

A SYNODAL CHURCH BEYOND 2024 SYNOD: ECHOES FROM THE PASTORAL TEACHING OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

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Abstract

This article demonstrated the correlation between the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the synodal Church envisaged by Pope Francis. The author's curiosity in seeking the link was motivated by the assertion that the Conciliar Teaching, on the one hand, is a sure compass by which the Church takes her bearing in the third Christian Millennium and, on the other hand, that the synodality envisaged by Pope Francis is what the Lord expects of his Church in the Third Millennium. This being so, how has the teaching of the Second Vatican Council influenced the call for a synodal church? Starting, therefore, with a brief historical survey of the Second Vatican Council, through the process of the evolution of its documents, it was underscored that the theme of synodality is deeply rooted in the theology and ecclesiology of the Council. The article offers one recommendation, which is the need for a continual study of the documents of the Second Vatican Council for an in-depth understanding of synodality. It concludes with a quote from Pope Francis in which he invites all “to go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ”.

Keywords: Synod, Synodality, Second Vatican Council, Third Millennium, Pope Francis

1. Introduction

The Second Vatican Council opened formerly during the pontificate of John XXIII on 11th October 1962 and was also closed officially during the pontificate of Paul VI on 8th December 1965. It was the twenty-first ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church and the second to be held at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. The Council has been described as the greatest of all the Councils ever held by the Catholic Church due to the fact that the Council has been remarkably different from any of the previous councils in many respects. First of all, the involvement of

participants from all over the world gave it the nature of a general or an Ecumenical Council.¹ Most of the previous ecumenical or general Councils had participants from all over the then-known Christian world, such as Europe. Only Vatican II had participants from all over the globe, cutting across peoples irrespective of religion, ethnicity, and cultural differences.² Secondly, it differs from the previous councils in regard to the matter it sets out to address. For instance, previous Councils were called to address certain doctrinal and disciplinary issues or crises in the life of the Church. Vatican II was not. There were no doctrinal issues at hand, and there was no crisis in the life of the Church, except the issue of the primacy of the pope vis-a-vis collegiality. According to John XXIII, the Council was called for so that the fathers could deliberate and come up with new and effective ways of transmitting the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of a changed and changing world. Hence, the Council is rightly described as a pastoral Council. It is indeed an ecumenical Pastoral Council.³ It is the teaching of this Council that Pope Benedict XVI, citing Pope St. John Paul II, says: "There we find a sure compass by which to take our bearing in the century now beginning... If we interpret and implement it guided by a right hermeneutic, it can be and can become increasingly powerful for the ever-necessary renewal of the Church."⁴

Two decades into the century, now referenced by Benedict XVI, Pope Francis inaugurated the Synod on Synodality in October 2021 with a theme: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission. The synod was to be carried out in stages to climax with the celebration of the XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2023, which was later extended to 2024 and to be conducted in two sessions. The first session, which since October 2021 began consultations across churches at diocesan, national and continental levels in October 2023, "received the fruits of the consultation in order to discern in prayer and dialogue the path that the Spirit is asking us to follow. This phase will last until October 2024, when the Second Session of the Assembly will complete its work".⁵ For Pope Francis, Synodality is the quality of carrying everyone along, and a synodal Church is a Church that carries everyone along in communion, participation, and mission. Listening is to be the instrument of this synodality.

¹RICHARD P. MCBRIEN, *Catholicism*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 655.

²MCBRIEN, 656.

³MCBRIEN, 656-657.

⁴BENEDICT XVI, *Porta Fidei* of the Supreme Pontiff for the Indiction of the Year of Faith 2011, 4.

⁵This is from the introductory note of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops First Session 4-29 October 2023 Synthesis Report A Synodal Church in Mission.

“A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realises that listening 'is more than simply hearing'. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all are listening to each other, and all are listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (John 14:17), in order to know what he says to the Churches (Rev 2:7).”⁶ This synodal way of being the Church is demanded by God of the Church of the third Millennium. “We must continue along this path. The world in which we live and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of its mission. It is precisely this path of Synodality which God expects of the Church of the third Millennium.”⁷ If the path of synodality is what God expects of the Church of the Third Millennium, on the one hand, and on the other, in the documents and teaching of the Second Vatican Council is to be found a compass from which the Church takes her bearing in the century now beginning (the third century), then could Pope Francis' synodal way of being the Church be that compass referenced of the documents of the Second Vatican Council? If so, then the continual study of these documents is imperative for understanding synodality and for being a Synodal Church beyond the 2023 XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. It is precisely echoed on synodality from the documents of Vatican II that this article seeks to highlight.

2. Understanding the terms Synod, Synodal and Synodality

The terms Synod, Synodal and Synodality all come from and are related to the Latin *Synodus*, which is a transliteration of the Greek (*sunodos*). The Greek word is made up of two separate words, the preposition meaning with or together, and the noun meaning path or way, a pathway. Put together literally means with a path or a way, or still, together on a way/path. It indicates the path or the way along which people walk together. The term '*synodus*' is rendered in Latin as '*concilium*', which means a council. In ecclesiastical usage, the terms *synodus* and *concilium* are both employed to refer to the gathering together in an ecclesiastical assembly. Since the early Christian centuries, the term synod has been employed and applied with specific meaning to refer to "ecclesial assemblies convoked on various levels

⁶FRANCIS, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops. Paul VI Audience Hall Saturday, 17th October 2015. See also Synod 2023 Preparatory Document, 1.

⁷FRANCIS, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops. Paul VI Audience Hall Saturday, 17th October 2015.

(diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal or universal) to discern, by the light of the Word of God and listening to the Holy Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions that arise as time goes by."⁸ From the foregoing, synodality refers to the quality of being synodal, and a synodal church is a church that carries everyone along.

3. Historical background to Vatican II

On 25th January 1959, the Holy Father Pope John XXIII announced to a group of cardinals his intention to convene a Council of the whole Church, which came to many as a surprise. This announcement, in a sense, could be said to be the beginning of what came to be known as the Second Vatican Council. A closer look at the happenings around the world and in the Church would, however, reveal that the journey to the Second Vatican Council started a few centuries ago, before 1959, since "many of the issues and questions that dominated discussion at Vatican II emerged from significant developments in the Catholic Church and in the world that had transpired in the previous four centuries."⁹

3.1 Developments in the Church

Developments within the Church leading to the Second Vatican Council could be traced back to the Council of Trent, which met from 1545 to 1563. Since that Council, the Church has adopted a posture of defensiveness toward all that was perceived to be a real threat or imagined to be so to the Church. This posture was first directed at the Reformation Churches but also, in the centuries to come, against other faithful Church members whose theological views were perceived as threats to the Church's mission and her very existence.¹⁰ For instance, it was at Trent that the Protestant Reformation and attacks on the efficacy of the sacraments, the ministerial priesthood, the authority of the Pope, and bishops were met with significant reforms. These reforms responded to these attacks and challenges in a defensive manner, building walls around these institutions and excluding offenders with anathemas.¹¹ Sadly, one result of responding to the Protestant Reformation was that the Catholic Church became less Catholic or universal. It had to tighten up its discipline and redefine itself, withdrawing from the world to a degree to determine its own lifestyle and identity. Some people say

⁸International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2018, 4.

⁹RICHARD R. GAILLARDETZ, *The Church in the making Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (New York: Paulist, 2006), 1.

¹⁰GAILLARDETZ, 2.

¹¹GAILLARDETZ., 1.

that the Catholic Church became a fortress Church—more certain of its identity but more defensive.¹²

National and Regional Churches

The growing consciousness of national or regional churches and their councils was yet another threat to the Church. Rulers of traditional Catholic nations—France, Spain, and Austria—established more authority in their Christian churches than the Pope. France, for example, attempted to create a French National Catholic Church with little or no regard for the authority of the Pope in the movement called Gallicanism.¹³

Theologians and their Works:

Perceived threats from theologians and their theological works were also contributing factors to the calling for and the outcome of the Second Vatican Council. In this regard, one can not underestimate the contribution of Catholic Biblical Scholars who, taking a leap from their Protestant counterparts, desired to explore the Bible with the tools of modern historical scholarship and higher biblical criticism. This attitude was not welcomed by the Church. Even though Leo XIII acknowledged the value and significance of employing more sophisticated, linguistic and exegetical tools in biblical studies, Gaillardetz opined that he denounced the move of these biblical scholars in his Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*.¹⁴

In the area of liturgy, the theologian's desire for liturgical renewal was also expressed. Though the movement for liturgical renewal started with the Benedictine monks, it got accepted all over and spread like wildfire. Hence, experts in the liturgical field desired many reforms, such as the involvement of the laity in the liturgical life of the Church, the celebration of the mass in vernacular, the employment of biblical homilies at Eucharistic celebrations and the reception of communion by the laity under both species.¹⁵

In the other fields of theology, theologians wanted a break from the monopoly of Neo-Scholasticism that held sway and had the Church's blessing in doing theology. Neo-scholasticism was a modern way of doing theology based on

¹² ALAN SCHRECK, *The Compact History of the Catholic Church*. (Bandara, Mumbai: St. Paul, 2011) 79.

¹³ SCHRECK, 93-94.

¹⁴ GAILLARDETZ, 4.

¹⁵ GAILLARDETZ, 4-5.

the principles of scholasticism fashioned out by Thomas Aquinas, which theologians felt was outdated. In doing theology, they felt that consideration should be given to history and human experience as places where meaning and truth are encountered. Hence, doing theology with the intellectual straight jacket of neo-scholasticism, which the Church approves of without reference to contextual human historical realities and experiences, was felt by these theologians to be outdated and should be discarded. The attempts by these theologians at a reformulation of the Catholic faith met with sweeping, severe condemnation from Pius X and the Holy Office, the Congregation (now Dicastery) for the Doctrine of the Faith, which created a climate of fear and suspicion among the theologians and induced a chilling effect on Catholic theological scholarship.¹⁶

3.2 Developments from the world scene

Apart from developments within the Church, which were contributory factors to the outcome of the Second Vatican Council, there were also those from the world scene. Among these developments was the rise of monarchies with absolute powers in Western Europe from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, which increasingly subjected the Church's mission to the control of these monarchies. At times, the monarchs place more restrictive limits on the activities of the Church within their boundaries. This consequently gave rise to controversy and suspicion between the states controlled by these monarchs and the Church. As such, the Church during this period employed a defensive posture against these monarchs, sometimes with threats of, and at other times, actual excommunication, thereby excluding some of the monarchs and their territories from the Church.

The Enlightenment

The rise of the Enlightenment, which championed the autonomy of human reason, was another challenge and threat to the Church. It questioned the legitimacy of any kind of revealed knowledge. Hence, "the Bible, church tradition, and the legitimacy of an authoritative church office were all challenged during the age of reason."¹⁷ . Again, in her style, the Church was defensive, condemning the perpetrators and banning their works from publication and circulation. David L. Edwards describes the negative impact of the Enlightenment on the Church and her response thus: "To be enlightened was to refuse to be

¹⁶GAILLARDETZ, 5.

¹⁷GAILLARDETZ, 3.

content with the submissive acceptance of the religious orthodoxy and church-directed morality which had commonly been expected from those who wished to be ordained, or to be counted as true believers among protestants and Catholics alike, with penalties for defiance in the form of excommunication on earth and purgatory or hell in eternity."¹⁸

The Age of Enlightenment also triggered various revolutions, which were regarded as threats to the Church. These revolutions, especially the French one, complicated issues for the Catholic Church. Prior to the French Revolution, the Church, especially its clerics, was virtually speaking in every sector of human endeavour. The clergy had enjoyed extensive property rights and special privileges and had long been a target of criticism on account of this. The French upheaval led to the attitude of official anti-clericalism.¹⁹ This made the "church leadership to be suspicious of the revolutionary impulse itself, whether in the name of democracy or some other ideological banner."²⁰ Pius VI further denounced the liberty, equality, and fraternity of the revolutions as words empty of meaning.²¹

These factors and many others were, in the eyes of the Church, threats to what she stood for. As such, the Church in the centuries prior to the Council was characterised by a defensive posture. It defended itself against these threats to such an alarming degree that it condemned and excluded many, such as the Protestants, political leaders, and even within its fold, theologians from the Church.

Despite this stern stance of the Church, several interest groups continued to agitate for a change during the years leading to the Council. Richard Gaillardetz sums up the scenario thus:

In summary, the Roman Catholic Church of the 1950s could be characterised as a church in which a still dominant stance of reflexive defensiveness was being cautiously challenged by countervailing movements of reform and renewal percolating just before the surface of the church life. It would take the peculiar dynamism of an ecumenical council to bring the movements for reform and renewal to the forefront.²²

¹⁸ DAVID L. EDWARDS, *Christianity the First Two Thousand Years*. (London: Cassell, 1997), 350.

¹⁹ EDWARDS, 380.

²⁰ GAILLARDETZ, 3.

²¹ EDWARDS, 380.

²² GAILLARDETZ, 6.

The above historical background sets the context for understanding the Second Vatican Council's Synodality. There was a wide chasm between the Church and various categories of humanity, both within and outside the Church. When John XXIII called for the Second Vatican Council, he had hopes that the Council would eradicate centuries' seeds of discord and promote concord, justice, peace, and the brotherly love and unity of all humankind in the Church and the world.²³ The Italian word "*Agionamento*" was one of the words used to describe what the Council was called to achieve. For the past four centuries, the Church has locked itself in and excluded many from its fold. Now, there was the need to open herself up so that others may benefit from her treasures.²⁴

Another writer described the event of the Second Vatican Council as a new Pentecost. It is a new Pentecost in the sense that prior to the Council, the Church was enclosed in itself by building fences around her in defence of herself against everything she perceived as threats to her. Vatican II was to make a big shift from this, like on the day of the first Pentecost, when the doors where the apostles were forced open by the power of the Holy Spirit, the doors of the Church were forced open to all in the world irrespective of culture, creed, nationality, and even philosophical ideology. In the words of MCBrien, "In a word, Vatican II was a council unique in the history of the Church because it was the first really ecumenical Council. As such, it signalled the Catholic Church's movement from a Church of cultural confinement, particularly of the European variety, to a genuine world Church"²⁵, to a synodal Church.

4. The Stages leading to the Council

Once a Church Council is called for, it does not gather and meet immediately to commence deliberations. Consultations and preparation took some time before the actual gathering of the council members, and so was it with the Second Vatican Council. It took about three and half years for such consultations in preparation for it. The Holy Father, Pope St. John XXIII, on 25th January 1959, announced to a group of eighteen cardinals his intention to call the bishops of the world for a Council. Shortly after this announcement, by 17th May 1959, he created a commission and saddled it with the responsibility of preparing for the Council. On 18th July 1959, this committee solicited initial proposals for the agenda of the Council from curial officials, bishops of the world, male

²³MCBRIEN, Catholicism, 665.

²⁴MARGARET LAVIN, Vatican II Fifty Years of Evolution and Revolution in the Catholic Church. (Bandara, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2013), 17-19.

²⁵MCBRIEN, Catholicism, 657.

religious superiors, theologians and University faculties. Richard R. Gaillardetz writes thus on these consultations: "In any event, an invitation to submit proposals for the council agenda went out to 2,812 bishops, theologians, male religious superiors, theological faculties, and Roman congregations. Of this number, 2,150 replied in some manner, though many responses were short and perfunctory."²⁶ By 5th June 1960, the Pope created the central preparatory commission, headed by himself, and ten other preparatory commissions, which were presided over by the various heads of Roman dicasteries or curial offices. The preparatory commissions were to handle materials connected with their offices and group topics and give them the shape of an agenda. All of this was to pass through the central preparatory commission for final approval before they could be submitted as working draft documents for the Council itself. On 25th December 1961 and 2nd February 1962, the Council opening was announced for 1962, and 11th October was set as the opening date, respectively.

Meanwhile, before the opening date, the central preparatory commission had come up with about seventy topics to be discussed at the Council, which were sent to the bishops of the world on 11th June 1962 for study before the Council. By 8th July 1962, all Christian church communities were invited to send observers to the Council. Finally, the operating guidelines for the Council were set by 6th August 1962, and the bishops gathered in Rome. The Council opened officially on 11th October 1962 and also closed officially on 8th December 1965.

5. The Council and its Documents²⁷

The Council met in four sessions²⁸ and came up with sixteen council documents. The first session took place from 11th October – 8th December, 1962. No document was produced during this session. The second session lasted from 29th September – 4th December, 1963. Two documents were produced in the second session, namely, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication *Inter Mirifica*. At the third session from 14th September – 21st November 1964, three documents were likewise produced. They are The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, The Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and the Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. At the fourth and final session of the Council, 14th September – 8th December 1965, eleven documents came out. These are The Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral office in the

²⁶GAILLARDETZ, 7.

²⁷MCBRIEN, Catholicism, 666.

²⁸MARGARET LAVIN, Vatican II Fifty Years of Evolution and Revolution in the Church. (Bandara, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2013), 9.

Church *Christus Dominus*, The Decree on Priestly formation *Optatum Totius*, The Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*, The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to none Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, The Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum educationis* and The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*. Others are The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes* and The Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*.

The sixteen documents are made up of four constitutions, nine decrees and three declarations. They all vary in authoritative standing, content, and effect on the Church. The constitutions have a higher standing in authority than the decrees and the declarations. The dogmatic constitutions touch substantively upon doctrinal matters which pertain to the very essence of the Church. The decrees and declarations, on the other hand, are directed at specific pastoral concerns. Two of the four constitutions, the Constitution on the Church and the Constitution on Divine revelation are called dogmatic in that they do indeed touch upon matters that are themselves part of the dogmatic content of the Christian faith. One of the constitutions is called Pastoral. It touches upon the fundamental relationship of the Church to the world at large. The fourth Constitution is the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy. No special designation is attached to it, but liturgy is part of the Church's nature.²⁹

6. Echoes of Synodality from Conciliar Documents

6.1 Synodality in the Ecclesiology of Vatican II

Ecclesiology pervades the entire documents of the Second Vatican Council. However, the document on the Church lucidly demonstrates and lays bare its ecclesiology. We briefly consider this ecclesiology with a view to situating synodality therein.

Before fashioning out the title of the Constitution on the Church as *Lumen Gentium*, the sub-commission on ecclesiological matters, under the Council's Commission on doctrine and faith matters, had already prepared a schema titled: "De Ecclesia". The schema was made up of about eleven chapters in all, with a chapter in the form of an appendix on the "Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Men was also added. This schema, it was observed, was not different

²⁹MCBRIEN, Catholicism, 666-667.

from what had been there before in the Church's treatment of herself. It also resembles the standard textbook treatment of the Church.³⁰

After this drafted schema was presented, the Council was expected to clarify its task. The Council had the one task of defining the Church and its nature in relation to Catholics and non-Catholics. According to this clarification, "the church was asked to present itself by speaking of its innermost being, first to Catholics, but also to those who do not belong to its outward form."³¹ This was to be done by drawing inspiration from the biblical and patristic points of view.

As the discussions went on, so many suggestions were put forward, amendments were made, and debates continued endlessly. More clarification was sought in John XXIII's opening speech.³² Many flaws were pointed out in the prepared schema. Such flaws included poor biblical spirit and poverty of patristic points of view. Several bishops found the schema too juridical in tone and too little concern with the Church as a mystery. The schema was also faulted for lack of structural coherence and for portraying the laity too much as the mere appendage of the hierarchy. The document's poverty also included its lack of sensitivity to the legitimate role of the State alongside that of the Church and the conspicuous lack of reference to the works of the Eastern Fathers of the Church.³³ Hence, as more suggestions were put forward by all those concerned, in the end, it became more obvious that the revision of the entire schema was inevitable in the face of another light found from John XXIII's opening speech:

When the Church preaches the truths of faith, it wishes to show itself as patient and kind, as a mother who is merciful and loving towards all, including her separated children. And the Church must show itself as the source of light and unity by making sure that its good things are within the reach of the whole human family.³⁴

The task at hand has to be done within biblical and patristic traditions, and the Church that was needed is a church that is mother, merciful and loving to all, and whose good things are within the reach of the whole human family.

³⁰ RICHARD P. MCBRIEN "The Church (*Lumen Gentium*)" in Adrian Hastings ed. *Modern Catholicism Vatican II and After* (New York: Oxford, 1991), 84.

³¹ GERARD PHILIPS, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, History of the Constitution" in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II Vol. I* (New York: Herder, 1967), 108.

³² PHILIPS, 108.

³³ MCBRIEN "The Church (*Lumen Gentium*)" in Adrian Hastings ed. 84-85.

³⁴ PHILIPS, 110.

Hence, the very prepared text on the Church, that is, the schema from the commission, which the bishops had received in a prepackaged form, was ultimately rejected, and an entirely new document that takes cognisance of the entire human family was then prepared. The bishops at the Council also indicated the need for a new statement on the meaning of the Church and not simply restating what had hitherto been. To ensure faithfulness to this wish, it was evident that the Council needed a synodal church that embraced all humanity by opening the door of faith to all.³⁵ Vatican II is all about finding ways of making available our faith to all humanity.

The dynamics involved in crafting the document on the Church were rich in concepts that point to synodality as the nature and type of Church needed. First, the Church was asked to present and speak of its innermost being, first to Catholics but also to those who do not belong to its outward form.³⁶ As such, the juridical and hierarchical character and tone of the Church, which in the past held sway and failed to recognise the legitimacy of several persons in their socio-cultural, religious, ideological, and philosophical groupings, and made even the lay members of the Church an irrelevant appendix of the hierarchy was questioned. Secondly, the Church rediscovers her true vocation. When the Church preaches the truths of faith, she does that with patience, kindness and as a mother who is merciful and loving towards all, including her separated children. Thus, the Church that was needed is an inclusive church that is a source of light and unity, ensuring that its good things are within the reach of the whole human family.³⁷ Hence, the synodal nature of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. It is about a synodal Church that carries everyone along. This expectation of a Church that carries everyone as constituting the nature of the Church is what is expressed in the title of the document on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (light of the nations).

From the foregoing, in as much as synodality refers to the quality of being synodal and a synodal church is a church that carries everyone along, there is a sense in claiming that the sixteen documents of the Second Vatican Council serve the synodal character of the Church. They are all connected in one way or another with the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, which

³⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Data Porta Fidei* of the Supreme Pontiff for the Indiction of the Year of Faith. Rome, Saint Peter's 11th October 2011, no. 1

³⁶ GERARD PHILIPS, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, History of the Constitution" in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II Vol. I* (New York: Herder, 1967), 108.

³⁷ PHILIPS, 110.

underscores the universal Synodality in Christ, who “is the light of humanity”³⁸ which also shines visibly in the Church.

This Constitution speaks of the Church in general, taking into consideration her inner nature and place in history. The Church, above all, is a mystery, a reality imbued with the hidden presence of the triune God in Christ, the light of the nations. The Church bears the reflection of this light mandated to illuminate humanity in the manner of a sacrament.

Christ is the light of humanity, and it is, accordingly, the heartfelt desire of this sacred Council, being gathered together in the Holy Spirit, that by proclaiming his gospel to every creature (cf. Mk. 16:15), it may bring to all men the light of Christ which shines out visibly from the Church. The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament- a sign and instrument that is of communion with God and of unity among all men.³⁹

Thus, the Church is a Sacrament that is a sign and instrument of union and communion with God and with all humankind. Communion speaks of a double life participation: the incorporation of Christians into the life of the triune God in Christ and the communication of that life of charity to the entire body of the faithful in this world and the next; union with God in Christ and union among Christians in the Church.⁴⁰ This is the theological origins of the synodal Church in the Trinitarian Union.

As a result of this union and communion of mankind with God and with one another, chapter two of *Lumen Gentium* employed the image of the people of God to express it. All those who are in communion with God and with one another through Christ in the Church through the word and sacrament are constituted the people of God⁴¹ and share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly roles of Jesus Christ.⁴² They are all called to take part in the Church's mission of bringing people to communion with God and with one another based on their standing among the people of God. The chapter further discusses the different categories of members of the people of God,⁴³ underscoring the roles expected of them within the synodal family.

³⁸ LUMEN GENTIUM, 1.

³⁹ LUMEN GENTIUM, 1.

⁴⁰ ST. JOHN PAUL II, Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful *Christifedeles Laici* 29.

⁴¹ LUMEN GENTIUM, 9.

⁴² LUMEN GENTIUM, 10.

⁴³ LUMEN GENTIUM, 16.

The chapter further discusses different categories of persons who have not yet received the gospel and states categorically that such persons "are related to the people of God in various ways."⁴⁴ Among them were first the Jewish "people to which the covenant and promises were made, and from which Christ was born according to the flesh."⁴⁵ Related also to people of God are those who believe in the creator God. Among them are the Moslems, those who seek God in shadows and images, "those who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, but seek God with a sincere heart; and those who without any fault of theirs have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life".⁴⁶ Indeed, the image of the people of God employed in *Lumen Gentium* that describes the universal communion in Christ through the Church is a perfect description of the needed Synodal Church of inclusivity.

6.2 Synodality from Conciliar Documents⁴⁷

If we understand synodality as a process of inclusivity that brings all journeying and discerning together with the grace of the Holy Spirit, especially in the decision-making process in the Church or in the words of Pope Francis, it is a constitutive element of the Church that can be mirrored through some organs of participation and co-responsibility,⁴⁸ Then, there is a sense that it could be said that the sixteen *Conciliar Documents* are synodal in character. They are all, in one way or another, organs of inclusivity and participation connected with the relationship of various segments of humanity with the Church and, as such, with the Council's *Lumen Gentium*. The inner life of the Church, which consists of proclamation, teaching and worship, with a view to opening the door of faith to everyone, concerns the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine revelation, the Declaration on Christian education and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Proclamation, teaching and worship are instruments of synodality in the Church. Proclamation and teaching as instruments of inclusivity transmit Christ the Light of humanity, which shines visibly from the Church to every creature (Mk 16:15). Apart from that, the Synodal process begins with listening to God in his proclaimed and taught word before proceeding to listen to one another. In this vein, Pope Francis prays thus: "For the Synod Fathers, we ask the Holy Spirit first of all for the gift of listening: to listen to God so that with him we may hear the cry

⁴⁴LUMEN GENTIUM, 16.

⁴⁵LUMEN GENTIUM, 16.

⁴⁶LUMEN GENTIUM, 16

⁴⁷MCBRIEN, Catholicism, 668-669.

⁴⁸FRANCIS, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops. Paul VI Audience Hall Saturday, 17th October 2015.

of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.”⁴⁹ In worship, all are taken up in an inclusive fashion as sacrifices through, with and in Christ. The various ministries and forms of Christian existence and services rendered in the Church, to which all are called as missionaries, are treated in the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Decree on priestly formation, Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.

The interrelationship between the church and other Christian churches is taken up by the Decree on Ecumenism and the Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches. Ecumenical movement is indeed a form of an inclusive path. The Declaration on Non-Christian Religions deals with the relationship between the Church and other religions of the world beyond the Christian religion and the Church. It concerns itself with dialoguing with other non-Christian religions. Dialogue is also an instrument of inclusivity and, thus, synodality. Finally, dealing with the Church's relationship with the world at large is the concern of the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the modern world, the Decree on the Church's missionary activity, the Declaration on religious freedom and the Decree on Instruments of Social Communication. These are conciliar organs of inclusivity and synodality, which respond to Pope Francis' aspirations, which are expressed thus: "We must continue along this path. The world in which we live and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."⁵⁰

In an inclusive fashion, all the sixteen documents are indeed connected with the life of the Church in relation to members of the Church who are within the Church and in relation to those outside the Church. Thus, some experts in the study of the documents of the Second Vatican Council rank the document on the Church as the greatest achievement of the Council "because the constitution of the Church occupies a very vital and central role in relation to the other documents and indeed, all the other documents must be read and understood in the light of *Lumen Gentium* and the reforms it ushered in.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ FRANCIS, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops. Paul VI Audience Hall Saturday, 17th October 2015.

⁵⁰ FRANCIS, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops. Paul VI Audience Hall Saturday, 17th October 2015.

⁵¹ GWIMI P. SAMUEL, *Terra Theology for Pastoral Ministry*, (Port Harcourt: CIWA Publications, 2021), 10.

7. Conclusion

Synodality in the Church is about inclusiveness, consultation and carrying everyone along, bridging the gaps of division and segregation. It is the way of being the Church. It is not democratic in nature or in character in the sense in which democracy is understood. It is also not a once-and-for-all thing; rather, it is a process and the way of being the Church, as it is clearly spelt out in the ecclesiology and teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Synodality has to be realised each day.

The same synodality is also expected of the world at large. The need for universal synodality can never be overemphasised. Present-day experience reveals a growing loss of human fraternity and social friendship. This is evident in the resurfacing of ancient conflicts, wars, and strife thought to be long buried and forgotten,⁵² across many parts of the world. As a result of this, "We are more alone than ever in an increasingly massified world that promotes individual interests and weakens the communitarian dimension of life."⁵³ If the documents of Vatican II are the compass by which to take our bearings, and the path of synodality is what God expects of the Church of the third Millennium, then, first, the urgent need for continuous study and use of the Council's documents is imperative for understanding and achieving world synodality of fraternity and human solidarity.

Secondly, all must, in humility, learn this way of being the Church. We must admit that we are so used to our juridical, hierarchical, and triumphalistic way and manner of being the Church, either as clerics/hierarchy in relation to the laity or as Catholics in relation to our separated brethren and other non-Christian religions, that it makes it difficult to break with the past. Here, the sentiments of Pope Francis should inspire us as we conclude.

Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church to be concerned with being at the centre, which then ends with being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. Suppose something should rightly disturb us and trouble our

⁵² FRANCIS, *Fratelli Tutti* Brothers and Sisters all, Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship. Asisi, 3 October, 2020, 11.

⁵³ FRATELLI TUTTI, 12.

consciences. In that case, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light, and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, and without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37).⁵⁴

⁵⁴ FRANCIS, The Joy of the Gospel, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father. Rome, 24th November, 2013, 49. See also Congregation (Dicastery) for the Clergy. Instruction: The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community, 3.