrote several documents concerning the universality of the Church. It begins with the individual bishops who should collaborate with the College of Bishops, as the

²² Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 4, a.*”

²³ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 4, b.*”

²⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Apost. Exhort. *Africae munus*, 19th November 2011.

²⁵ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Apost. Exhort. *Africae munus*, nn. 42-46.

²⁶ Cf. Can. 1274 of CIC/1983.

²⁷ Cf. Can. 281 of CIC/1983.

²⁸ Cf. Can. 1254 §2, CIC/1983.

²⁹ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 4, n-q.*”

bishops are the visible unity of the Church³⁰. This can sometimes be a bane, as already witnessed in some dioceses and even the acceptance of ecclesiastics within the diocese and parishes in Nigeria. As the report states: "The Church too is affected by polarisation and distrust in vital matters such as liturgical life and moral, social and theological reflection. We need to recognise the causes of each through dialogue and undertake courageous processes of revitalising communion and processes of reconciliation to overcome them"³¹. On this note, the universality of the Church should be the paradigm for active collaboration and the quest for unity devoid of tribal affiliations and segregations.

(f) In chapter six on the relations between the Eastern Churches and Latin traditions: The various other Catholic churches *sui iuris*³² maintain a good relationship with the Latin rite. In Nigeria, due to a large number of Maronite faithful, they currently have a hierarchy to cater for their needs, and it corresponds to the issue in one of the points of convergence³³. The eparchy of the Annunciation Ibadan was erected by Francis on the 13th January, 2014, to cater for the Maronites living in West and Central Africa, states such as Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Senand Angola. It currently has Simon Faddoul as the eparch or bishop. However, the emigration is not to the extent that, as it stands, one *sui iuris* eparchy church as established is sufficient to care for the spiritual needs of the Maronites residents in this juridical circumscription.

(g) chapter seven, titled The Road Towards Christian Unity, illustrates a fundamental point that the conciliar fathers of the Second Vatican Council discussed. Two documents could be mentioned – *Unitatis redintegratio*³⁴, and to an extent, *Nostra aetate*³⁵. Synodality is based on the reception of the sacrament of baptism, and the latter is the ingredient or most essential element of ecumenism³⁶. The reports acknowledge what is known as the ecumenism of

³⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Postal synodal exhortation *Pastores gregis*, nn. 8-10.

³¹ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. "A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 5, h.

³² The term *sui iuris* is used in the *CCEO/1990* to mean the twenty-four Churches, with twenty-three for the Eastern Churches and one Latin Church, thus making it twenty-four. It means that each is *sui iuris*, a Church with its own tradition, liturgy, and unique rite.

³³ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. "A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. c.

³⁴ *Unitatis redintegratio* is a Vatican II decree that discusses the Church's unity, especially ecumenism and dialogue with the separated brethren.

³⁵ *Nostra Aetate* is a Vatican II document that explains the principles and modes of interreligious dialogue with non-Christian religions.

³⁶ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. "A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 7, a.

blood³⁷. This implies that some Christians, despite their denominations, shared their lives for the faith they professed. A concrete example would be the Holy Martyrs of Uganda.

The proliferation of Churches in Africa, especially in Nigeria, is indisputable. The case seems not to be retrogressing but is accelerating, which is essentially alarming. However, while baptism bridges the gap between ecumenism, the Eucharist does not. According to the report from the first session, "We need to examine the issue of Eucharistic hospitality (*Communicatio in sacris*) from theological, canonical, and pastoral perspectives in light of the link between sacramental and ecclesial communion"³⁸. However, this study acknowledges the importance of the Eucharist to the core nature of the Church and thus calls for caution and restraint. John Paul II affirms that the Eucharist makes the Church, in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*³⁹. He links the Eucharist to the Apostolicity of the Church⁴⁰. There is clear evidence that some areas are not to be discussed, though some questions could be raised. However, in the events of several charisms in the Church, the question rests on how these charisms could be synergised so as to pastorally take care of the flocks rather than hind under the pretence of conservatism.

2. Part Two: All Disciples are Missionaries

The second part treated six chapters in this format that is, from chapters 8 to 13⁴¹. Chapter 8 treats the Church is Mission; 9. Women in the Life and Mission of the Church; 10. Consecrated Life and Lay Association and movements: A Charismatic sign; 11. Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church; 12. The Bishop in Ecclesial Communion; 13. The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops. From the various chapters in part two, a pivotal connection is its advancement of *Lumen gentium*.

(a) The Church as a Mission; *Ad gentes divinus* is the decree of the Second Vatican Council, which this chapter tends to evaluate. It is a document of the missionary aspect of the Church. The semantic employed, that is., by saying that the Church is mission rather than the Church has a mission⁴², should be

³⁷ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. "A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 7, d.

³⁸ *Ibid*, i.

³⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 17th April, 2003, nn. 21-24

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, nn. 26-28.

⁴¹ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. "A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 8-13.

⁴² Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. "A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 8, a.

considered. It means that it is one of the natures of the Church. Christian initiation empowers all Christians to be a missionary⁴³. It conforms to what Vatican II Fathers assert the missionary nation of all baptised in various articles in *Lumen gentium*⁴⁴ as well as in *ad gentes divinitus*⁴⁵.

As a result, the participation of the laity in the integral life of the Church is encouraging in Nigeria. It conforms to *the Sacrosanctum concilium* emphasis on the active participation of the faithful. The study notes that the need for active participation of the faithful began sometime in 1903 with the document *Tra le sollecitudini of Pius X*⁴⁶ where he outlined for the first time the need for active participation of the lay faithful, and it progressed during the pontificate of Pius XI, where he emphasised that the lay faithful participate actively at the Liturgy of the Mass because they are priestly people⁴⁷ and Pius XII in *Mediator Dei*, where he emphasised that the lay faithful participate in the office of Christ at the Eucharist and, where Christ is offered⁴⁸. This participation connects the need for the pastors of souls to permit the lay faithful to exercise their charisms through the various lay associations permitted by the Church.

(b) In chapter Nine - Women in the Life and Mission of the Church, and in Chapter ten, Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: A Charismatic Sign: The report enumerated several roles enacted in the life of Christ as seen in the person of Mary of Bethany. Christ considered women and men to have the same dignity⁴⁹ by the baptism they have received⁵⁰. Hence, he chose a woman, Mary Magdalene, to reveal his resurrection⁵¹. Women have always played a major role in the Church in Nigeria in such a way that they occupy various positions in lay pious association and also continue to receive the ministries of lectors and extraordinary ministers of communion. The Church has always benefited from charisms⁵². It accounts for why the female religious are mainly in charge of the social service of the Church, ranging from Health, Education and charitable institutions.

⁴³ *Ibid*, b.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, nn. 7, 44,

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ad gentes divinitus*, nn. 3, 12.

⁴⁶ PIUS X, Motu proprio *Tra le sollecitudini*, 22 November, 1903

⁴⁷ PIUS XI, Motu proprio *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, 8 May, 1928,

⁴⁸ PIUS XII, Encyclical letter *Mediator Dei*, 20th November, 1947.

⁴⁹ Gal 3:28.

⁵⁰ Cf. Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 9, a-b.*”

⁵¹ Luke 8:2

⁵² Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 10, a.*”

(c) In chapter ten, on consecrated Life and Lay associations and movements, A Charismatic Sign: the report traces the root of involvement in lay associations and other forms of consecrated life, the obligations that arise from the sacraments of Christian initiations, which empowered everyone to be involved in the missions. The implication therein alludes to the fact that the Church in Nigeria has received it with open hands. The avalanche of religious congregations that have emanated from this land and other pious associations affirms this truth that has already been established.

(d) In chapter 11, titled Deacons and Priests in the Synodal Church, and chapter 12, Bishops in Ecclesial Communion, the report emphasises the need for synergy between those in the clerical state. *Lumen gentium* states that priests are the principal collaborators of the bishops⁵³, while it states that deacons exercise their ministry in the service of charity, outside the ministration of the Word and some of the sacraments⁵⁴. However, as they collaborate with the bishops in the care of souls, they must avoid clericalism⁵⁵. The report calls for special formation for priests and deacons due to the important function that they exercise in the Church⁵⁶. They should be conscious of their limitations and the various obligations clearly stated in cann. 273-289 of the *CIC/1983*.

(e) Chapter 12, on the bishops in ecclesial communion, affirms the unitary role reserved for the bishops. They are the source of unity in the particular churches. Moreover, bishops are the principal source of the unity in the Church⁵⁷. Accordingly, they should exercise the power of governance, taking into consideration the principle of subsidiarity, solidarity and collaboration. As such, if the synodal structure is to be in an active mood, it is the responsibility of the bishops, and the relationship between the synodal Church and bishops must be strengthened⁵⁸.

(f) Chapter 13 on the Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops is essential because the promotion of Christian unity is an intrinsic aspect of his mandate. The Pope uses the Roman curia in affairs and relations with particular churches. Hence, *Praedicate Evangelium* states that the Roman curia stands and assists the Pope just as it does the local Churches in harmonious service rendering.

⁵³ *Lumen gentium*, n. 28.

⁵⁴ *Lumen gentium* n. 29.

⁵⁵ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 11, c.*”

⁵⁶ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 11, e-f.*”

⁵⁷ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 12, a.*”

⁵⁸ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 12, c-f.*”

3. Part Three: Weaving Bonds, Building Communities

Part three treated seven chapters in this order: Chapter 14, A Synodal Approach to Formation; Chapter 15, Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions; Chapter 16, Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church; Chapter 17, Mission in the Digital Environment; Chapter 18, Structures for Participation; Chapter 19, Grouping of Churches within the Communion of the whole Church; and Chapter 20, The Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial assemblies.

(a) In the first instance, chapter 14, a synodal approach to formation conforms to the decrees *Optatam totius*⁵⁹ of Vatican II. Jesus model for the formation of his disciples should be the paradigm for every method⁶⁰, beginning from the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* for the universal Church and the adopted versions in the various nations. In this formation, the entire people of God must be involved⁶¹.

As a result, it proposes that seminarians should be under the watchful eyes of their parish priests, and there should be an interface between the parents and seminarians on the one hand and the entire vocation theme on the other hand. This will encourage and invigorate the entire process of discernment and conscientise parents on their continuous role in the integral formation of future priests. Already, some dioceses in Nigeria have adopted this pattern, but it should not be left for a part; it should be extended to the whole.

(b) In chapter fifteen, on Ecclesial discernment and open questions, the reports outline that discernment is one of the aims of the Synod. However, on open questions such as artificial intelligence, non-violence and legitimate self-defence, the reports call for discussion and discernment in the light of the Word of God and the Sacred tradition⁶². The above-mentioned point is essential and a welcome development for the Church in Nigeria. Authentic discussion is possible only in the light of sacred scripture and tradition.

(c) In chapter 16, Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church, The study notes that the entire project and call for ecclesial synodality is centred on listening and accompanying⁶³. Listening has a Christological and ecclesiological

⁵⁹ *Optatam totius* is the Vatican II decree on the training and formation of seminarians.

⁶⁰ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 14, b.*”

⁶¹ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 14, f.*”

⁶² Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 15, c.*”

⁶³ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 16, a.*”

value⁶⁴. Francis enumerated the importance of listening in his document *Evangelii gaudium*⁶⁵. Listening to God and man brings truth, understanding, wisdom, guidance, conviction, instruction and encouragement to our attention. Most of the time, Christians “hear” God through the spirit rather than with physical hearing.

(d) In chapter seventeen, Mission in the Digital Environment, the reports call for the acceptance of digital reality and even refer to the joint as digital 'natives'. The truth resides in the fact that before the advance of rapid technological innovations, it had been in a geometric growth right from the advent of the early nineteenth century. It accounts for the reason why *Inter mirifica* on modern means of communication was one of the first decrees of the Second Vatican Council. Accordingly, it has become imperative for each Communications Commission of dioceses to launch into this technology, as seen already in the Nigeria Church. It is currently impossible to name a local church in Nigeria without one form of digital means of communication, such as the spread of information and evangelisation.

(e) In chapter 18, titled Structures for Participation, One of the ecclesial dimensions of baptism is the obligations of co-responsibility⁶⁶. This accounts for the reason why the work of the CIC/1983 had to wait for the completion of Vatican II, though it was announced the same day as the convocation of Vatican II by John XXIII on 25th January 1959. Chapter four of *Lumen gentium* outlines the place of the lay faithful in the Church and equally delineates their obligations⁶⁷. On this basis, there are various canonical participative structures in the Church that must be strengthened and improved upon.

(f) Chapter 19 treated the grouping of Churches within the Communion of the whole Church: One note that *Lumen gentium* discusses the various grouping of Churches, from the universal to local churches. In the report, "The synodal process has shown how the bodies provided by the Code of Canon Law and the Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches exercise their function more effectively when these bodies are understood from the local churches"⁶⁸. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts for the common good, making each Church interdependent and sharing the same life. Spiritual attitudes such as humility, generosity, respect, and

⁶⁴ Phil 2:6-11. The Christological value means adopting Jesus's pattern in his approach to those that he met in his public ministry.

⁶⁵ FRANCIS, Post synodal exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 267.

⁶⁶ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 18,*

⁶⁷ *Lumen gentium*, nn. 30-33.

⁶⁸ XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS. “*A Synodal Church in Mission, chap. 19, c.*

sharing are important for the Church⁶⁹. As a result, this chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter. The essence is to foster collaboration in the different levels in the Church.

(g) Chapter 20, titled the Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assemblies, presupposes that the Synod is not an ecumenical council and accounts for its differences in methodology. However, it questions what role the other ecclesial assemblies could exercise in subsequent assemblies. A good manifestation is extending invitations to more churches for their participation, which other *Episcopal Communion* of Francis envisaged.

Conclusion

This work aptly presented and examined the Church's synodal processes, as well as the results of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Our proposals and recommendations have direct expectations and implications for the Church in Nigeria⁷⁰. In attempting the review, some chapters have been briefly examined and contextualised without prejudice to the other chapters. The Holy Father's vision for the Church of the 21st century is one of synodality, where mutual Conversations, Communion, Participation, and "walking together" as Church are important. The Synod of Synodality has started, it is ongoing, and it is relevant for the Church in Nigeria.

⁶⁹ EDWARD HAHNENBERG, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*. Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007.

⁷⁰ B.A.C OBIEFUNA AND IKECHUCKWU ANTHONY KANU "Achieving the Strategic goal and objectives of the Synod on Synodality: A Nigerian Perspective" in *Ohazurume: Unizik Journal of Culture and Civilization*. Vol 1, No.1:154, Academic Search Complete.