

“As the church walks forward in the season of implementing synodality on the local, regional, and universal levels, this book is for those who seek to turn this promising springtime into a fruitful harvest. Rooted in theological and historical foundations, Kristin Colberg and Jos Moons move from the *what* of synodality to the *how*, offering tools for cultivating the conversion of attitudes, behaviors, structures, and practices to synodalize the church’s life and mission today.”

—Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ, undersecretary
of the General Secretariat of the Synod

“This important book lives up to its claim to being both an accessible explanation of the vision of a synodal church, as well as a spiritual and practical guide to embedding that vision into church life. Following the 2021–2024 Synod on Synodality, the journey of ‘synodalizing’ the church will benefit greatly from this hope-filled work. It is essential reading for those who wish to understand the ongoing impacts of a truly synodal church.”

—Ormond Rush, Australian Catholic University

“Colberg and Moons offer a rich testimony to the process of the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024), rightly pointing to its foundation in the Second Vatican Council’s recovery of an understanding of the shared dignity of all the baptized faithful, their shared belonging to the pilgrim people of God, and co-responsibility for the life and mission of the church. This book is an indispensable resource for understanding the synod’s aim of helping us to become a truly synodal church in practice and for receiving the orientations contained in its final document. It should be required reading for bishops, pastors, deacons, lay leaders, and all those preparing for ministry in the church today.”

—Catherine E. Clifford, professor of systematic and historical
theology, Saint Paul University, Ottawa

“During the two synod sessions in Rome I experienced firsthand what it means to be a listening, participatory, and consultative church. And it was a deeply consoling experience that changed my understanding of the universal church. This superb new book is a wonderful resource to help people to begin, and continue, the synodal journey. It reminds us that synodality is a practice with deep historical roots and with solid theological foundations, and it offers concrete steps on how to move forward.”

—James Martin, SJ, editor at large of America Media

“Synodality is a developing and all too often abstract term. In these early days, more work is needed to help us fully grasp its potential to transform our communities. This book expertly fills that gap. It offers a primer on the theological and historical origins of synodality while offering concrete suggestions for the attitudes, structures, and practices of personal and communal conversion required to unlock the radical possibilities of synodality to meet the needs of our hurting and rapidly changing world.”

—Avril Braigent, facilitator at the Synod of Bishops,
co-founder and director of the School for Synodality (UK)

“If synodality is ‘journeying together,’ I can think of no better guide along the way than this book. It’s Rick Steves for the pilgrim people of God! Theologically grounded and pastorally realistic, Colberg and Moons provide an exemplary introduction to what is perhaps the most important development in the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. It is simply the best single volume out there for understanding and advancing Pope Francis’s vision of a more participatory, collaborative, and hopeful church.”

—Edward P. Hahnenberg, Breen Chair for Catholic
Systematic Theology, John Carroll University

The Future of Synodality

*How We Move Forward
from Here*

Kristin M. Colberg and Jos Moons, SJ



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Introduction

We live in an extraordinary time in the Catholic Church. Because we stand in the midst of it, it can be difficult to appreciate the distinctiveness of the present moment. The church has begun a profound process of renewal that engages every element of its life and its outreach to the world; it has embraced the path of synodality. Until recent years, the word *synodality* remained largely unfamiliar to many Catholics. While it sounds complex, it means something like “journeying together” (from the Greek *syn* = with, and *hodos* = road). Synodality is a way of being church that includes everyone, inviting all to speak and participate, appreciating the insights and gifts of each member of the community, seeking the way forward together. Most of all, it is a style “that starts from listening as the first act of the Church.”¹

Ecclesial synodality is both ancient and new. Like the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) before it, the current process engages in both *ressourcement* (a return to the church’s earliest sources) and *aggiornamento* (updating). Gathering in

1. General Secretariat for the Synod, *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 6, July 9, 2024, <https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-instrumentum-laboris.html>. This text is referred to as *Instrumentum Laboris* 2024, to distinguish it from the *Instrumentum Laboris* written in service of the first general assembly in 2023, which can be found at <https://www.synod.va/en/resources/documents/documents-for-the-second-phase/documents-for-the-1st-session-of-the-XVI-assembly/documents.html>.

2 *The Future of Synodality*

synods began in the earliest days of the church and has continued as a vital tool of consensus-building over the last two millennia. These moments of collaborative decision-making where Christians (usually bishops) gathered to pray, listen, dialogue, and discern ways forward for the church stand out as major moments of the church's life. Today, the church wants to embrace essential aspects of these gatherings while updating them to involve the participation of the entire People of God and meet the needs of a global church today. The church also finds itself confronted with unprecedented challenges that extend across the entire world, such as a wide range of violent conflicts, a looming climate crisis, the widening gap in economic equality and opportunity, and growing political polarization. In the face of the significant complexities facing the church and the world, the Catholic Church has committed itself in recent years to the synodal path because it believes that it is what God "expects of the Church of the third millennium."²

To explore this style of being church, the Catholic Church undertook the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024). As we will see in this book, the synodal way ushered many welcome innovations into being. By engaging in the "greatest consultation effort in human history," the church listened to and with the People of God to discern the call of the Holy Spirit.³ At the very beginning of the process, the official guidebook stated: "This Synod aims to promote a new style of living out the

2. Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, October 17, 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

3. Christopher Lamb, "Pope Francis Announces Global Synod Meeting Will Occur Over Two Years," *Chicago Catholic*, October 19, 2022, <https://www.chicagocatholic.com/vatican/-/article/2022/10/19/pope-francis-announces-global-synod-meeting-will-occur-over-two-years>.

communion, participation, and mission of the Church.”⁴ Now that the Synod on Synodality has ended, the question of how we can *continue* to grow in this new, more synodal—more inclusive, participative, humble, and spiritual—ecclesial style remains. This book wants to contribute to the conversation on that question.

It wants to do so in two unique ways. First, this is a comprehensive presentation that is complete without getting lost in the details. Instead of focusing on one aspect, we address various dimensions: history, theology, concrete aspects of the Synod 2021–24, types of behavior that befit synodality, and ecclesial structures. Second, this is a readable and accessible book. In order to truly journey together, as synodality requires, it is important that everyone has a sense of the nature and aims of synodality. Unfortunately, the (many!) theological articles and books on synodality are often not very accessible. The writing style may be too dense, the length may be discouraging, or the content may be too abstract or specialized. While we need those types of materials, they need to be complemented with solid yet accessible presentations of a more general kind at the service of all of the People of God. That is what this book hopes to achieve.

The book consists of two parts. In part one, we survey the developments of the last several years, during which much has happened. It should clarify matters to those who are interested but not too sure about what’s happening or who have some suspicions. It aims to help those who don’t see the forest for the trees and those who see some trees but can’t identify the forest. We discuss four aspects, the first of which is theology. It is important to underscore that synodality has deep theological roots, especially in the Second Vatican Council.

4. General Secretariat for the Synod, *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality 3.5, September 7, 2021, <https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-vademecum-for-the-synod-on-synodality.html>.

The theological exploration in the first chapter is complemented by a historical exploration in the second chapter. We will see that synodality can be traced back as far as the Acts of the Apostles. Moreover, it is a fitting (and necessary) response to contemporary crises such as the sexual abuse scandal and the cover-up culture. Pope Francis's role in inspiring synodality is mentioned, too. In the third and fourth chapters, we focus on the Synod 2021–24. Through a series of snapshots, we seek to bring to life the process as it unfolded, and then we move on to the topics that surfaced in the synodal deliberations in parishes, dioceses, countries, continents, and in Rome. These chapters are complemented by two appendixes with overviews of the major dates and major documents.

In part two, we look towards the future. The Synod 2021–24 was part of a much larger project, which is to develop synodality into the church's usual practice. This requires a “synodal conversion” or a “synodalization” of the church, that is, a wholesale change of thinking, acting, and organizing ourselves to build up a church that is marked by synodality. What does the church need to move forward in that direction? We point to three challenges, pertaining to synodal *attitudes and behavior*, synodal *structures*, and synodal *practices*. Chapter five presents these challenges and explains how they complement one another. Chapter six focuses on attitudes and behavior of the faithful—all of us. How can we become better listeners? How can we become better at journeying together? Chapter seven looks into the way we organize ourselves in the church: our procedures, rules, and structures. How can ecclesial structures, rules, and processes better reflect a participative and inclusive church, and better contribute to it? Finally, the last chapter explores practices: the realm of culture and habits, which typically situates itself in between behavior, which is highly personal, and structures, which are highly impersonal. What would a synodal culture look like? By way of a case study, we delve into an ancient example, the monastic communities rooted in the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Immediately after the Second Vatican Council, the influential German theologian Karl Rahner wrote a small booklet titled “The Council: A New Beginning.”⁵ The council, Rahner knew, was not the end point but rather the beginning of something. Like Vatican II, so the Synod 2021–24 is a new beginning, too. This book hopes to contribute to that new beginning.

This book has been coauthored by Kristin Colberg (College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University and School of Theology and Seminary, Collegeville, MN) and Jos Moons, SJ (KU Leuven, Belgium, and Boston College), who both have extensive experience with the topic. Trusting that our experiences and talents would be complementary, we decided to write the book together. We have extensively discussed each chapter, and while our different styles are still noticeable, the content belongs to both of us. In so doing, we felt we were doing what we were writing about: journeying together, learning from one another, appreciating one another for what we think and are.

Kristin Colberg was a member of the Theological Commission advising the Synod on Synodality 2021–24. As such she was involved in many aspects of the preparation for it. One of her most notable contributions is that she served as a member of the writing team that produced the Working Document for the Continental Stage, *Enlarge the Space of Your Tent*. She also collaborated extensively with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Diocese of Saint Cloud, Minnesota, during the local and regional phases of the synod. During the three years of the Synod on Synodality, she traveled

5. Karl Rahner, SJ, “The Council: A New Beginning,” in *The Church after the Council*, trans. D. C. Herron and R. Albrecht (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), 9–33.

across the United States to several countries, participating in listening sessions and speaking about the synod. Kristin is also a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, which has also taught her the ways of synodal walking together.

Jos Moons was the main researcher for a research project entitled “Mapping Synodality,” which reviewed academic publications on the synod and on synodality. The fruits thereof include an academic bibliography for the period 2013–2024, covering English, French, German, and Spanish literature, and a series of theological briefing papers that provided short, accessible summaries of the academic conversation on key topics such as participation, the role of the bishop in a synodal church, the participation of women, and canon law. He has published scholarly articles on synodality in Dutch, English, French, Italian, and Spanish in which he has discussed the baptismal foundation of synodality, attitudes such as listening, practices such as discernment of spirits, the Holy Spirit as the synod’s protagonist, and canon law and its limitations. He edited the book *Witnesses of Synodality: Good Practices and Experiences* (Paulist Press, 2024).

We would like to express our thanks to Hans Christoffersen, who first suggested writing a book for Liturgical Press. Thanks also to the monks of Saint John’s Abbey, who have been so kind to host me (Jos) for a time of undisturbed writing. Thanks to Barry Hudock, who has reviewed our texts with great dedication and professionalism. Deep gratitude is also extended to Shawn Colberg, who read many chapters of this book and provided invaluable comments, editing and insight.

Part I

Synodality

*Foundations and
Recent Developments*

Chapter One

Why Synodality?

Theological Considerations

The Catholic Church today has committed itself to a synodal path. It seeks to develop a new way of proceeding that is characterized by listening, consultation, and dialogue. The point is to seek the way forward *together*. Building up the church and serving our neighbors is done together: all can contribute and participate. One reason this is a good idea is that this way of being church reflects sound theological convictions. Listening to our fellow Christians is ultimately a matter of faith: we believe that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through our brothers and sisters. Similarly, appreciating the contributions of every member of the community also has a deep theological foundation, as it is a way of honoring each person's gifts, which are ultimately given by the Spirit. This chapter explores several theological notions that are foundational for synodality.¹

1. What follows adapts some ideas and material from Jos Moons, SJ, "A Comprehensive Introduction to Synodality: Reconfiguring Ecclesiology and Ecclesial Practice," *Roczniki Teologiczne (Annals of Theology)* 69/2 (2022): 73–93.

The Second Vatican Council, which also sought to reform the church, will play a key role in these reflections. Vatican II promoted a church that preaches the Gospel by convincing, not imposing, and it set first steps on the path of appreciating the wisdom found in other churches and, indeed, in society. Dialogue was not only embraced as the council's style, but it was also promoted as the church's style in general. In terms of content, the council elaborated various notions that are central to the synodal process, such as the People of God, *sensus fidelium*, charisms, journeying, and style. In many ways, current efforts to promote synodality can be seen as efforts to advance the council's teaching. Explaining the synod's theological foundation can, therefore, not be done without unpacking the council. Official documents for the synod explicitly make this connection. For example, the Synthesis Report 2023 speaks of the Synod 2021–24 as “a true act of further reception of the Council, prolonging its inspiration and reinvigorating its prophetic force for today's world.”² In other words, synodality takes up crucial elements from the council, shaping them in a way that befits the contemporary context.

Baptism and the People of God

We ourselves, the faithful, constitute a first foundation for synodality. To use an image of Pope Francis: synodality inverts the ecclesial pyramid and starts with all of us. The importance of the faithful in the life of the church is evident in the way the Synod 2021–24 functioned. For example, the synodal

2. Synthesis Report: A Synodal Church in Mission (hereafter: Synthesis Report 2023), Introduction, <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf>. Cf. 1a: “The Second Vatican Council ‘updated’ this [synodal] practice [of the early church], and Pope Francis once again encouraged the Church to renew it. The Synod 2021–2024 is part of this renewal.”

process opened with a consultation that sought to include all the faithful. According to the Working Document for the Continental Stage (2022), in which the views of participants in this consultation were gathered, “many emphasized that this was the first time the Church had asked for their opinion and they wish to continue this journey.”³ Another strong indication that believers other than bishops were being taken seriously is the fact that a (limited) number of lay people, including women, fully participated in the 2023 synod meeting, with the right both to speak and to vote, and that there were lay facilitators, again including women.⁴

The theological foundation of this innovation is the sacrament of baptism.⁵ All the faithful share the fundamental, equal dignity of being baptized. While that dignity bears resemblance to the fundamental human dignity shared by all people, whatever their faith, it has a deeper and more explicitly Christian layer also. Ultimately, that is a mystical layer. In baptism, we have been clothed with Christ, anointed with the Holy Spirit, and confirmed in our adoptive daughter- and sonship by God the Father.

3. General Secretariat for the Synod, Working Document for the Continental Stage, *Enlarge the Space of Your Tent* 16, <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continentale-EN.pdf> (hereafter cited as Document for the Continental Stage).

4. The Synod of Bishops 2023 had 364 participants with the right to speak and to vote, plus the pope. Of those, 54 were women (29 lay women and 25 religious women) and 27 were priests. In addition, there were 85 facilitators and experts. See Antoine Mekary’s “Here’s the Synod in Key Numbers,” October 5, 2023, <https://aleteia.org/2023/10/05/heres-the-synod-in-key-numbers/>.

5. On baptism as a foundation for synodality, see Jos Moons, SJ, “Broadening the Baptismal Foundation of a Synodal Church: A Plea for a Baptismal Ethos,” *Studia Canonica* 58 (2024): 131–52; see also Susan K. Wood, SCL, ed., *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003).

The sacrament of baptism also has an ecclesial significance: through it, one becomes part of the Christian community. While in modern Western contexts, the celebration of baptism sometimes functions as a religious version of a baby shower, originally it was the end point of a long process of personal and spiritual development with a step-by-step introduction to the faith community. In theological terms, baptism makes one part of the People of God. For, as *Lumen Gentium* beautifully states, God does not want us to be saved individually but connected with one another, as a people (see LG 9).

While this baptismal dignity is a grace, it also comes with responsibilities, namely, to contribute to the building up of the kingdom of God and of the church by words and deeds, by prayer and action. Two theological terms help to specify this ecclesial responsibility, namely, *sensus fidelium* and charisms. The *sensus fidelium* is an instinct for the truth that all the faithful, including those without theological training, have. It is sometimes described as an “innate sense,” an intuition for what is true about God, faith, church. On the one hand, the notion of *sensus fidelium* is an act of faith in God working in and through all of the faithful, not just the professionals, be it theologians or clergy. Theological reflection speaks of that instinct as a fruit of the Holy Spirit working in us and, therefore, as something that is freely given. On the other hand, we should avoid identifying all that comes to our mind or heart as the voice of God; of course, it may just be our own imagination, the influence of the culture we live in, or even our human sinfulness that is at work. Therefore, we can and should develop or refine that faith instinct by living a life of faith in God and prayer, serving our neighbor, engaging in fraternal conversations with fellow Christians (and people in general), and theological formation.

Ideally, we should hope for faith intuitions shared by all, for if we reach consensus, we can be sure that God is at work in us. As *Lumen Gentium* puts it, “The whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from

the holy one (see 1 Jn 2:20 and 27) cannot be mistaken in belief” (LG 12).⁶ Since our diversity is such that unanimity is improbable, a more pragmatic perspective may be more useful. Practically speaking, the implication of the *sensus fidelium* is that dialogue is important. Members of the faithful need to make their voices—or rather, their faith witness—heard. At the same time, they need to listen to other voices. Just like the Spirit may be speaking through me, he may be speaking through somebody else. Especially for church leaders and theologians, that is a challenge. Having been trained and missioned to teach, they are sometimes less familiar with listening to and learning from “ordinary faithful” outside of their own circles, be it academic or episcopal, who don’t “speak their language.” Once again, the faith intuitions of these “ordinary faithful” may actually be very instructive—it may be that God’s Spirit speaks through them.

Another way to contribute to the building up of the kingdom of God and of the church are to use our charisms. Charisms are gifts that God gives to each person, to equip her or him to build up the church and the kingdom. Here St. Paul’s image of the one body with a variety of members—read gifts and graces—is helpful (see 1 Cor 12–14). People have different gifts. These should not lead to haughty self-congratulation, rivalry, or fights, as easily happens, both in Corinth almost two thousand years ago and in our own parishes today. Instead, one should employ one’s gifts in such a way that they serve others and, in case of doubt, aim for the highest gift, which is love.⁷ Paul’s exhortation means that we all have something to give to the other members of the body and that we all receive something

6. All quotations from the documents of the Second Vatican Council are taken from Austin Flannery, OP, ed., *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

7. Note that the canticle of love in 1 Cor 13 is often read at weddings but is not about romantic love.

as well, and this is a key concept of synodality. That something may be the spiritual gifts that St. Paul refers to, but it may also be our experiences, insights, and thoughts.

The Second Vatican Council sees these charisms as gifts from the Spirit and contends that, by means of them, the Spirit seeks to build up the church. To say the same thing in more critical terms: building up the church is not only a matter of hierarchical ministry; all the faithful have a role to play. That is the starting point of *Lumen Gentium*'s teaching on charisms: "It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries that the holy Spirit makes the people holy, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts 'at will to each individual' (1 Cor 12:11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the church" (LG 12). Practically, this means that we should all be active members of the church, as we all have gifts to share. Moreover, while contributing our bit, we should also acknowledge what others contribute and appreciate how we complement one another. A synodal church is participatory and appreciative.

The appreciation for our common baptismal dignity and for co-responsibility is grounded in several theological shifts or, in more technical language, reconfigurations. Reconfigurations are an important aspect of the Catholic approach to renewal. To go forward, we reach backward and seek a foundation in the past, thus providing renewal with theological validity. What we retrieve from history is presented—or "configured"—in such a way that newness emerges, for example, by shifting priorities. For instance, instead of starting with holy orders, synodality gives priority to baptism, recognizing it as the church's foundational sacrament. That is not to dismiss, downplay, or deny the importance of the sacrament of holy orders or the role of the ordained ministry in the life of the church; it means that these must be understood in the context of baptism. The church, its

mission, and its unity are founded in the first place upon baptism, while ordained ministry is one way of carrying out that mission and serving that unity.

This reconfiguration in relation to our baptismal dignity takes up a crucial earlier reconfiguration carried out by the Second Vatican Council in the church's understanding of itself. While an early draft text of *Lumen Gentium*, the council's document on the church, had spoken first about the hierarchy (in chapter two) and then about "the People of God, especially the laity" (in chapter three), the final text speaks of the People of God as a whole in chapter two and then develops two specific groups within the church, the hierarchy (in chapter three) and the laity (in chapter four). Instead of imagining the church primarily according to distinctions based on higher and lower roles, the council wanted deliberately to start with the shared dignity that all of the faithful, the entire People of God, hold in common and that comes with a co-responsibility for the church's mission.⁸ Accordingly, the Australian theologian Ormond Rush has rightly stated that one of the council's greatest achievements is the way that it gives us a vision of the church that is "primarily baptismal in orientation" rather than hierarchical in orientation.⁹ Prioritizing baptism over ordination is an important step in taking up this theological shift and unlocking its potential for transforming the function of the church.

Another reconfiguration has to do with the appreciation of the *sensus fidelium* and of charisms. Synodality offers a more positive approach to these realities than has sometimes been the case. In the years since the council, magisterial documents have almost entirely "forgotten" the notion of *sensus fidelium*,

8. See the minutes of the council, *Acta synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Vaticani II* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970–1999), vol. III/1, 209–10.

9. See Ormond Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church," *Theological Studies* 78 (2017): 299–325.

focusing rather on magisterial teaching and obedience. This contrasts greatly with the extensive theological scholarship that has developed during this same period; indeed, publications on the topic have been so numerous that a series of overview articles was justified.¹⁰ One sign of hope, however, is the publication of the study *Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church by the Vatican's International Theological Commission in 2014.¹¹

Similarly, magisterial documents have tended to narrow down charisms by linking them with specific groups in the church, especially those belonging to the charismatic renewal or the so-called new movements. They have often stressed that the laity's responsibility is particularly to build up the kingdom, leaving the running of the church for the most part to the clergy. Church documents tended to warn against lay clericalization. Synodality takes a different approach and revisits the broader notion of charisms as found in the writings of St. Paul and in *Lumen Gentium*. In so doing, synodality is an important step forward in developing a more generous appreciation of the essential contribution of the lay faithful.

Third and finally, these theological reconfigurations also affect our understanding of ecclesial leadership.¹² Certainly hierarchical leadership remains. In a synodal church, bishops

10. See John J. Burkhard, OFM Conv, "Sensus Fidei: Theological Reflection Since Vatican II: Part I: 1965–1984," *The Heythrop Journal* 34 (1993): 41–59; "Sensus Fidei: Theological Reflection Since Vatican II: Part II: 1985–1989," *The Heythrop Journal* 34 (1993): 123–36; "Sensus Fidei: Recent Theological Reflection (1990–2001): Part I," *The Heythrop Journal* 46 (2005): 450–75; "Sensus Fidei: Recent Theological Reflection (1990–2001): Part II," *The Heythrop Journal* 47 (2006): 38–54.

11. International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church (2014), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html.

12. See the seminal article by Myriam Wijlens, "Reforming the Church by Hitting the Reset Button: Reconfiguring Collegiality within Synodality because of *sensus fidei fidelium*," *The Canonist* 8 (2017): 235–61.

continue to fulfil an important role. Anointed by the Spirit, missioned by Christ, and appointed by the pope, their task is to shepherd their flock, in collegial collaboration and communion with their fellow bishops and other pastors. In a synodal church, too, bishops and the pope have the final word. The major shift here is that prior to having the final word, leaders should listen and learn. Bishops, priests, deacons, religious superiors, and other church leaders should become team players who welcome advice, encourage initiatives, share their considerations and decisions, and so on. Thus, rather than focusing on their authority, they should focus on processes of consultation, dialogue, collaboration, and complementarity.

Therefore, distinctions such as that between higher and lower members of the church—a distinction one still finds in *Lumen Gentium* and that underpins ecclesial titles such as “Your Eminence”—no longer make sense, for our highest dignity is a common one.¹³ The first reality of the church is what we are together: the People of God. This holds a particular significance for the magisterium and its teaching role. In a synodal church, the magisterium, too, is learning. As Francis said in his notable 2015 address on synodality: “Everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).”¹⁴ Thus, the church is a *communio*, as post-conciliar magisterial teaching has emphasized, but we should not stress the hierarchical aspect of the church (the *communio hierarchica*) but rather the communion of the faithful.

13. For that distinction, cf. what *Lumen Gentium* teaches on the ordained and non-ordained “differ[ing] essentially and not only in degree” (LG 9), thus taking up the old idea that the ordained are “more important” members of the church.

14. Pope Francis, Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary.

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