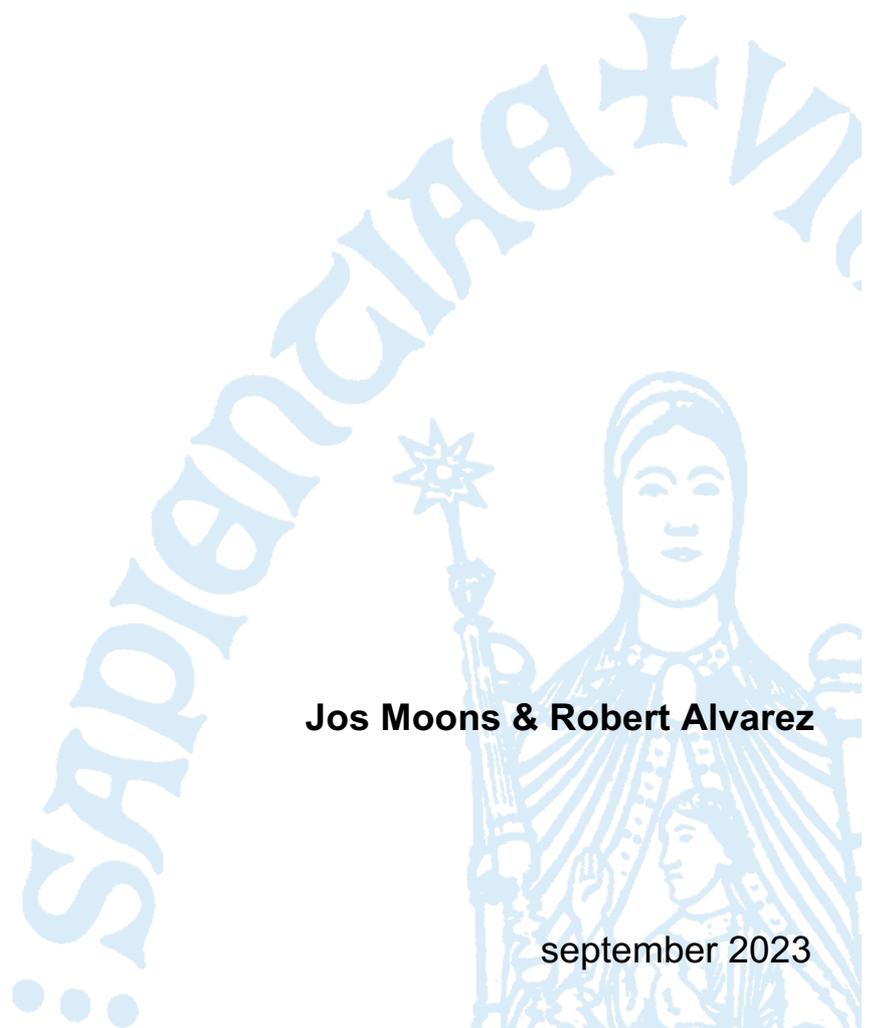


Theological Briefing Papers for the Synod 2023

Jos Moons & Robert Alvarez

september 2023



Colophon

What Are the “Theological Briefing Papers”?

The *Theological Briefing Papers* are a series of relatively short (3-5 pages) comprehensive presentations that summarize in an accessible format the academic conversation on topics related to the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church and, more generally, to the Synod 2021-2024: For a Synodal Church.

They are meant for all those who want to be informed about the academic conversation on synodality, particularly the participants in the Synod 2023.

For the topics that are covered, see the Table of Content.

The *Papers* are based on literature in English, French, German and Spanish from the period 2013-2023.

The papers are available on the Synod’s website with resources, <https://www.synodresources.org/> and on <https://kuleuven.academia.edu/JosMoonsSJ> and can be used freely.

The *Briefing Papers* are also available in French (*Apports des théologiens et théologiennes pour le Synode 2023*), German (*Theologische Tischvorlagen für die Synode 2023*), and Spanish (*Documentos informativos de teología para el Sínodo 2023*).

For an extensive Methodological Justification, see the Introduction.

The project has been supervised by Professor Judith Gruber (KU Leuven).

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In service to all fellow Christians, sister Faculties of Theology, those in ecclesial leadership, and news agencies

ONS KENMERK

UW KENMERK

LEUVEN

9th September 2023

Dear Madam
 Dear Sir

On behalf of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies (KU Leuven), I am pleased to present a series of Theological Briefing Papers that offer succinct, comprehensive overviews of the global academic conversation on synodality.

The synodal journey that the Roman Catholic Church is currently undertaking can be characterized as “an exchange of gifts and insights.” While a synodal Church respects the variety of roles and responsibilities in the Church, it first highlights the faithful’s common baptismal dignity and the fact that all have something to share talents (charisms) and insights (*sensus fidelium*). Theologians serve the synodal journey with critical and constructive reflections on underlying concepts and lived experiences that “help the judgement of the Church to mature” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 40). Indeed, Pope Francis’ synodal impulses have resulted in a boom of books, articles, and courses on synodality.

The enclosed Theological Briefing Papers are among the fruits of the “Mapping Synodality Project” at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies (KU Leuven), and aim at offering an overview of this growing body of literature. They are meant as a help for the members of the People of God who want to be informed about the academic conversation on synodality, particularly those who participate in the Synod 2023. They cover four languages, English, French, German and Spanish and deal with the following topics: 1. The Practice of Synodality; 2. Participation, the People of God, and the Sensus Fidelium; 3. The Bishop in a Synodal Church; 4. Canon Law & Structures for Synodality; 5. Social Justice and Synodality; 6. Inculturation and synodality; 7. Women Participation; 8. Formation for Synodality; 9. Liturgy and Synodality. There is also a paper with a Methodological Justification. The papers may be consulted online on the website of the Synod: <https://www.synod.va/en.html>.

We hope that these papers can help in preparing classes, organizing conferences, writing articles, and in whatever other way that seems appropriate.

Sincerely yours

Prof. Dr. Bénédicte Lemmelijn
 Dean

Introduction

Methodological Justification

Introduction

The *Theological Briefing Papers* summarize in an accessible format the academic conversation on topics related to the Synod 2021-2024. They are meant for all those who want to be informed about the academic conversation on synodality, particularly the participants in the Synod 2023.

Objectives

These *Papers* have two objectives.

- First, they are a way to make the academic voice part of the synodal process. While theologians are part of the people of God, their thoughts are sometimes not accessible. People may not have access to academic material, they may not have the time to read long articles, or these materials may be too abstract. Therefore, these Papers present a survey of the academic conversation in an accessible, short format.
- Second, these *Papers* may support the synodal conversation and discernment process. Concepts, developments, and tensions that have been discussed in academic research may shed light on what is happening and thereby help the conversation and discernment process move forward.

The Selection of Literature

The *Theological Briefing Papers* are based on a bibliography that was put together for this specific purpose, and that can be consulted online.¹ It includes a substantial methodological justification that can be consulted online also. In summarized form, the key criteria and considerations are the following:

- To avoid a narrow focus on one language, the bibliography includes English, French, German, and Spanish literature. Italian turned out to be not feasible because many journals are not available online, requiring one to search manually through libraries.
- This already points at an important practical consideration: with limited time, it is unavoidable to make choices.
- The biography contains only academic literature. This rigorous focus has the advantage of resulting in a biography with a clear focus. The disadvantage of excluding pastoral material by bishops, outreach publications, such as *America Magazine* or *Stimmen der Zeit*, and blog posts, is that less voices are represented. Here, time constraints play a role: without the focus on academic materials, the number of contributions to be collected and processed would have been enormous. We are also aware that non-Western voices are underrepresented in academic literature. Therefore, we have sought to find as much non-Western material as possible.
- The time span has been limited to 2013-2023, that is, from Pope Francis. Arguably, Pope Francis has given synodality a significant impulse. While the twists and turns of the reception of Vatican II in the post-conciliar period are important and interesting, including that in the Papers is simply impossible—except when the 2013-2023 authors speak about it, which they do.

¹ Jos Moons, “Synodality and the Roman-Catholic Church. An Academic Bibliography 2013-2022” (Cahiers Internationaux de Théologie Pratique, série ‘Documents’ n° 17), accessible at https://www.academia.edu/98525943/2023_Synodality_and_the_Roman_Catholic_Church_An_Academic_Bibliography_2013_2023_Cahiers_Internationaux_de_Th%C3%A9ologie_Pratique_s%C3%A9rie_Documents_n_17_2nd_edition.

- Finally, we have only selected material that deals with Roman Catholic synodality. Therefore, ecumenical voices on, e.g., Anglican synodality are included if they also relate to the Roman Catholic Church. Similarly, reflections on, e.g., the role of women in the Church are only included if they address synodality.

The Bibliography contains 750+ titles. We estimate that it is 90% complete (except for 2023).

Database

The research has been done with the help of software; this seems the only way to review the entire corpus. Therefore, we have had to work with a database. The database contains some 650 pdf files and scans. This suggests that some 100 titles are not included. In fact, the number of not-included literature is higher, as book chapters (or groups of chapters) have been uploaded to the database separately. We estimate that some 150 titles are not included in the database. This is due to time constraints or practical issues such as books or journals not being available.

Choice of Topics

The topics have been chosen on the basis of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. Since the descriptions of the “worksheets” in the IL are typically broad, but a *Theological Briefing Paper* needs focus, it is not possible to achieve a 100% overlap between the IL and the papers. In what follows we indicate our topics and how they relate to the IL.

1. The Practice of Synodality

This relates closely to “A. For a synodal Church. An integral experience” and to various worksheets, such as 3.2 (on developing discernment practices and decision-making processes).

2. Participation, the People of God, and the *Sensus Fidelium*

These topics are all part of the very foundation of the Synod 2021-2024. The topic of participation is part of the subtitle of the Synod (“Communion, Participation, Mission”) and is a key element in topic B 3 (“Participation, governance and authority”). The People of God and the *sensus fidelium* are included since, especially in the academic literature, both undergird the theology of participation.

3. The Bishop in a Synodal Church

This relates to the topic of “Participation, governance and authority” (B 3) and to various worksheets: 2.4 (on ordained ministry in relation to baptismal ministries), 2.5 (on renewing and promoting the bishop’s ministry), 3.1 (on the service of authority), 3.3 and 3.4 (both on structures for synodality), and 3.5 (on reforming the Synod of Bishops).

4. Canon Law & Structures for Synodality

This relates to the topic of B 3, which as its subtitle “What processes, structures and institutions are needed in a missionary synodal Church?” Worksheets 3.3 and 3.4 (both on structures for synodality), and 3.5 (on reforming the Synod of Bishops) all speak about structures and canon law.

5. Social Justice and Synodality

Topic B 1 (“A Communion that radiates”) implies respecting and integrating the poor, which means a commitment to social and ecological justice, see 1.1 (“How does the service of charity and commitment to justice and care for our common home nourish communion in a synodal Church?”).

6. Inculturation and Synodality

Topic B 1 (“A Communion that radiates”) implies respecting and integrating cultural diversity, as worksheets 1.5 elaborates (“How can we recognize and gather the richness of cultures and develop dialogue amongst religions in the light of the Gospel?”).

7. Women Participation

This relates to topic 2.3, “How can the Church of our time better fulfil its mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?”

8. Formation for Synodality

Formation is mentioned extensively at the end of the introduction of the IL (no. 58-59), and it is mentioned as a subtopic in many worksheets (1.1, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2., 2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3).

9. Liturgy and Synodality

Although mentioned in the *Instrumentum Laboris* (cf. 2.1), this is not a major topic. It was chosen as a “try out,” as it is a relatively small topic. Over time its importance has increased, see the Working Document for the Continental Stage, no. 88-97.

For practical reasons of shortage of time we may not be able to prepare papers for

1. A Welcoming Church

Topic B 1 (“A Communion that radiates”) implies a welcoming church 1.1 for LGBTQ, those who are discriminated for their race or caste or culture, migrants, etc. This is treated in 1.2. Producing a *Theological Briefing Paper* would require narrowing down the focus.

2. Diversity and Unity

Topic B 1 (“A Communion that radiates”) implies a positive take on the diversity within the Catholic church and with other churches (1.3 and 1.4).

3. Ecumenism

Topic B 1 (“A Communion that radiates”) implies an ecumenical commitment, as worksheet notes 1.4 (“How can a synodal Church fulfil its mission through a renewed ecumenical commitment?”).

Research Method

For each *Briefing Paper*, the research includes the following.

- First, we explore the official documents related to the Synod 2021-2024. This gives a first idea of the topic. It also helps to see how the topic is presented in the official documents, which prepares for the subsequent analysis of the academic material. However, this exploration is mainly to provide context and not the main focus of the Papers.
- Second, we perform a thorough quantitative analysis of the database with the help of the software program, MAXQDA. This helps to see how often a given term is mentioned and in what combinations, which helps to determine the likely top papers. Sometimes, reading through the materials suggests recalibrating the quantitative analysis. For example, the search term “liturgy” does not exhaust all papers with a liturgical focus, as a fair number of papers speaks about the “Eucharist” without using the word “liturgy.” In such cases, additional searches are needed.
- Thirdly, we do a qualitative survey of the top sources. Depending on the topic, this means reading (almost) all the materials, or a selection thereof. For example, in the case of women participation, the number of publications is limited, so we read (almost) everything.

However, in the case of the Paper on the bishop(s) over 180 documents have 50 references or more to the terms bishop(s) and episcopal, so we have to make a selection. Criteria for choosing which top sources we read are: Does the paper elaborate views relevant to the Paper under consideration? (A paper make make frequent references to, e.g., listening, without elaborating these.) Does this paper broaden the languages represented in the paper? (After three English papers, we prefer a Spanish one.) Does it make a point that was not represented so far? (In this way, minority views are included also.)

- While reading, we think about ways to present the materials. What way of structuring the variety of views gives insight to the reader while being faithful to the materials? This is a creative process of going back and forth between the structure that is being developed and the materials of the database.
- Finally, the research has included extensive consultation. All through the first year (from May 2022 onwards), we consulted with a Scientific Committee. Members included, amongst others, Kristin Colberg (Saint John's School of Theology), Anne-Béatrice Faye (Association des théologiens africains), Arnaud Join-Lambert (Université Catholique de Louvain), Christina Kheng (East Asian Pastoral Institute), Rafael Luciani (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (Venezuela), Boston College). Throughout, Professor Judith Gruber (KU Leuven) has been supervising the project.

Presentation

Each *Theological Briefing Paper* consists of three sections.

- A short summary offers a first orientation.
- After that, a detailed analysis provides some statistics and structures the literature under a couple of relevant headings.
- Finally, a selection of relevant reading materials facilitates personal exploration. These materials have usually been mentioned in the detailed analysis.

Note that some Italian titles have been added afterwards, with the kind help of Serena Noceti, to help out those who do not read English, French, German or Spanish.

We strive for publication in four languages: English, which is the language in which we have worked, and the three languages that are represented in the literature: French, German, and Spanish.

Standards

The *Briefing Papers* aims to hold up the following standards:

- The papers want to be clear and understandable.
- Great care has also been taken to be short, with a maximum of five pages.
- Finally, the papers mean to present the material without manipulating and without ignoring certain perspectives or voices.

Authors

- Jos Moons (1980) is a Jesuit priest. He currently works as a lecturer, researcher and student chaplain at KU Leuven (Belgium). Before entering the Society of Jesus he also worked as a diocesan priest (2005-2009). He has published on *Lumen Gentium*, pneumatology, synodality, and Ignatian spiritual direction.
- Robert Alvarez (1992) studied at Notre Dame and at KU Leuven, where he is currently preparing a Doctoral project on Michel de Certeau. Before his academic work, he taught high school religious education in Portland, OR, and was a missionary for two years in Trujillo, Honduras.

1. The Practice of Synodality

Summary

Official documents for the Synod 2021-2024 stress that synodality is not only an ecclesiological theory but also a practice: a “journey,” “a process,” and a “concrete experience” (e.g., *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 17-18). As such, it requires attitudes and a synodal style: “if it is not embodied in structures and processes, the style of synodality easily degrades from the level of intentions and desires to that of rhetoric, while processes and events, if they are not animated by an adequate style, turn out to be empty formalities” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 27). Typical virtues that characterize a synodal style are listening, openness, discernment, and maintaining communion while bearing tensions (cf. IL 19-31). The documents note that this style and these virtues presuppose conversion.

In the academic literature, one finds frequent references both to general notions (such as attitudes, practice and style) and to specific notions (such as listening and openness). The relevant terms are varied: attitudes, conversion, culture, dialogue, discernment, humility, mindset, listening, obedience, openness, practices, virtues, etcetera. Nonetheless, sustained reflection on synodal practice is rare.

As it is impossible to elaborate all the relevant aspects, this paper develops two key aspects of a synodal style, namely, listening and discernment, and one example of a recent synodal practice, namely the Australian Plenary Council.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- A word search with the terms practice and style yields 3,085 hits in 86% of the documents (562 out of 651). Adding neighboring terms such as attitude, mentality, and spirituality leads to over 90% of the documents.
- Materials with practice-focused titles are usually in fact about ecclesiological concepts, such as Legrand’s article “Synodality is a Matter of Practice” (2021) that was also

published as “La sinodalidad es práctica,” “Synodalität als Praxis,” and “La synodalité est d’ordre pratique,” Luciani’s book on synodality as “A New Way of Proceeding in the Church” (2022), and Thiel’s article “Une culture synodale et fraternelle peut-elle refréner la culture des abus?” (2022).

- A word search for the more concrete term listening and hearing yields over 7,400 hits in over 90% of the documents (604 out of 651). A word search for another specific term, to discern / discernment, yields almost 4,500 hits in 75% of the documents (487/651).

1) Listening

- From the top 10 papers several mention familiar aspects from Pope Francis’ teachings on synodal listening without much further elaboration: mutual listening amongst the baptized, including between bishops and lay faithful; a mutual listening that is ultimately a listening to the Holy Spirit; honest and open speaking (*parrhesia*); the relationship between listening and encountering; openness to new or unfamiliar perspectives; and a willingness to learn. These papers are not included in the list of Reading Materials below as these are familiar. (Cf. Moons “A Comprehensive Introduction to Synodality” (2022), Renken, “Synodality: A Constitutive Element of the Church” (2018), Rush, “Inverting the Pyramid” (2017).)
- Estevez & Martínez-Gayol and Silber (who suggests listening is a *nota ecclesiae*) elaborate the act of listening against the background of power structures. Silber focuses on kenotic listening that includes accepting criticism and seeking conversion. In light of old power structures that focus on men, Europe and North America, and prosperity, he makes a plea for listening to women, non-Western contexts, and the poor. Estévez & Martínez-Gayol do the same from a feminist perspective. They suggest listening to the variety of voices from the margins, especially women voices, is a way to overcome colonial, patriarchal, and hierarchical thinking and is an example for synodality.
- Plattig details the rich variety of essential spiritual attitudes, such as self-knowledge, silence, prayer, a willingness to be transformed by what has been heard and to act, being in contact with the signs of the times and ordinary daily life (*der Alltag*), abstaining from judging, relativizing my own ideas, etcetera.
- Ndongala Maduku draws attention to the example of Cardinal Malula (+1989), “the bishop who listens” (*l’évêque à l’écoute*), who started in the Archdiocese of Kinshasa (Congo) a culture of conversation that allowed him to know of people’s issues and needs and to search for solutions together with them, thus avoiding a top-down approach.

2) Discernment

- Discernment is considered important, but the concept is not clear. Osheim calls it “an essential compass” for a synodal Church and Haers speaks of “an excellent tool to put synodality into practice.” Cuda, Haers, and Moons elaborate the Ignatian version of discernment as a spiritual practice of humble listening to the Holy Spirit that comes with “the enemy” who plants temptations such as formalism, intellectualism, rigid thinking, and so on. Haers stresses that discernment is apostolic (i.e., related to mission) and involves listening to ‘the world’ that we serve and from which we learn. Moons explains that it differs from the Benedictine tradition, which focuses on *discretio* as wisely seeking moderation, because of its affective dimension. Other articles do not specify discernment. Their implicit understanding is discernment as reflecting and searching for wisdom, usually in dialogue (Osheim, Sawa, see also most other articles).
- Discernment is a communal affair. As such it is the opposite of an authoritarian, rationalistic, and closed style (all the above authors). There is a difference in perspective between Sawa and the other authors. Sawa states that bishops discern, which they can only do well after listening to the desires, experiences, and thoughts of the laity. The other articles stress that *all* the faithful discern.
- Discernment is not a given. Osheim suggests we need to develop a modern, understandable vocabulary for discernment. Temptations were mentioned already (Cuda, Haers, Moons). Cuda stresses the participation of those from the peripheries. Osheim pleads for developing “spiritualities, structures and practices of discernment” that involve both dialogue and listening and statistics. Sawa underlines that bishops must want to listen and that the faithful must respect the bishops’ role to decide. One finds references to formation in all contributions.

3) An Example: Australia’s Plenary Council

- The Fifth Plenary Council of the Church in Australia (2018-2022) is work in progress: “an emerging practice” (McEvoy) and “a learning experience” (Rush). Moreover, is a slow process during which it is crucial to respect all voices for “all the baptized have equal access to a personal relationship with God” (Rush).
- Prayer and spiritual conversation were felt to be important (McEvoy, Rush). After the first assembly, Rush noted that participants “talked of the importance of the prayerful mode in which the group listening, dialogue, and discernment took place” and after the second

assembly McEvoy commented that spiritual conversation “proved immensely fruitful . . . , with many members speaking of it as a transformative experience.” McEvoy argues that it is spiritual conversation that makes the difference between power play – a characteristic of democracies – and listening to the Spirit through listening to one another – a defining mark of synods.

- The Plenary Council was an example of growing towards consensus amidst diversity and tensions, not a “gladiatorial contest” with winners and losers (Lennan 2023). Lennan notes two complementary types of participation. The laity shared their real-life faith experience, challenges, and opportunities, while bishops exercised their leadership in contact with the people and their lived faith. McEvoy elaborates how the bishops initially did not accept two motions on women, which first led to great distress and then to new motions that were adopted almost unanimously. He suggests that the initial grief brought to the attention of the bishops something they had not yet been aware of.
- From a different perspective, two authors warn for focusing on the inverted pyramid (McGregor) and a “an overemphasis on governance” (Zimmermann), for the Church is also the mystical body of Christ led by God and by the hierarchy.
- Especially Lennan makes recommendations for (more) successful synodality:
 - Fleshing out the role of periti.
 - Promoting conversation between canon lawyers and theologians.
 - Cultivating a hermeneutic of trust towards the *sensus fidei* of the faithful.
 - Making a seating arrangement that facilitates encounter between the bishop and his flock.
 - Developing a theology of the bishop as “part of rather than apart from.”

More general recommendations are:

- Promoting that theologians are in touch with the pastoral reality.
 - Bishops engaging sufficiently with grassroot level faith life.
 - Ongoing theological formation.
- The Plenary Council is not the only example of synodal practice. Too large to be elaborated here is the synodal tradition in Latin America and the Caribbean (see, e.g., Luciani’s many contributions). The various religious spiritualities and cultural traditions are other obvious

examples (see, e.g., Stan Chu Ilo on the African “palaver” tradition, or Gregory J. Polan on the Rule of Saint Benedict).

Materials: Major Recommended Readings

Cuda, Emilce, “Caminar del Pueblo de Dios y sinodalidad,” *Medellín. Teología y pastoral para América Latina y el Caribe* 48 (2022): 35-60.

Estévez López, Elisa, and Nurya **Martínez-Gayol** Fernández, “‘Escuchar, dialogar y discernir’ con las mujeres. Retos de una Iglesia sinodal,” *Estudios Eclesiásticos: Revista trimestral de investigación e información teológica* 97 (2022): 555-589,

Haers, Jacques, “A Synodal Process on Synodality: Synodal Missionary Journeying and Common Apostolic Discernment,” *Louvain Studies* 43 (2020): 215-238.

Ilo, Stan Chu, “The African Palaver Method: A Model Synodal Process for Today’s Church,” *Concilium. International Journal for Theology* 2021 (2021): 68-76.

———, “Die Methode des African Palaver: ein Modellprozess für die Kirche heute,” *Concilium. Internationale Zeitschrift für Theologie* 57 (2021): 176-183.

———, “El método africano de la deliberación (*palaver*): Un proceso sinodal modelo para la Iglesia actual” *Concilium. Revista internacional de teología* (2021): 235-244.

Lennan, Richard, “The Plenary Council as a Practice of Theology,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 100 (2023): 3-24.

———, Ormond **Rush**, Gerard **Kelly**, and James **McEvoy**, “Theological Reflections on the First Assembly of the Plenary Council,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 99 (2022): 131-145.

Luciani, Rafael, “Medellín como acontecimiento sinodal. Una eclesialidad colegiada fecundada y completada,” *Horizonte. Revista de Estudos de Teologia e Ciências da Religiao* 16 (2018): 482-516.

———, “Medellín as Synodal Event: The Genesis and Development of a Collegial Ecclesiality,” *Studia Canonica. Revue canadienne de droit canonique* 53 (2019): 183-208.

Ndongala Maduku, Ignace, “L’ évêque à l’ écoute, un chemin de synodalité, SJ,” *SEDOS Bulletin (Online)* 53 (2021): 14-23.

McEvoy, James, “Pope Francis on the Practice of Synodality and the Fifth Australian Plenary Council,” *Theological Studies* 84 (2023): 79–94

McGregor, Peter John, “Synodality and the Australian Plenary Council: Listening to and Looking at those who are Living in the Spirit,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 86 (2021): 21-38.

Moons, Jos, “Synodality and Discernment. The Affective Reconfiguration of the Church,” *Studia Canonica. Revue canadienne de droit canonique* 56 (2022): 379-393.

Osheim, Amanda C., “Stepping toward a Synodal Church,” *Theological Studies* 80 (2019): 370-392.

- Plattig**, Michael, “Gehorsam. Grundhaltung für synodale Prozesse,” in *Synodalisierung. Eine Zerreiβprobe für die katholische Weltkirche? Expertinnen und Experten aus aller Welt beziehen Stellung*, ed. by Paul Zulehner, Peter Neuner and Anna Hengersperger (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2022), 87-104.
- Polan**, Gregory J., “Synodal Elements in the Rule of St. Benedict,” *The American Benedictine Review* 73 (2022): 1-9.
- Sawa**, Przemysław, “Synodality, graunment, Catholic Movements,” *Ecumeny and Law* 7 (2019): 115-141.
- Silber**, Stefan, “Synodalität als ekklesiologisches Prinzip ad intra und ad extra: Lernen von der Bischofssynode für Amazonien,” *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 105 (2021): 34-47.
- Zimmermann**, Nigel, “A Test Case in Synodality: Australia’s Fifth Plenary Council in Light of the Thought of Eric Mascall,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 100 (2023): 25-37.

Italian References

- Gianfranco Calabrese, “Il ruolo del vescovo e del presbiterio nei processi decisionali ecclesiali,” in *Sinodalità. Dimensione della Chiesa, pratiche nella chiesa*, ed. by Riccardo Battocchio and Livio Tonello (Padova: EMP, 2020), 57-78.
- Alessandro Clemenza, “Sinodalità e discernimento comunitario,” in *La sinodalità nella vita e nella missione della chiesa*, ed. Piero Coda and Roberto Repole (Bologna: EDB, 2019), 107-115.
- Francesco Coccopalmerio, “La ‘consultività’ del Consiglio pastorale parrocchiale e del Consiglio per gli affari economici della parrocchia,” *Quaderni di diritto ecclesiale* 1 (1988), 60-65.
- Paolo Gherri, “Discernere e scegliere nella chiesa,” *Apollinaris* 87 (2014), 373-404.
- Serena Noceti, “Elaborare decisioni nella chiesa. Una riflessione ecclesiologica,” in *Sinodalità. Dimensione della Chiesa, pratiche nella chiesa*, ed. by Riccardo Battocchio and Livio Tonello (Padova: EMP, 2020), 237-254.

2. Participation, the People of God, and the *Sensus Fidelium*

Summary

Participation is a key term in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. (In fact, it has been a key term from the start of the Synod 2021-2024, and is part of the Synod’s subtitle.) It is related to other key terms such as the People of God, baptism, charisms and co-responsibility. For example, the IL states that “baptism creates a true co-responsibility among all the members of the Church, which is manifested in the participation of all, with the charisms of each, in the mission of the Church and the building up of the ecclesial community” (no. 20). The seemingly related notion *sensus fidei fidelium* is mentioned infrequently.

All these themes are reflected in the academic literature, too, with one major difference. In the academic literature the *sensus fidei* is mentioned as frequently as baptism, and is therefore much more dominant than in the *Instrumentum Laboris*—or indeed in most other official documents.

In terms of quantity, the academic literature is overwhelming. In what follows we focus on the topic of participation, with a particular interest in the People of God and the *sensus fidelium*. Two types of reflections and insights can be distinguished, one related to the grounds for participations and another that spells out ways to increase participation.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

The topics in the Table below are structured according to their importance in the academic literature. Note that the total number of references in the academic literature mirrors the relative importance of each term in the *Instrumentum Laboris*—again, the one exception being the *sensus fidelium*.

	<i>Instrumentum Laboris:</i> number of references	Academics: hits per 651 documents
particip*	95	6,190 hits in in 568 documents
People of God	66	5,223 hits in 550 documents
<i>sensus fidelium</i>	9	2,625 hits in 339 documents
baptis/z*	52	2,376 hits in 474 documents
Coresponsibility¹	30	1,893 hits in 418 documents
charism*	28	1,777 hits in 360 documents

¹ Search terms were: co-resp*, coresp*, corresp*, Mitverantwort*, responsabilidad compartida, Commune responsabilité, responsabilité commune.

1) The foundations of participation

The first few foundations for participation are theological in nature.

- Firstly, participation is seen as a practical translation of Vatican II’s choice to start the reflection on the Church with the topic of the People of God (see *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 2) and to consider the hierarchy (chapter 3) in that context. Rush speaks of “considering the church as all the *fideles*, before considering the hierarchy who serves them” and considers this one of the Council’s “reversals.” Demel states that “laity and clergy together form the one People of God in which there is true equality among all believers” and specifies that, while this grounds a common responsibility, it does not rule out leadership. Eckholt speaks of “an ecclesiological change of paradigm.” (See also Luciani, Wijlens, and many others.)
- Another, more technical theological ground for participation is the *sensus fidei fidelium*: a somewhat intuitive “sense of the faith” shared by all the faithful, that complements hierarchical teaching. Eckholt speaks of the laity “becoming subjects” of the faith, which means that bishops can only fulfill their office “with” (*con*) the laity. Many authors recall that, therefore, we cannot simply distinguish any more between a teaching church (the bishops) and a learning Church (the others)—*ecclesia docens, ecclesia discens*. Particularly the participation of the poor should be taken seriously, for “because of their ‘connaturality’

with the suffering Christ they are active subjects of teaching” (Chiron). Relevant too is Vitali’s observation that, historically speaking, the focus on papal primacy in relation to *sensus fidei* is a recent development. Ultimately, the *sensus fidei* relates to pneumatology: it is a way of listening to the Spirit who may speak through all, which requires mutual listening (Rush). It supposes, therefore, a dynamic Church “transcending itself in a posture of openness and receptivity to God’s self-disclosure” (Gaillardetz) and more dialogical notions of God’s revelation (Wijlens).

- A small number of contributions puts different emphases regarding the functioning of the *sensus fidei*. Blankenhorn asserts that holiness is necessary for the development of one’s individual *sensus fidei*. Since our ability to recognize holiness is subject to “reliable ethical criteria” located within the tradition, the *sensus fidei* cannot be appealed to in order to “justify a revolution in the Church’s ethical teaching” (Blankenhorn). Cavadini is concerned about an overemphasis on the ecclesiology of baptism. As he explains, the ecclesiology of *communio* requires clear and distinct roles for the laity and clergy, which reflect their separate functions in the Eucharistic.

The following foundations for participation are more contextual in nature.

- Some authors link participation with developments in society, especially, the rise of human rights and democracy. For example, in a fundamental reflection Madrigal speaks of “the democratic spirit inscribed in the Church’s very essence of being-communion, which is nourished by the evangelical spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity” and Raj states that the Church should “in inculcate the values of democracy and good governance” as she is part of society, with a reference to *Gaudium et Spes*.
- Some authors also identify a need for participation on the basis of the sexual scandals, which indicate structural problems. These authors do not only come from Germany and the context of the *Synodaler Weg*. For example, the French Dominican Legrand wrote on “the systematic dimensions of the abuse crisis in the Church,” and, speaking from the experience in India, Kochuthara pleads for “a new ethical horizon” that recovers a more participatory notion of the Church. Arenas speaks from the experience in Chile (Arenas 2022).

The following foundations are less developed.

- Baptism is often mentioned (see the Table above) and is related to the theological priority of the notion of the people of God, but academics rarely analyze the notion in depth.

- The notion of co-responsibility is regularly mentioned (see the Table above) and is also elaborated. It is not developed here for reasons of shortage of time and space.
- Charisms are regularly mentioned but rarely elaborated. See however Kaptijn, “Charisms as Mediation between Baptism and Ministries in the Church” (2022) and Richi Alberti, “Sinodalidad y carismas en la Iglesia” (2019 and 2020).
- The notion of an “all-ministerial Church,” mentioned 9 times in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, is mentioned very rarely. For example, the Spanish search terms “[iglesia] toda ella ministerial,” “toda ministerial,” “enteramente ministerial,” and “totalmente ministerial” had no more than 14 references in 8 documents. Cf. however Famerée, “Quels ministères pour une Église synodale ?” (2023); Noceti, “El sínodo para la Amazonía y la reflexión sobre los ministerios que «hacen Iglesia»” (2020); Peña García, “Ministerialidad laical en una Iglesia sinodal” (2020); Theobald, “Renouveler la théologie des ministères à partir des communautés” (2023); Trigo, “Una iglesia toda ella ministerial” (2020).

2) Ways to increase participation

- Demel, Peña García, Poothavelithara, Wijlens, and many more argue that canon law needs rebalancing, for its current form canon law is more concerned about the authority of the bishop than about the participation of all. For example, as Wijlens states, in relation to the magisterium’s teaching office, canon law specifies the ways in which the faithful have to obey or submit “without at the same time making any provision for an obligation on the side of the bishops to ascertain the *sensus fidei fidelium*.” Knop argues that taking seriously the lay people’s *sensus fidelium* means involving lay people in meaningful ways in decision making and decision taking. (See also the *Briefing Paper* on Canon Law.)
- Participation requires developing another, more participative style of teaching that incorporates *sensus fidelium*. (See also the *Briefing Paper* on the Practice of Synodality.)
 - Vitali proposes “circularity:” a circular, reciprocal listening process between the magisterium and the People of God that integrates the hierarchical teaching role and the People of God’s participation therein.
 - Luciani proposes “restitutio:” a process of magisterial teaching and the People of God receiving it and “giving back” (*restitutio*) what they think. As a process it creates communion and fosters growing towards consensus.

- Chiron speaks of a culture of encounter, for “faith only reveal itself and is only articulated in a context of dialogue.” He highlights the importance of listening to the poor and to popular piety, and allowing for regional diversity. Destivelle stretches encounter to ecumenism.
- Moreover, to increase participation we need to develop a participative culture and style. This requires “a conversion of minds and hearts of the persons involved” (Poothavelithara) to “practices and virtues such as consultation and dialogue (Chiron, Loiero), “honest speaking and mutual listening” (Poothavelithara, and many others), bearing tensions (Eckholt) and welcoming diversity (Chiron), and the circularity and *restitutio* that were mentioned above (Luciani, Vitali). Drawing on secular experiences, Raj pleads for “participatory planning,” that is, involving consultation with all those concerned. (See also the *Briefing Paper* on Practice.)
- Bacher Martinez dwells on participative ways of doing theology that involve the people whom it concerns in the reflection, elaborating a model called *investigación-acción participativa* (IAP).
- On increasing the participation of women: see the separate *Briefing Paper* on Women Participation.
- Finally, Ilo proposes to learn from non-Western ways of consultation and conversation such as the African Palaver and, in that way, to decolonize synodality. Other articles speak of the Idian tradition of “Palliyogam” (amongst others Poothavelithara). Arenas elaborates a secular Western model of “distributed leadership” (Arenas 2020). (See also the *Briefing Paper* on Inculturation.)

Materials: Major Recommended Readings

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3. The Bishop in a Synodal Church

Summary

Attention to the bishop in the official documents has increased. The *Vademecum* mainly speaks of the role of the bishop in organizing the Synod 2021-2024 (in § 4.2). In the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the bishop is itself a topic of reflection, especially in worksheet 2.5, “How can we renew and promote the bishop’s ministry from a missionary synodal perspective?” The bishop plays a role too in worksheets 2.4 (on ordained ministry in relation to baptismal ministries), 3.1 (on the service of authority), 3.4 (on structures for synodality), and 3.5 (on reforming the Synod of Bishops).

The bishop is arguably the main topic of academic literature on synodality, with over 180 documents (out of 651) featuring 50 reference or more to the term bishop or episcopal. Many academics note that the magisterial reception of Vatican II has focused on the authority of bishop and on the authority of the pope, with considerable hesitation to acknowledge intermediate levels of collaboration, such as the Conference of Bishops. They also note that the magisterial reception has tended to focus on the figure of the bishop without taking into account the faithful with whom he makes out the People of God and for whom he has a pastoral responsibility. Finally, many note that Pope Francis has brought a change in this regard. A couple of academics makes various proposals for renewal that promote local collaboration amongst bishops and involving lay people.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- A word search with the noun bishop and the adjective episcopal yields 28,600 hits in 97% of the documents (634 out of 651). Over 180 documents have 50 references or more to these terms. Only 18 documents do not have any reference at all. This makes the bishop a major theme in the academic literature, and the major topic of these briefing papers.
- The titles of the contributions give a similar impression. A vast number mention the words bishop, collegiality, the magisterium, the Synod of Bishops, etc. in their titles.

1) The Development of Magisterial Teaching on the Bishop

- The most complete overviews of magisterial teaching are provided by Legrand 2017 and Madrigal. Schüller gives a succinct general overview of the various relationships between pope and bishop according to Church documents. Vitali explains with great detail *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 2 and 3 (Vitali 2016), and Legrand 2021 lists various elements in chapter 3 that suggest a non-universalist ecclesiology of a communion of churches.
- Many authors criticize the centralist and universalist tendency of magisterial teaching, and the tendency to think of the bishop without his people (Brighenti, Legrand, Madrigal, Noceti, Rahner, Schüller, and many others).
- Almost all authors note the renewal that Pope Francis has initiated in *Evangelii Gaudium* as well as in other statements, and in his way of organizing synods and the Synod 2021-2024. With an increased appreciation of the People of God, the *sensus fidelium*, and the local Church, Francis distances himself from a centralist, universalist, and bishop-centered magisterial interpretation of *Lumen Gentium*, chapter III.
- The Eastern Catholic and Orthodox experience points in a similar direction. Denysenko notes that “the [Orthodox] rite of a bishop’s ordination shows that the ministry of primacy is always exercised in dialogue with fellow bishops (the synod) and the laity (ecclesial collegiality)” and Kaptijn elaborates similar views on the basis of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO). (See also the *Briefing Paper* on Liturgy.)
- Szabó gives various reasons why magisterial teaching and canon law can change. First, not all rules are directly based on revelation. Moreover, the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches suggests other possible ways of doing things. Finally, canon law should facilitate salvation as much as possible, including in new contexts. Szabó makes 8 concrete proposals for changes (see below). (See also the *Briefing Paper* on Canon Law.)
- A couple of other voices are more moderate. For example, Graulich shows that the post-conciliar period has been a period of constant renewal and that Pope Francis highlights aspects that other popes mentioned also. Vitali focuses, not on new rules, but on a new three-phase dynamic “circular” process of a) listening to the people of God, b) discerning (especially by the pastors), and c) putting into practice (by hierarchical decision taking and by the faithful’s reception) (Vitali 2016 and 2022). (Luciani introduces a similar concept, namely, *restitutio*, see the *Briefing Paper* on Participation.)

2) The diocesan bishop

- Legrand strongly deplores defining the bishop as someone who “is constituted a member of the Episcopal body in virtue of sacramental consecration and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the body” (*Lumen Gentium* 22) without considering his being part of a community. Similarly, Noceti strongly criticizes the post-conciliar interpretation of *in persona Christi* for focusing on the link between Christ and the ordained minister without considering the community, the “ecclesial We.” As a consequence, reflections on the bishop are more about power than communion (Brighenti), with little attention for enhancing the local diocesan Church, enhancing regional Churches (e.g., episcopal conferences), and re-imagining the Curia (Legrand).
- In the same line, authors highlight Pope Francis’ “inverting the pyramid” (Rush) and “gear shift” (Wijlens) by situating the bishop in the context of the people of God and its *sensus fidelium*. The bishop is primarily a fellow faithful with the same dignity as the other members of the people of God, and only then a bishop. Therefore, too, he may learn from the faithful’s sense of the faith as much as teaching them. (See also the *Briefing Paper* on Participation.)
- Legrand makes the following concrete suggestions to promote a practice of the bishop in contact with the people:
 - Consulting with lay people for appointing bishops, and a ritual for the reception by the people of the newly ordained bishop (Legrand, see also Denysenko).
 - Calling a diocese “the local Church” rather than “the particular Church,” for the latter tends to promote universalism (Legrand).
 - Promoting diocesan synods, advisory bodies such as the diocesan pastoral council, and structures for the bishop’s accountability (Legrand).
 - Rethinking the theological and practical status and functioning of auxiliary and emeritus bishops who don’t have the charge of a local Church; the question is relevant as it applies to 48% of the bishops (Legrand, see also Szabó, Wijlens).

3) The Conference of Bishops and other intermediate levels

- The practice of bishops exercising their pastoral duty together in specific circumstances and territories can be supported with references to Vatican II (especially LG 23 and 26; CD 36-38). However, authors criticize the post-conciliar magisterium’s functional and

pragmatic treatment of the episcopal conference as a useful pastoral instrument (with limited teaching power), without robust elaboration of its theological status and canonical functioning (Brighenti, Madrigal, Rahner, Scerri). Especially Rahner criticizes the Conference's weak status because effective (and not merely affective) "horizontal collegiality" forms a crucial part of *communio* (see also Brighenti); Scerri draws on history to give examples of groupings of Churches contributing to magisterial teaching.

- Pope Francis seems to be promoting the role of the local Church (viz., bishops' conferences) as intermediate instances of collegiality. In his writings he quotes from Conferences of Bishops much more frequently than his predecessors (Scerri), and he has added a continental stage to the Synod 2021-2024 (Scerri). Foundational notions are the following: decentralizing in favor of the local Church; inculturation; highlighting that a bishop is related to his people, so that collegiality and synodality merge (Madrigal, Schüller, Wijlens). Schüller comments that greater collaboration and autonomy would require a "change of mentality" amongst the bishops.
- Especially Szabó makes concrete proposals "for the renewal of interdiocesan/regional synodal institutions in order to achieve wider synodal activity in the Latin Church, more open to lay involvement." These are based on a sacramental (and not exclusively institutional) notion of the bishop. He adds that it may be easier to achieve them by reviving particular synods than by revising episcopal conferences, though.
 - To revise the role of titular bishops, who do not have the charge of a diocese, in order to promote the relationship of the bishop with the faithful (in jargon: the *communio episcoporum* and the *communio ecclesiarum*) (see also Legrand, Wijlens).
 - To develop the idea of the bishop's responsibility beyond his own diocese (see also Legrand).
 - To grant general legislative power to episcopal conferences, like Eastern episcopal synods have, in order to promote and facilitate inculturation (see also Schüller).
 - To lower the requirement of a two-thirds majority to a simple absolute majority in case of purely disciplinary questions. Rahner suggests revising the unrealistic requirement of absolute consensus.
 - To replace the requirement of a Roman *recognitio* with something lighter and more dialogical (also Schüller).

- To add two rules that stipulate both a bishop’s willingness to follow the conference (which safeguards *communio*) and the conference’s modesty in defining binding rules (which safeguards autonomy). (See also Rahner’s criticism of the focus on “the exclusive autonomy of each bishop.”)
- To grant teaching authority to episcopal conferences—preferably on the basis of consensus—in order to promote and facilitate inculturation, like Eastern episcopal synods have.
- To design advisory bodies with lay people, after the example of the Eastern Catholic Church (cf. Kaptijn).

4) The Synod of Bishops and the Pope

- The Synod of Bishops in its current form is an advisory body to the Pope rather than an instance of collegiality. The reasons for this gap are various, but include the fact that not the entire college of bishops is represented, that non-bishops can be invited also, and its consultative rather than decision-taking role (Borras, Graulich, Schüller, Vitali); still, it is “already a corrective of Roman centralization” (Borras).
- Pope Francis has put greater stress on the laity’s involvement and on listening to the laity. Most authors consider this revolutionary; Graulich recalls that the concrete functioning has undergone various changes and that other Popes have also spoken about the role of the laity, and therefore suggests this is rather a development, not a revolution.
- In terms of future developments, Schüller proposes a couple of juridical measures such as synods every three years, greater involvement in choosing and elaborating the topic, and more space for freedom of discussion. Vitali seems to opt for something more spiritual, noting that the stress on listening turns the Synod of Bishops into a circular and dynamic process rather than an event (Vitali 2022) (see above).

Materials: Major Recommended Readings

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4. Canon Law & Structures for Synodality

Summary

Both official documents and theological literature speak much more frequently about structures for synodality and (less often) institutions and procedures than about canon law and other canonical regulations. Still, canon law is seen as a much-needed instrument that fosters and facilitates a synodal ecclesial lifestyle by providing synodality with a form and structure.

Four perspectives may be detected. In the first place, various authors draw attention to existing structures of participation, such as the synod of bishops and pastoral councils. The second perspective posits that canon law is a practical instrument that is situated in an ecclesial and theological context and can therefore be reformed. Thirdly, authors suggest various possibilities for reconfiguring structures and rules in view of greater lay participation. Finally, several reflections point out that canon law needs to be complemented by something else, namely, conversion and (different) attitudes.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- The *Working Document for the Continental Stage* speaks once of “canon law” (in no.71) and 26 times of “structures.” The *Instrumentum Laboris* mentions “canon law” 7 times (in 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4), over against some 40 references to “structures” and more than 30 references to “institutions.”
- A quantitative MAXQDA search reveals a similar trend. There are 23 articles, books, or book chapters with 10 or more references to canon law, over against 82 to structures.
- At the same time the bibliography reveals that canon lawyers have contributed more than 70 articles, books, or book chapters, that is, some 10% of the total number of publications. Two persons stand out for the number of contributions: Alphonse Borras (18) and Myriam Wijlens (13). (Some of these contributions are republished translations.)

1) Existing structures of participation

- Canon law already allows for (or even urges) lay participation. Scholars refer to fundamental statements on the common baptismal dignity of all the faithful and their participation and particular responsibilities in the Church, including sharing one's view related to ecclesial matters (can. 208-223; for laity can. 224-231). They also refer to specific participative provisions, such as those for Diocesan Synods (can. 460-468), Diocesan and Parish Finance Councils (can. 492-494 and 537), the Presbyteral Council and the College of Consultors (can. 495-502), the Diocesan Pastoral Council (can. 511-514), the Parish Pastoral Council (can. 536) (Althaus, Glendinning, Peña Garcia, Prisco, Rees, Renken). (See the *Briefing papers* on participation and on the bishop.)
- However, scholars observe that the Code has been formulated with a focus on the hierarchical aspect of the Church. For example, the reflection on the diocesan bishops starts with stipulating that “a diocesan bishop in the diocese entrusted to him has all ordinary, proper, and immediate power which is required for the exercise of his pastoral function except for cases which the law or a decree of the Supreme Pontiff reserves to the supreme authority or to another ecclesiastical authority” (can. 381) (Glendinning). Similarly, diocesan synods depend greatly on the bishop; as Glendinning writes, the bishop “convenes it, determines its agenda, presides over it, and dissolves or suspends it. The diocesan bishop alone ‘signs the synodal declarations and decrees, which can be published by his authority alone’ (can. 466).” The hierarchical focus of the Code and Catholic theology and practice makes that the laity's participation depends too much on good will and on bishops voluntarily sharing power, and “real consultation is often minimal” (Clifford).

2) Canon law is reformable

- Canon law is meant to be an instrument: “the Code is no more than the instrument that seeks to translate the conciliar ecclesiology into canonical language” (Peña Garcia), and “structures must enable the community to live according to its own faith, not hinder it” (Wijlens 2020). Moreover, canon law is situated in the context of time and theology, and, therefore, reformable (Borras 2022a, Peña Garcia, Szabó, Wijlens 2020).
- We are living in a new theological context. Pope Francis has “hit the reset-button” in the interpretation of Vatican II and emphasizes the people of God over the hierarchy, and (baptismal) synodality over (episcopal) collegiality (Wijlens 2017 and many others).

Borras and Luciani highlight the importance of the local Church over the universal one, and therefore inculturation and diversity. (For a fundamental reflection on the maintaining both the importance of the local Church and the universal one, see Polanco's chapter on polarity.) Those theological shifts require institutional conversion that translates into structural reform. Canonists are realistic people who know that ideals need to be put into structures, "otherwise we are left with pious wishes" (Borras 2022a).

- This requires canonical creativity and courage. Wijlens refers to the period between Vatican II and the promulgation of the new Code in 1983 and speaks of temporary constitutions (or, "ad experimentum") and of interpreting the law in its current context (the jargon speaks of the "mens legislatoris ex nunc" and not merely "ex tunc") (Wijlens 2017). In a similar vein, Borras speaks about the dynamic between "lo instituido y lo instituyente" (what has been instituted and what is being instituted) (Borras 2022a).

3) Institutional reform

- According to Borras, synodality requires various shifts: from the universal to the particular Church, from a focus on the priest towards the fundamental dignity and equality of all the baptized, from consultative to deliberative, overcoming autocratic tendencies in ecclesial governance (Borras 2022a/b). (Again, see Polanco for a fundamental analysis on polarity.)
- More concrete proposals for "ecclesial structures of communication" (Osheim) are the following.
 - Collegiality needs to be both affective and effective (Borras 2022a, cf Szabó).
 - Making diocesan and parish pastoral councils obligatory (Borras, Glendinning, Osheim, Poothavelithara).
 - Meeting with the local community during pastoral visitations (Glendinning).
 - Setting up review boards in relation to urgent issues, such as the sex abuse scandal (Glendinning, Schickendantz), and more generally, third-party reporting mechanisms or procedures for hearing grievances (Clifford, Glendinning, Schickendantz).
 - Developing ways for the laity to contribute their perspective and collaboration (Peña Garcia), especially for (lay) theologians (Peña Garcia), thus developing and integrating the variety of ministries (Clifford, Peña Garcia).

- Consulting the laity before appointing bishops or parish priests (Clifford, Glendinning).
- Strengthening “regional instruments of communion” such as national or diocesan synods, or even continental ones such as CELAM, and a healthy decentralization away from the Roman curia (Clifford, Luciani).
- Instituting greater lay representation in Diocesan Synods (Borras 2022b).
- Making accountability the norm (Borras 2022b).
- Including women at the various ecclesial levels (Schickendantz).
- In developing more synodal rules and structures, the Catholic church may learn from ecumenical sister Churches (Clifford, Osheim).
- There are good examples that can be followed. Australia’s Plenary Council or the new *Conferencia Eclesial de la Amazonia* respect canon law yet work with larger lay participation and are rooted in a particular Church (Lennan, Luciani, Neumann). There is some literature reflecting with examples from the perspective of Eastern Churches (cf. Szabó) and religious orders, but these are unincorporated into this analysis for reasons of time constraints.

4) Conversion

- Authors note that changing canon law alone is not enough and that we need a conversion of the heart to a mindset of openness to the Spirit (Moons, Poothavelithara). Osheim speaks of “spiritualities and structures of discernment” and Borras states that “synodal events suppose a *habitus*, a ‘style,’ and its institutional formalization” (Borras 2022a). Some authors quote Paul VI’s word of a “*novus habitus mentis*” (Paul VI) (Glendinning, Renken, Wijlens). Various resistances need to be overcome for this, including some hierarchical “autocratic tendencies,” the laity’s passiveness, a fear of change, etc. (Borras 2022a /b). (See the *Briefing Paper* on the practice of synodality.)
- This involves formation (Osheim, Poothavelithara). Glendinning makes a plea for “better formation of lay persons and clergy on the benefits and necessity of a broad-based consultation in the decision-making process.”

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5. Social Justice and Synodality

Summary

In his programmatic speech on the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis highlighted listening to the poor as a key element of a synodal Church: “to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.” This option for the poor structures Francis’ conception of synodality and is explicitly developed in the *Instrumentum Laboris* worksheet B 1.1 (on the issues of poverty, care for our common home, migration, and political polarisation).

In the academic literature, the reflection on these themes of social justice and synodality is limited. However, the contributions that do explicitly focus on these topics stress the foundational relevance of the option for the poor for synodality. They then apply this principle to not only the various issues outside the Church (*ad extra*), but also apply it to the Church itself (*ad intra*). Therefore, the Detailed Analysis is divided into two sections: first, the option for the poor as criterion of synodality; second, key issues of social justice.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- Social justice and synodality is a broad topic. Articles and chapters can focus on anything from gender, ecology, to neoliberalism and poverty. As such, it is difficult to get a sense of the scope of its reception in the corpus. “Poor” seems to be the best term to gauge this, appearing in 37% of sources (241/651).

1) The option for the poor as criterion of synodality

- According to Grieu and Trigo, we cannot recognize God’s will without the option for the poor; thus, it is a criterion for revelation and synodality. Grieu explains that the Church is only a communion if it addresses itself to the suffering parts of the body. Their suffering is both God’s call to the Church and standard by which the Church is measured as a communion. Grieu also expands the category of “poor” to include those not allowed to

speak, either by legal or cultural conventions. He argues that any synodal process must pay particular attention to these excluded peoples. (See also Trigo.)

- Social justice concerns have a broader meaning than “the poor” and are not only pastorally relevant outside the Church. They also pertain to other types of exclusion and marginalization than poverty. Moreover, these other types of exclusion and marginalization may occur inside and outside the Church. Silber and Gruber (2020) both discuss the layered nature of the Church’s pastoral activity, questioning the simplistic categories of the Church *ad extra* and *ad intra* while insisting on the criterion of the option for the poor in both. Intra-ecclesial questions like *viri probati* (Gruber 2020) and inculturation (Odinot) are measured too by this option for the marginalised.
- The option for the poor has to do with conversion. Championed by Pope Francis, the concept of pastoral conversion is rooted in the ecclesiological reception of the People of God in Latin America after Vatican II (Luciani, also Costadoat). As Grieu indicates, the *call* and *response* structure of revelation implies the act of *conversion*, which necessarily implies *reconciliation*. Silber follows upon this concept of reconciliation, discussing how, in order to be truly synodal and missionary, the Church must address injustices *ad intra* as well as *ad extra*.

2) Key issues of social justice

- Both Silber and Faye discuss gender issues within the Church. For Silber, the Church’s ability to address discrimination against women within the Church is a test for the credibility of synodality. (For a more in depth-treatment, see the *Briefing Paper* on Women Participation.)
- Hinze addresses the structurally enabled sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. In so doing, he proposes complementing synodality with restorative justice in order to promote the healing of the victims. He also explores how the Church might minister to young, disaffected Catholics who have left the Church because they no longer see it as a credible witness of the Gospel.
- Pastwa offers an in-depth treatment of migration. Recognizing that migration is not just a temporary issue but a structural phenomenon in society, Pastwa follows the principle of *ius sequitur vitam* (law follows life) to argue that synodality offers both the ethical imperative and the practical resources to respond to the migrant crisis.

- Miller discusses how society also structures the Church, particularly how colonial and neoliberal values have come to dominate relations between Catholics. He links this with the “throw-away” culture denounced by Pope Francis and insists that synodality should be considered as a way to witness proper relationships within the Church, relationships which then radiate outwards, providing an example to society. (Cf. the *Briefing Paper* on Inculturation.)
- Gruber (2020) espouses concerns that modern Catholic culture considers dissent an “extraordinary” event rather than a constitutive element of being Church. In contrast, she argues that the marginalised will only have a voice if a theology of dissent is permitted to within synodality.
- Finally, both Gruber (2022) and Miller analyse the ecological crisis from the theme ecological interconnectedness. By linking these concepts, they seek to break with the European legacy of colonial extraction and exploitation, opening the Church to learning from cultures outside of its European heritage.

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6. Inculturation and Synodality

Summary

The official documents mention inculturation infrequently. For example, the *Working Document for the Continental Stage* mentions inculturation two times (no. 54, 92), and the *Instrumentum Laboris* three times (no. 60, Introduction, B 2.1).

In the academic literature too, the topic is not mentioned often, with 16 materials discussing the subject in some depth. These articles and chapters link key features of synodality such as encountering and listening with inculturation.

Three interpretations of inculturation come to the fore. 1) Theologically speaking, God incarnated within a specific human culture; this provides the theological template for our inculturation within (new) cultures. 2) From a missionary perspective, inculturation means a synodal attitude of openness for and communion with the “other,” with a readiness to adaptation. 3) In a more general ecclesial sense, walking together on a synodal path implies a “healthy decentralization” in order to allow for unique inculturated and decolonial expressions of catholicity in particular Churches.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- The word *incult** features 718 times. Although 25% of the documents (160 out of 651) refer to inculturation, most of these documents (85%) have 5 references or less. There are 16 documents with more than 10 references to the term.
- Most of the top 16 contributions (most of which are treated below) has been written by authors who work in Latin America, come from Latin America, or deal with Latin American themes (Borras, Galli, Luciani, Martínez-Saavedra, Noceti, Weiler).

1) Theological Foundations of Inculturation

- The incarnation of Jesus Christ and the inculturation of the early Church within its Greco-Roman context, is a template for modern-day inculturation (Galli, Martínez-Saavedra). The Second Vatican Council recognized this, articulating the need to “adapt the Gospel” in order for the Church to achieve its missionary purpose (*Gaudium et Spes* 44) (Luciani 2020b).
- Martínez-Saavedra compares the Tower of Babel and Pentecost and suggests that the unity lost at the Tower of Babel is not recovered via a return to uniformity, but rather via the diversity of languages experienced at Pentecost.

2) Criteria of Inculturation

- Missionary encounters require an attitude of openness and imply mutual transformation. This openness is rooted in the Christian experience of God’s mercy and enables the Church to approach the extra-ecclesial “other” from a position of humility (Eckholt).
- From within this humility, evangelization is not merely the task of “bringing the Gospel” *towards* the other but is primarily a “walking according to the Gospel” *with* the other (Odinet). Rather than a unilateral acculturation of one culture *towards* the Gospel—which implies an unequal relationship—inculturation should be the incarnation of the Gospel from *within* a culture (Martínez-Saavedra, cf. Luciani and Weiler).
- Following the doctrine of the option for the poor, successful inculturation is marked by the flourishing of the poor (Odinet). Women are also a litmus test for inculturation, as their exclusion from Church structures both prevents the Church from identifying with modern society and prevents proclamation of the Gospel from a female perspective (Heller, also Weiler).
- Inculturation is something demanded of the Church even in majority catholic contexts; inculturation never stops (Eckholt).

3) Inculturation, Decentralization, and De-Colonisation

- A key theme—and tension—is the relationship between the authority of local Churches and the universal Church. Eckholt argues that there must be a healthy permission of plurality within the Church to allow for inculturation—and thereby allow for evangelization—to

function (Eckholt). Much of the literature concerning inculturation refers to the recent Synod on the Amazon (Galli, Martínez-Saavedra, Luciani 2020a, Luciani 2020b, Noceti, Weiler). According to Luciani, the Synod on the Amazon emerges as a prime example of both attention to the challenges of a particular Church, and of an attempt to develop a more dynamic relationship within Church hierarchy (cf. the other authors).

- Some authors contrast inculturation with the colonial heritage and neo-colonialism in the form of absolutizing Western culture (Luciani 2020a, 2020b, Noceti, with some elaboration in Weiler). For example, Luciani notes that synodality requires a “cultural conversion which proposes decolonial inculturation processes” (Luciani 2020a) and Weiler testifies that indigenous people living in the Amazon feel they are not at home in the Church, but feel themselves to be guests.

Materials: Major Recommended Readings

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7. Women Participation

Summary

The Working Document speaks at some length about the “full and equal participation of women,” an issue “almost all reports raise” (no. 60-65). The *Instrumentum Laboris* makes it one of the topics for discernment: “How can the Church of our time better fulfil its mission through greater recognition and promotion of the baptismal dignity of women?” (IL, B 2.3).

In the academic literature the topic of women is often mentioned, yet mostly in passing. A limited number of contributions gives it sustained attention. In these contributions one finds strong pleas for overcoming clerical, male-dominated structures, processes, and thinking. One senses frustration about past and present misogyny, exclusion, stereotypes, and the slow rate of changes. Women ordination (to diaconate and/or priesthood) is addressed yet it is not the main topic.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- The terms woman/women are mentioned 3,186 times in 60% of the documents (395/651). The top 4 articles feature more than 130 references each (Eckholt, Estévez, Berrelleza & Zagano, Faye). There are 14 contributions that focus on the topic of women (most of which feature below and in the Recommend Readings).
- The authors come from across the globe: Brazil (Souza), Burkina Faso (Faye), Chili (Arenas), Germany (Eckholt, Kolm, Wendel), India (Abraham), Philippines (Del Castillo, Sanchez), Spain (Estévez & Martínez-Gayol, López, Martínez), USA (Berrelleza & Zagano, Heller, Zagano).

1) Exclusion

- Various aspects of exclusion are thematized. Eckholt points at the misogyny in Thomas Aquinas’ anthropology—he considers women inferior to men and incapable of representing Christ—that still marks ecclesial reflection. Feminist theology exposes power structures

and mentalities that obstruct women participation (Abraham, Estévez & Martínez). Indeed, women are usually underrepresented in ecclesial gatherings, e.g., the Second Vatican Council (23 observers with 2,000+ Council fathers) (Arenas, Estévez & Martínez, Souza), CELAM gatherings (Souza), or diocesan synods (Kolm). The same holds true for the Vatican Dicasteria (Heller) and the Synod on the Youth and the Amazonia Synod (Berrelleza & Zagano, Zagano). Sanchez speaks of exclusion of women and others as a “social sin.” Ecclesial exclusion sometimes overlaps with societal and cultural patterns of exclusion (Souza).

- All authors point with frustration at the slow rate of change, and some note the resistance of groups making greater participation difficult. Some quote from Francis’ 2015 address: “journeying together is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice” (Estévez & Martínez, Faye). Faye also elaborates reasons for hope, such as the nomination of Nathalie Becquart, and the “Women’s Consultation Group of the Pontifical Council for Culture.”

2) Participation

- A desire for greater participation is felt in all articles. That desire is inspired by both the synodal renewal and transformations in society, both of which are about the participation of *all* (Estévez & Martínez, Faye, Martínez, cf. others). Greater participation is essential for synodality, not secondary: “Walking together affects directly the question of women in the Church” (Martínez). It is rooted in baptism, *sensus fidelium*, and charisms (almost all). Moreover, actual church life provides examples of women leadership (Abraham, Berrelleza & Zagano, Del Castillo, Zagano), women theologians (Azcuy), and women with responsible positions in the Vatican (Faye). Past examples include Catharine of Sienna (Zagano). A growing majority of US Catholics accepts women deacons (Berrelleza & Zagano), and this is true for other contexts too (Eckholt).
- According to these authors, what is needed is the following:
 - Other types of reflection. This includes re-imagining anthropology, e.g., by overcoming stereotypical thinking on women that focuses on service, motherly qualities and Mary as a disciple, virgin and spouse (almost all authors). Other aspects that are mentioned are: imagining leadership as “distributed leadership” (Arenas), priestly ministry as service (Eckholt), and the Church as communion instead of a hierarchy of power (Martínez). Generally speaking, caring and listening should take the place of using one another and using nature (Martínez).

- Listening more to women’s experience. This will open our eyes to the reality and plurality of women’s realities (Del Castillo, Faye, Estévez & Martínez, Martínez). We need to promote possibilities for dialogue and encounter.
- Structural change. As ecclesial structures and canon law are ordination-based and therefore male-dominated, including women in *decision making* and in *decision taking* requires deliberate efforts that involve structural changes, so that women participation is not a favor or an option ‘if need be’ (Abraham, Arenas, Faye, Martínez, Zagano).

3) Ordination

- Some articles address women’s ordination to the diaconate and/or priesthood (Berrelleza & Zagano, Eckholt, Heller, Sanchez, Wendel) sometimes with a more general focus on ministries (Estévez & Martínez). Authors refer to the extensive body of post-conciliar scholarship related to women and ordination that thematizes, amongst other things, the fundamental baptismal equality of men and women, historical evidence of women deacons, the misogynic Thomistic anthropology (see above) and androcentric understanding of the priesthood, and the pastoral reality in which women play an important role.

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8. Formation for Synodality

Summary

As noted in the *Instrumentum Laboris* (no. 58-59), all the reports of the continental assemblies indicated a need for formation for synodality. The literature echoes this need for formation but pays it little in-depth attention. Indeed, when formation does appear, it is a prescription rather than the subject of investigation. The literature therefore does not generally engage in the evaluation of concrete proposals for formation.

The following key themes emerge. Firstly, formation is often rooted in the particular needs of local churches, which necessitates a “healthy decentralization” for effective implementation. Secondly, the literature emphasizes the importance of experiential and affective formation in contrast to more didactic, information-based models. A few other issues are elaborated below.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- Nearly 250/651 articles mention formation, but only about 15 have more than 10 references to formation. Thus, formation is not explored much in the literature.
- Some of the more concrete proposals—which are further elaborated below—come from the field of religious education (Lamont and Sullivan), but the contributions from this field remain few in number.

Formation of whom? And what sort of formation?

- There are two clear audiences for formation with distinct needs and problems: laity (Clifford and Lamont) and clergy (Kochuthara and Costadoat).
- In the context of youth ministry and synodal listening practices, two authors call for an experiential formation (Lamont, Silva Coelho). Questioning whether Christian truth is mere

knowledge meant to be deposited in the minds of those being formed, the authors push for a more incarnated, affective conception of Christian truth.

- Kochuthara and Costadoat apply a similar analysis to seminary formation. Commenting on the sexual abuse crisis and clericalism, they plea for a more holistic and affective formation that involves laypeople in seminary formation, “including women and families” (Kochuthara).
- Sullivan argues for formation in friendship. He explains that the frankness of speech demanded by synodality requires friendship if it is not to devolve into fighting and politics. For this virtue of friendship, we should cultivate spaces for informal relationships in our communities.
- The precise form of the Church’s missionary activity is an unresolved tension for formation. Do we form with the aim of restoring church attendance, or do we form for novel forms of Christian communities? (Clifford)
- There is also a need to consider formation for ecumenism for both clergy and laity in increasingly plural religious contexts (Arenas).
- Finally, Clifford highlights that the lack of financial resources limits the Church’s capacity to invest in lay and clerical formation.

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9. Liturgy and Synodality

Theological Briefing Papers for the Synod 2023

Jos Moons & Robert Alvarez (KU Leuven)

Summary

The official documents for the Synod have always insisted that liturgy is part of the synodal experience. For example, they recommend that prayer and liturgical celebrations be part of synodal gatherings (*Vademecum*). Over time, attention to liturgy has broadened. For example, the *Working Document* also appreciates liturgical unity in diversity as an expression of synodality and identifies the need for a more participatory and therefore synodal liturgy (no. 88-97).

In a small number of contributions on liturgy and synodality, academics share (sometimes explicitly) the conviction that liturgical practice and faith convictions are related and mutually shape one another (*lex orandi lex credendi*). In light of this relationship, three key themes emerge. First, how may liturgical practice better facilitate synodal experience? Secondly, how may a more synodal theology of ministry and community lead to better liturgical articulations of synodality? Thirdly, some reflection draw attention to Eucharistic ecclesiology: modeling the Church on the celebration of the Eucharist.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- The search term liturgy* yields a relatively small number of 1,795 hits in almost 60% of the documents (383 out of 651). Eleven articles (out of 700+) mention in their title the words liturgy, Eucharist, or sacraments. A small number of top publications has over 50 references (Jeggle-Merz, Join-Lambert, Denysenko, Haquin, O'Loughlin).

1) The Mutual Reinforcement of Synodality and Liturgy

- Liturgy can make people experience a synodal Church (cf. what follows below on Eucharistic ecclesiology). Various possibilities to improve this experience are mentioned. According to Join-Lambert the actual liturgy during synodal gatherings merits consideration: does it happen in a way that befits synodality (cf. *lex congregandi*)? Speaking about liturgy in general, Jeggle-Merz asks what “the new way of being Church” (*die neue Art, Kirche zu sein*) means for liturgical life. She challenges the liturgical focus on the priest and suggests focusing on baptism, promoting inculturation, appreciating the roles of women, and developing other types of liturgies than the Eucharist. O’Loughlin makes various creative proposals to overcome a “sacramental individualism,” such as the practice of standing around the altar (cf. *circumstantes* in Eucharistic Prayer 1).
- In these matters, the underlying and often implicit theology of ministry and of liturgy plays a major role. Most authors highlight the relation between ministry and the community, and therefore plead for greater participation. Legrand regrets that ministry is usually considered an individual vocation and that ordination is usually about sacramental power. Reminding that all eucharistic prayers have as its subject “we” (*nous*), he suggests another, more community-related understanding of ministry and ordination. Denysenko notes that “the [Orthodox] rite of a bishop’s ordination shows that the ministry of primacy is always exercised in dialogue with fellow bishops (the synod) and the laity (ecclesial collegiality).” Therefore, he suggests that the laity’s involvement should increase, e.g. in the procedure of appointing bishops or in the reception of Church teaching. For similar thoughts, see Jeggle-Merz and Routhier.
- Some authors develop their reflection in another direction. Cavadini warns for a “flattening out of the Church on the basis of baptism,” and promotes a co-responsibility that respects ordination-based differences. Gefaell develops his view of the liturgy and the Church with ample reference to papal primacy. Healy underlines the sacramental nature of authority, which means that it refers to Christ. Therefore, “true [synodal] reform demands a return to the lifegiving source of authority, Christ himself” rather than focusing on equal participation of all.
- A quite specific, both liturgical and theological and canonical issue—that we don’t elaborate here—is dealing with contexts without priests and therefore no Eucharist; it is discussed especially in relation to Querida Amazonia (see, e.g., De Almeida 2020, Luciani 2020, Noceti 2020, Wijlens 2022).

2) Eucharistic Ecclesiology

- According to the Orthodox perspective, the local Church's Eucharistic life implies synodality (Denysenko, Stavrou, Turner). Just as the laity are actively involved in the Eucharist, so too are they actively involved in church life, e.g., in actively receiving teaching. In light of liturgical practice, it is obvious that bishops do not stand apart from their congregation, and that local Churches are in communion with other local Churches. Primacy is especially linked with Christ and the Holy Spirit. There has been a historical development from a "synodal ethos" to a synodal ecclesiology, although a synodal theory does not guarantee a synodal spirit (Stavrou).
- Roman Catholic theology appreciates liturgy also. Routhier speaks of the Eucharist as "a heuristic model" and argues that we should think the Church more from the liturgy, especially the Eucharist. Following this perspective, a first type of Roman Catholic Eucharistic theology focuses on the community. Bueno and Martínez consider the Eucharist a "foundation" of synodality, for "the eucharistic gathering implies a plurality of members (a "we") in a specific place and a concrete human, sociological, and cultural space" (Bueno). Or, as Martínez explains, "synodality, then, has its origin and culmination in the conscious and active participation in the eucharistic synaxis" (cf. Routhier). In their elaboration, they touch on aspects such as building community and fraternity, diversity, a certain structure, and being rooted in Christ and the Spirit.
- Fearing for a form of synodality that minimizes the hierarchical dimension of the Church, Cavadini and Gefaell present another, second type of Eucharistic ecclesiology. Cavadini differentiates between a baptismal communion and a eucharistic one. He underlines that the Church's communion being built up in the Eucharist, which supposes hierarchical ministry. Gefaell distinguishes between an orthodox Eucharistic approach and the Catholic Church's; the latter supposes "communion with a visible center of unity which is identified in the Bishop of the Church of Rome."

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