

More Than Listening is Needed for Synodality: Observations Based on the Australian Plenary Council and the Church in the New Testament

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Abstract: This essay will examine how the Australian Plenary Council and the church revealed in the New Testament can help us come to a deeper understanding of the nature and practice of synodality. The first part will look at how the Plenary Council was envisaged as a response to the call for synodality, the preparations for the Council, the composition of its membership, and the foci of the Council's deliberations, so as to make suggestions about how a Synod could be organised and conducted. This could be called an investigation into the "body" of synodality. The second part will examine the church in the New Testament from the perspective of being in both *koinonia* and *homothumadon*, in the hope that such an investigation can help us develop a synodal process which, through both "listening" and "looking," can come as close as possible to consensus. This could be called an investigation into the "soul" of synodality.

In response to Pope Francis's call for greater synodality in the church, during 2021 and 2022 the Catholic Church in Australia held a Plenary Council. As well as bishops, the 277 members of the Council included people nominated by dioceses, eparchies, ordinariates, leaders of religious congregations, some church ministries, and a personal prelature. Six themes guided the deliberations of the Council: the need for a church that is 1) missionary and evangelising; 2) inclusive, participatory, and synodal; 3) prayerful and Eucharistic; 4) humble, healing, and merciful; 5) a joyful, hope-filled, and servant community; 6) open to conversion, renewal, and reform. Both Pope Francis and those who prepared the Council stressed the need to listen to the Holy Spirit through listening to each other.¹

¹ For more on synodality and the Australian Plenary Council, see Timothy Costelloe, "Plenary Council Closing Mass," *Australasian Catholic Record* 100, no. 1 (2023): 38–41; Bruce Duncan, "The Australian Plenary Council: A Bold Beginning with Much Further to Go," *Australasian Catholic Record* 100, no. 2 (2023): 149–159; Denis Edwards, "The Spirit of God and the Plenary Council," *Australasian Catholic Record* 95, no. 4 (2018): 387–398; Richard Lennan, "The Plenary Council as a

However, in this essay it will be argued that there were some deficiencies in the preparation for and implementation of the Council. One was an approach to the selection of Council members that led to the practical exclusion of many potential members who were not “administrative” or “curial” Catholics. Another was the overrepresentation of members of the clergy and religious congregations. A third was an almost exclusive focus in Council deliberations about “what is going wrong with the church” to the exclusion of discussion about “what is going right with the church.” In response, this essay, drawing on the experience of the Australian Plenary Council, and the witness of the New Testament church, will present possible solutions to these deficiencies, including how more of those who could be described as “entrepreneurial” and “ordinary” Catholics might be included in any synodal process, and how there could be greater emphasis on “affirmations” of and “testimonies” to how the Holy Spirit is already at work in the church.

The issue of “representation” is a significant concern in the first part of this essay. However, I wish to make clear that I am not advocating proportional representation of any kind. The church is not governed after the fashion of a representative democracy. Nor am I calling for any kind of “quota” system. Furthermore, I am not advocating any usurpation of episcopal responsibilities. The final decisions of a plenary council or synod lie with their serving episcopal members. All other members are there to serve as something like “consultants,” with bishops remaining free to make their own decisions. Rather, my motives are to ensure that bishops may receive input from as diverse a range of “voices” as possible, as well as a concern that some “voices” were muted in or absent from the Australian Plenary Council.

The essay will be divided into two parts. The first will examine how the Australian Plenary Council was envisaged as a response to the call for synodality, the preparations for the Council, the composition of its membership, and the foci of the Council’s deliberations, to make suggestions about how a Synod could be better organised and conducted. This could be called an investigation into the “body” of synodality. The second will examine the church in the New Testament from the perspective of being in both *koinonia* and

Practice of Theology,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 100, no. 1 (2023): 3–24; Richard Lennan, Ormond Rush, Gerard Kelly, and James McEvoy, “Theological Reflections on the First Assembly of the Plenary Council,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 99, no. 2 (2022): 131–145; Peter John McGregor, “Synodality and the Australian Plenary Council: Listening to and Looking at Those Who Are Living in the Spirit,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2021): 21–38; Nigel Zimmermann, “A Test Case in Synodality: Australia’s Fifth Plenary Council in Light of the Thought of Eric Mascall,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 100, no. 1 (2023): 25–37.

homothumadon, in the hope that such an investigation can help us develop a synodal process which, through both “listening” and “looking,” can come as close as possible to consensus. This could be called an investigation into the “soul” of synodality.

THE AUSTRALIAN PLENARY COUNCIL

The Council as a Response to the Call for Synodality

Pope Francis has pointed out that the very word “synod” is derived from the Greek *syn hodos*, which means “to travel together.” He defines a synodal church as

a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing.” It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17), in order to know what he “says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7).²

In response to this call for synodality, Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane unveiled plans to hold a Plenary Council of the entire Catholic Church in Australia.³ The Archbishop saw the Council as an exercise in the kind of synodality of which the Pope speaks. In defining the nature of this synodality, both the Pope and the Archbishop stressed the need for the bishops and all the faithful to listen to the Holy Spirit and each other. It is the burden of this essay to show that while such “listening” is necessary, it is not sufficient. Although “listening” is an essential prerequisite for success, for true synodality to occur we must also be “looking,” to see what the Holy Spirit is already “doing” in the church.

Preparations for the Council

In preparation for the Australian Plenary Council, about 222,000 people participated in “listening and dialogue encounters,” and 17,457

² Francis, “Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops,” Vatican City, October 17, 2015, w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

³ Mark Bowling, “Brisbane Archbishop Calls for First Synod for Entire Catholic Church in Australia since 1937,” *The Catholic Leader*, August 17, 2016, catholicleader.com.au/news/brisbane-archbishop-calls-for-first-synod-for-entire-catholic-church-in-australia-since-1937.

submissions were made.⁴ From this, six national themes for discernment were identified. The themes were: how is God calling us to be a Christ-centred church in Australia that is:

1. Missionary and evangelising;
2. Inclusive, participatory, and synodal;
3. Prayerful and Eucharistic;
4. Humble, healing, and merciful;
5. A joyful, hope-filled, and servant community;
6. Open to conversion, renewal, and reform.⁵

All this reveals that great efforts were put by the Church in Australia into preparing for the Plenary Council.

My experience of the Council was limited to reading about it in the Catholic and secular press, post-conciliar discussions with people who were members of the Council, and personal participation in a preparatory group composed of representatives of various movements and organisations within the Archdiocese of Sydney. I was a representative of a Public Association of Christ's Faithful, a new ecclesial movement called the Emmanuel Community.⁶ From my experience, I can say that almost all the preparatory group's focus was on what the participants perceived as being wrong with the church in Australia. The lesson I took from this is that, in attempting to discern what "the Spirit is saying to the Churches," a more balanced approach is needed, one that tries to look at the whole picture of what is happening in the church. So, the submission made to the Council by the Community to which I belong, authored by me but approved by the local board of the Community, while it included under the headings of "priestly," "prophetic," and "royal" a total of eighty concrete proposals for change, also made thirty-eight "affirmations of existing realities in the church in Australia." It tried to also look at what was "going right" with the church in Australia.

⁴ Plenary Council, "Listening and Dialogue," plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/listening-and-dialogue/. The number of participants in the "listening and dialogue encounters" is equal to about 4 percent of the total Catholic population of Australia. Also, it is equal to about 53 percent of regular Mass attendees in Australia. See *National Centre for Pastoral Research*, "The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2021," 6, ncpr.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Mass-attendance-in-Australia-2021-FINAL.pdf.

⁵ "Plenary Council Themes," plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/themes/about-the-themes/.

⁶ "Emmanuel Community Homepage," emmanuel.info/en/.

The Composition of the Council's Membership

The 2021–2022 Australian Plenary Council was the fifth one held in my country.⁷ The fourth Council was held in 1937. This fourth Council was attended by 85 people: the papal nuncio, 31 Australian and New Zealander bishops, and 53 priests, amongst whom were theologians, advisors to bishops, and superiors of religious congregations. In contrast, the second assembly of the fifth Council had 277 members: 40 active bishops, 4 emeritus bishops, 102 priests, of whom 19 represented religious congregations, 1 deacon, 24 religious sisters, 4 religious brothers, and 102 laypeople. Members were drawn from 28 Australian Dioceses, 6 Eastern Rite Catholic Churches, the Military Ordinariate, the Anglican Ordinariate, the personal prelature of Opus Dei, religious congregations, church ministries, seminaries, and various institutions. Representatives from each diocese included the diocesan bishop or bishops, priests, the single deacon, religious, and lay people. Clerical members numbered 147, 19 of whom were present as representatives of religious congregations, while religious brothers and sisters numbered 28. Laypeople numbered 102, coincidentally, the same number as priests, but this was split between 34 laymen and 68 laywomen. Finally, six national Catholic ministries were represented by eight laypeople.

What the composition of the Council's membership shows is that, although there was great innovation since the 1937 Council through the inclusion of religious brothers and sisters and lay people as members, the Council was still very clerically and religiously "top heavy." I wish to make five points about this aspect of the Council's membership.

First, clergy other than active bishops, that is, emeritus bishops, priests, and the single deacon, accounted for 38.5 percent of the Council's membership, while laypeople for 37 percent. I suggest that the inclusion of roughly the same number of priests as laypeople was not conducive to overcoming a "clerical" mindset. Here, part of the problem is that, according to current canon law, those who must be called as delegates to a plenary council, besides bishops, include vicars general, episcopal vicars, heads of seminaries and theological institutions, and leaders of religious congregations.⁸ In the case of the

⁷ For information about the Plenary Council, including the composition of its membership, see Plenary Council, plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au.

⁸ *The Code of Canon Law*, c. 443, www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann431-459_en.html#CHAPTER_IV.

Australian Plenary Council, this added up to 180 of the 277 delegates.⁹ In my opinion, there needs to be greater provision for non-clerical membership of a plenary council so as to obtain a more balanced picture of the needs of the church. To do this, it would not be necessary to change canon law. Rather, the number of extra delegates could be increased.

Second, representatives of religious congregations accounted for 16 percent of the Council's membership, but members of religious congregations currently make up only 0.1 percent of the Australian Catholic population.¹⁰ Even when measured against the current Mass-going Australian Catholic population, they still make up only 1 percent of that population.¹¹ This highlights an overrepresentation of members of religious congregations at the Council. Furthermore, on current trends, the great majority of religious congregations in Australia are in what appears to be an irreversible decline. By the middle of this century, we can conjecture that many of them will no longer exist. The reasons for this decline are debatable, but I suggest that, in view of the future composition of church membership and ministry, this provided a reason for increasing lay representation at the expense of religious representation.

Third, although there was an overrepresentation of religious congregations, there was no official representation from the new ecclesial movements. Historically, this would be like holding a church synod in the thirteenth century and inviting the Benedictine, Carthusian, Cistercian, and Premonstratensian monks, but not inviting the Augustinian, Carmelite, Dominican, and Franciscan friars. There were no representatives from movements like the Charismatic Renewal, Communion and Liberation, or the Neocatechumenal Way.

Fourth, the most under-represented group of Catholics at the Council was not laypeople in general but laymen. The president of the Plenary Council stated that

Bishops were mindful of the large number of clerics who must be called by virtue of their role. There were also many males who will represent religious orders. It was therefore important to prioritise lay people—and especially lay women—in the list of those local delegates who were

⁹ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, "Delegates Named for Celebration of Plenary Council," March 23, 2020," ampjp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020-03-23-Plenary-Council-Delegate-Announcement.pdf.

¹⁰ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia: 2022–2023* (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls, 2023), 761–762.

¹¹ National Centre for Pastoral Research, "The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2021," 6.

chosen. . . . We are pleased that we were able to . . . lift the proportion of lay people and the proportion of women in the overall delegate list.¹²

Although commendable, the problem with this approach is that it overlooks the fact that the experiences, perspectives, and needs of Catholic men, and indeed, women, are not identical. Those of a young married man with small children can be very different from those of a religious man in a monastic community. Catholic men are young and old; ordained, married, single, religiously consecrated, and widowed; with children and childless; employed, unemployed, and retired; and so on.

Laymen make up roughly half the Catholic population of Australia, and even if one only looks at the Mass-going population, they still make up about 44 percent.¹³ Yet, at the Plenary Council, there were exactly twice as many laywomen as laymen. Ten dioceses and two eparchies sent no laymen. An argument could be made that, given the church in the Western world has a problem with attracting male participation, the perspectives of a greater variety of laymen could have contributed substantially to the success of the Council.

The final point has to do with the six national Catholic organisations: the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (representing major Catholic health, aged and community care, and educational organisations), the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Health Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia, the National Catholic Education Commission, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council. These are ministries of mercy, education, and social justice, and their inclusion was justified, but there was no representation from evangelistic ministries. There were no ministries such as the National Centre for Evangelisation or Charis Australia.¹⁴ A second problem is the absence of Public Associations of Christ's Faithful. These are organisations the church recognises as contributing to its mission in the world, for example, Focolare and the Legion of Mary. Yet these kinds of organisations had no official representation at the Council.

Besides looking at the composition of the membership of the Council from the perspectives of ordination, sex, and ministry, its composition can also be analysed in at least two other ways:

¹² See Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Media Blog, "Delegates Named for Celebration of Plenary Council," mediablog.catholic.org.au/delegates-named-for-celebration-of-plenary-council/.

¹³ *National Centre for Pastoral Research*, "The Australian Catholic Mass Attendance Report 2021," 10.

¹⁴ Charis Australia represents the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. It is part of an international movement which seeks "to promote and encourage the grace of baptism in the Spirit in the Catholic Church." See www.charisaustralia.org.au.

availability, and what I call a curial/entrepreneurial dichotomy. By “availability” I mean the ability to attend the Council. The first assembly of the Council met for eight days in Perth, WA, while the second met for seven in Sydney, NSW. Given that Australia is a large country, many Council members would have needed extra days to travel to and from the Council. The total time commitment for some members may have been as many as nineteen days. Furthermore, this does not include time spent in preparation for the Council. For anyone in full-time secular employment, being a member of the Council may not have been possible given the loss of income, or the difficulties involved in taking leave from work. This also may have been a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of laymen.

The second point concerns the prominence of what I call “curial” Catholics, and the absence of what I call “entrepreneurial” or “freelance” Catholics, albeit in “good ecclesial standing,” from membership in the Council. An analysis of its membership reveals that many members of the Council “work for the church”: vicars general, episcopal vicars, heads of religious congregations, and employees of diocesan or other church institutions, in other words, Catholics involved in managerial or administrative roles within church institutions. Here, a few examples of diocesan representation may be helpful:

- The diocese of Broken Bay (215,000 Catholics): the bishop, the vicar general, the diocesan director of the confraternity of Christian doctrine, the director of Catholic schools, and the national director of missions of Couples for Christ Australia.
- The diocese of Sale (125,000 Catholics): the bishop, the vicar general, the episcopal vicar, a religious pastoral associate, and two lay parishioners.
- The Archdiocese of Sydney (595,000 Catholics): the archbishop, three auxiliary bishops, one emeritus bishop, the vicar general, four episcopal vicars, the juridical vicar, two seminary rectors, the deputy and vice deputy chancellor of a Catholic university, three heads of theological institutions or faculties, one professor of canon law, a lay member of the archdiocese’s Catholic youth office, a lay member of the archdiocese’s office of the episcopal vicar for formation, a lay person involved in “freelance” Catholic marriage and family ministry, and one other layperson.
- The diocese of Wollongong (190,000 Catholics): the bishop, the vicar general, two episcopal vicars, and three lay parishioners.

Besides bearing witness to the prominence of “curial” Catholics, and hence the danger of a “managerial” or “administrative” mindset becoming dominant, these examples show that largely missing from membership were Catholics who developed their own ministries on

their own initiative or participate in such ministries. Here, I think examples of such ministries may be helpful:

- In 2003, a small group of laymen, both married and single, established MenALIVE, a national Catholic ministry to men, in order to address the question “Where are all the men in the church?” Since then, the ministry has run more than 450 events in twenty-six dioceses throughout Australia and New Zealand for more than twenty-five thousand men.¹⁵
- Established in 2010 by a married Catholic layman, Parousia Media seeks to evangelise and catechise Catholics through podcasts, a YouTube channel, and social media platforms. It has an online ecommerce store with over three thousand Catholic resources such as CDs, DVDs, books, Bible studies, and so on. It hosts live events, international speaking tours, courses, Bible studies, and an online Catholic Adult Education certificate program.¹⁶
- The Youth Mission Team was founded by the Disciples of Jesus Community. Since 1986 it has been presenting the Gospel to Catholic high school students through presentations and retreats on knowing God, self-image, relationships, social justice, and leadership, reaching about sixteen thousand students per year.¹⁷
- NET (National Evangelisation Teams) Ministries were introduced from the USA to Australia. Since 1988 they have ministered to about five hundred thousand young Catholics in schools, parishes, and universities.¹⁸
- The Culture Project was established by a group of young Catholic friends. Since 2014, it has worked with many thousands of young Catholics at national conferences, youth groups, schools, and public events, presenting them with the Gospel of their inherent human dignity as children of God.¹⁹
- SmartLoving was established in Sydney in 1992, initially running weekend marriage retreats integrating the insights of the Theology of the Body with contemporary relationship research. Over thirty years, it has evolved to take advantage of new technologies and is now a global provider of marriage catechumenate resources serving around five thousand engaged couples annually, and thousands more in other stages.

This list is by no means exhaustive. Yet, of these listed ministries, only the last one had any representation at the Council. The insights Catholics like these could have brought to contemporary engagement in the life and mission of the church were missing.

¹⁵ “MenALIVE,” www.menalive.org.au.

¹⁶ “Parousia Media,” www.parousiamedia.com.

¹⁷ “Youth Mission Team Australia,” www.ymt.com.au/.

¹⁸ “NET Ministries Australia,” netministries.com.au/about-2/.

¹⁹ “The Culture Project,” www.thecultureproject.com.au/.

There is one more point I would have liked to but was unable to investigate because of a lack of data. This was the question of how many members of the Plenary Council were chosen, apart from those whose presence was mandated by canon law. When I made enquiries with those responsible for the national organisation of the Council, I was told I would need to make those enquiries with individual dioceses. So, I do not know how many of the members of the Council were selected. Were there requests for volunteers? Were there interviews before committees? Were there exercises in episcopal fiat? This leads into the question of how “representative” the membership of the Council was in terms of presenting the real concerns of “ordinary” Catholics.

Foci of the Council’s Deliberations

The foci of the deliberations of the Council can be summarised in eight points.²⁰

1. Reconciliation with indigenous Australians,
2. Responding to the sexual abuse of minors,
3. Promoting the mission of the church,
4. Promoting the participation of women in the church,
5. Overcoming “clericalism” and promoting synodality,
6. Promoting care for God’s creation,
7. Promoting the liturgical and sacramental life of the church, and
8. Promoting formation and leadership for mission and ministry.

While these foci were valid and, indeed, necessary, a perusal of the motions voted on at the Council reveals that one thing they all have in common is a focus on “problems,” that is, the rectification of deficiencies in the life and mission of the church.²¹ The fundamental deficiency of the deliberations at the Council is not what was discussed and listened to, but what was not.

One significant problem not addressed has already been mentioned: the crisis of participation in the life and mission of the church by laymen. Ironically, although the laywomen who participate in some way in the life and mission of the Australian Church outnumber laymen by a factor of about six to four, a substantial amount of the Council’s time was spent on the discussion of the needs of the former, in fact, more time than on any of the other foci, but none

²⁰ See Plenary Council, “Motions and Voting,” plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/motions-and-voting/.

²¹ See Plenary Council, “Motions and Voting.”

whatsoever on the needs of the latter. In this instance, it could be said that one group on the social periphery of the church is laymen.

Furthermore, there was also no discussion of something I have already mentioned, the “successes” of the church, the positive initiatives and developments. To use a military analogy, if a breakthrough is made in an offensive, a wise commander will seek to exploit it. It is just as important for the life and mission of the church to discuss where the Holy Spirit is making such “breakthroughs” as it is to shore up weak points in its “defence.”

For example, there was no discussion of the growing engagement of Australian Catholics in the new evangelisation; nor the growth and ministry of new ecclesial movements and “entrepreneurial” initiatives; nor the growth in adult catechumens and candidates being received into the church each Easter; nor of the growth of certain devotions, such as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and Divine Mercy; nor the explosion of youth and young adult ministries in Australia since the 2008 World Youth Day in Sydney; nor the establishment of new and growing religious congregations and monasteries. In other words, we needed to hear more “affirmations.”

LEARNING FROM THE *KOINONIA* AND *HOMOTHUMADON* OF THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

This essay argues that while listening to the Holy Spirit is necessary, it is not sufficient. We need to broaden the meaning of the term “listening” since, whatever the Holy Father means by “listening,” the way in which it generally has been understood has been univocal.²² It is not enough just to “listen” to what the Holy Spirit may be “saying” through the *sensus fidelium*. The Plenary Council in Australia heard many diverse and even contradictory opinions. How can we discern the voice of the Holy Spirit? Is it just a matter of listening to the opinions of a majority, the most articulate and persuasive, or those with whom we agree? We need to do more than say that we need to listen in order to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying. We need some criteria for discernment.²³ In order to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying we also need to expand our notion of listening to “looking” at what the Holy Spirit is “doing” in the local churches, especially as it

²² For an exception to this general trend, see Edwards, “The Spirit of God and the Plenary Council,” 391–392.

²³ With the notable exception of Edwards, thus far, the kinds of discernment being promoted for the Plenary Council have been the kinds suitable for an individual discerning God’s will in his or her own life, or general references to reading the “signs of the times.” See “Plenary Council 2020: Discernment,” plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/listening-and-discernment/. See also Edwards, “The Spirit of God and the Plenary Council,” 397–398.

is revealed in and through those who individually, but even more importantly, corporately, are “living” in the Spirit. As the prophet Isaiah tells us: “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isa 43:19 ESV). Where is the way that God is making, the rivers he is causing to flow?

For synodal deliberations to be fruitful, it is highly desirable that those engaged in them will arrive at positions as close to consensus as possible. So, to indicate what we should be looking for, where the Holy Spirit is at work, and who is responding to this work, this essay will examine two fundamental realities witnessed to in the New Testament: being in *koinonia* and being *homothumadon*. One should not only look at how the Holy Spirit works in our hearts as individuals. One should also look at how the Holy Spirit brings about *koinonia* (communion) between us and makes us *homothumadon* (of one accord). We could call this an investigation into the “soul” or “spirit” of synodality. What are the spiritual “pre-requisites” for Christians to be able to authentically listen to each other? What spiritual “qualities” do they need to possess? To put things more simply, how can synodality be carried out in a way that answers the prayer of Jesus:

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20–23)

Koinonia

The term *koinonia* occurs nineteen times in the New Testament, and is variously translated in the Revised Standard Version either as “fellowship” (Acts 2:42, 1 Cor 1:9, 2 Cor 13:14, Gal 2:9, 1 John 1:3–7), “participation” (1 Cor 10:16, Phil 2:1), “partnership” (2 Cor 6:14, Phil 1:5), “contribution” (Rom 15:26, 2 Cor 9:13), or “share/sharing” (Phil 3:10, Phlm 6, Heb 13:16). In the King James Version, it is sometimes rendered as “communion” (1 Cor 10:16, 2 Cor 6:14, 13:14).²⁴

²⁴ For a detailed account of the various ways in which the term is used in the New Testament, see Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 552–553.

It is common to associate *koinonia* with a description of the relationship between Christians. Thus, Paul recounts how James, Cephas, and John gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship (Gal 2:9–19), while Luke tells us that the first Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (Acts 2:42). Finally, in the First Letter of John we are told that the author's intention in proclaiming the Gospel to his readers is that they may have fellowship with him (1 John 1:3).

Notwithstanding the use of the term in this sense, what might be called a human or horizontal sense, the term *koinonia* is more commonly used with reference to the relation of Christians to the Son, the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, Christians have been "called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). This fellowship includes a participation in the sufferings of Christ (Phil 3:10), and in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). Furthermore, this fellowship includes partnership in the Gospel of Christ (Phil 1:5) and a sharing of faith in Christ between Christians (Phlm 6). This fellowship with the Son is also with the Father (cf. 1 John 1:3), and in the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14, Phil 2:1). It is fellowship with light, not darkness; righteousness, not iniquity (2 Cor 6:14). Indeed, this fellowship with light flows from the fellowship Christians have with God; only through this fellowship are Christians able to have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:3–7). Finally, *koinonia* is used in the sense of "contribution." This contribution is for "the poor among the saints" (Rom 15:26, cf. 2 Cor 8:1–4, 9:11–14), as well as generously sharing what one has with others (Heb 13:16).

Based on this brief survey, four points will be made about the nature of *koinonia*. The first is that *koinonia* is, first and foremost, with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We could call this Trinitarian *koinonia*. The classic expression of this is found at the conclusion of the second letter to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

The second is that this *koinonia* with these three is referred to in specific ways. First, it is *koinonia* "in" the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14, Phil 2:1). What is to be "in" the Holy Spirit like? The witness of the New Testament is that the gift of the Holy Spirit enables us to experience God's love being poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5). He is the Spirit of sonship, enabling us to cry out, "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:10, Gal 4:6). He bears witness to us that we are children of God (Rom 8:16). Only through the Spirit can we confess that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3). Our minds are renewed by the Spirit, giving us the mind of Christ (Rom 8:5, 12:2, 1 Cor 2:15–16, Eph 4:23). We are guided by the Spirit into all truth (John 16:3). We can worship God in the Spirit (Eph 6:18, Phil 3:3, Jude 1:20). The Spirit enables us to pray

as we ought (Rom 8:26–27). He is a guarantee in our hearts who convinces us of the truth of the Gospel and enables us to know that God is dwelling in us (2 Cor 1:22, 5:5, 1 Thess 1:5, 1 John 3:24, 4:13, 5:7–8). He grants spiritual gifts to us to build up the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1–13). Through him we can understand “spiritual truths,” and the gifts God has bestowed upon us (1 Cor 2:12–15, Eph 1:17, Heb 6:4). The Spirit works miracles among us (1 Cor 2:4, Gal 3:5, Heb 2:4). We are led by and walk in the Spirit (Rom 8:14, Gal 5:16–18). In the power of the Holy Spirit, we can put to death the deeds of the flesh (Rom 8:2–15, Gal 5:5–25). If we do so we will bear the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 6:22, Rom 12:11, 15:13, 1 Thess 1:6, 2 Tim 1:7). When we experience these things in ourselves and see them in each other, we can be confident that we can listen to each other “in the Spirit.” The “spirit” of synodality is the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, it is *koinonia* “in” Christ. Being in the Spirit means also being in Christ. Indeed, whenever the term “Christ” is used the Holy Spirit is implied. There is no Christ without the Holy Spirit. It is through the Spirit that the secret and hidden wisdom of God is revealed to us (1 Cor 2:7–10). What those who crucified Christ did not know, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:9–10). The Spirit reveals what Jesus calls the “mysteries of the Kingdom of God” (Matt 13:11, Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10) and Paul calls the “mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4; Col 2:2, 4:3). And not only of Christ, but of Christ in us (cf. Col 1:27), God’s will to unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:9–10), the Gospel (Eph 6:19), faith (1 Tim 3:9), our godliness (1 Tim 3:16), lawlessness (2 Thess 2:7), and resurrection on the last day (1 Cor 15:51–52). Things unaided human reason could never uncover have now been unveiled to us in the Spirit. Not only have they been revealed to us, but with this unveiling the Spirit also gives us the mind of Christ so that we can understand what has been revealed. Christ is in us, and we are in Christ, so now we “have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2–3). And we do not just *have* wisdom, for since Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24), we who have “become” Christ (Gal 2:20) have now “become” the wisdom of God. Thus, “He [God] is the source of [our] life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom” (1 Cor 1:30). If we are “in” Christ we will receive wisdom from listening to the Holy Spirit in ourselves and others.

This *koinonia* is not just “in” Christ, it is more specifically “in” his sufferings and his body and blood. Regarding the first, in some way we must all be able to testify to our participation in Christ’s sufferings.

We must be patient in tribulation and bless those who persecute us (Rom 12:12, 14). We must, to some degree, embrace being afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down (2 Cor 4:8–9). We must carry in ourselves the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us (2 Cor 4:10). Yet this participation in the sufferings of Christ is not yet sufficient. We must also participate in the sufferings of our brothers and sisters in Christ. For their sufferings too are the sufferings of Christ. Moreover, “if one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Cor 12:26) since we are all “members of one another” (Rom 12:5, cf. Eph 4:25). Not only are we to “rejoice with those who rejoice,” we must “weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15).

We could call our *koinonia* in the body and blood of Christ our Eucharistic *koinonia*. This *koinonia* “discerns the body” (1 Cor 11:29). To what “body” does Paul refer? Paul has been referring to the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:23–26). He goes on to say that whoever “eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself” (1 Cor 11:27–29). The fact that Paul says, “discerning the body,” not “discerning the body and blood,” shows that the body to which he is referring is the one body of Christ to which he referred earlier with the words, “because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). We profane the body and blood of the Lord when we come to the Eucharistic table with divisions among ourselves (1 Cor 11:18–19). When we do this, we despise the church of God (1 Cor 11:22). The most despicable way in which we can do this is to “humiliate those who have nothing” (1 Cor 11:22). This includes not just the materially poor, but those educationally poor. Indeed, the two usually go together. The contemporary scribes (theologians) and Pharisees (religious leaders) need to make sure that we do not despise the “little ones” (Matt 18:10) and treat them as an ignorant rabble (John 7:49). Having a doctorate in philosophy or sacred theology, teaching at a Catholic institute of higher education, heading an office in a diocesan curia, or occupying an episcopal see, in other words, being one of the supposedly “wise and understanding,” puts one in danger of mistaking knowledge for genuine wisdom, and hence despising the “babes” (Matt 11:25, Luke 10:21).

Our *koinonia* in Christ is also in the proclamation of the Gospel (Phil 1:5) and the sharing of our faith with each other (Phlm 6). Those who desire a synodal church must evangelise together and seek to build up the faith of their brothers and sisters in Christ. In *Evangelii*

Nuntiandi, Paul VI told us that the church exists to evangelise.²⁵ Francis now tells us, “The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”²⁶ It is essential to realise that when Pope Francis speaks of “mission” he takes his cue from *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. This document, more than any other, has shaped his understanding of evangelisation. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis refers to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* no less than thirteen times. Elsewhere, he has called it “a very full text that has lost nothing of its timeliness,” “that basic point of reference which remains relevant,” and “to my mind the greatest pastoral document that has ever been written to this day.”²⁷

When it comes to sharing our faith with each other, this is necessary because we all suffer in many ways. We suffer from the effects of our own sins, the sins of others, and the trials God permits. Sharing our faith with each other is a way of building up each other in hope and love. At the beginning of 1 Corinthians 14, after he has told us that the greatest of the theological virtues is love, Paul writes, “Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor 14:1). He then goes on to say that “he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. . . . [H]e who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Cor 14:3–4). In sharing our faith with each other we are acting towards each other in a prophetic way.

Upbuilding, encouraging, and consoling are promoted by Paul throughout his letters. He tells the Thessalonian Christians to “encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (1 Thess 5:11) and “comfort one another with these words [about the final resurrection]” (1 Thess 4:18). Paul speaks very beautifully about encouragement. Encouragement must be in love (Phil 2:1). He encourages like a father (1 Thess 2:11). He speaks of hearts being encouraged (Eph 6:22, Col 2:2, 4:8, 1 Thess 5:14). We

²⁵ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 14, www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html.

²⁶ Francis, “Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops.”

²⁷ Francis, “Address to Members of the 13th Ordinary Council of the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops,” June 13, 2013, w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco_20130613_xiii-consiglio-sinodovescovi.html; “Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil,” July 28, 2013, w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmgepiscopato-brasile.html; and “Address to the Participants in the Pilgrimage from the Diocese of Brescia,” June 22, 2013, w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco_20130622_pellegrinaggio-diocesi-brescia.html.

can mutually encourage each other with our faith (Rom 1:12). Consolation is a particular concern of Paul in 2 Corinthians. Because we have been comforted by God, we are able to comfort anyone being afflicted (2 Cor 1:4). If we share in the suffering of Christ, we will also share in his comfort (2 Cor 1:5). Even if we share in the suffering of those who proclaim the Gospel, we will also share in their comfort (2 Cor 1:7).

The love we are meant to have for each other is not a “cold” love that abstractly works for the good of the other. Rather, in a synodal situation, we can fulfil Peter’s exhortation to supplement “our faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love” (2 Pet 1:5–7). These will keep our synodality from being “ineffective and unfruitful” (2 Pet 1:8). As Paul said to the Corinthian Christians, we must be able to say to our co-workers in synodality, “our mouth is open to you . . . our heart is wide” (2 Cor 6:11). As he said to the Christians of Philippi, we must be able to say to each other “how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:8).

In 1 John 1:3 we are told that we can have *koinonia* “with” the Father as well as the Son. This *koinonia* is the work of the Holy Spirit. The most thorough exposition of this *koinonia* does not actually use the term. Rather, the term used is *menó*, to stay, abide, or remain. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit upon us (John 15:16–27). The Spirit remains with us just as he did with Jesus (John 1:33). When the Spirit remains with us, the Father and the Son abide in us (John 15). Through the Father’s gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Spirit of sonship, the Spirit of his Son, with Jesus we are able to cry out “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6).

The third point is that *koinonia* with brothers and sisters is always mediated via the apostles. We should note that all three references to *koinonia* between believers have what might be called an “apostolic” context. They refer to relations between or with apostles or “apostolic men.” In 1 John 1:3, the apostle tells his readers that what “we [the apostles] have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.” In other words, the *koinonia* of believers is via the *koinonia* the apostles have amongst themselves, and with the Father and the Son. In Galatians 2:9–10 it is between Paul and Barnabas on the one hand, and the three “of repute” on the other. The more the successors of the apostles are in *koinonia* with each other the more we will have authentic synodality. Furthermore, in Acts 2:42, being in *koinonia* is inseparable from “continuing steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles.” It is also inseparable from liturgical worship,

that is, the breaking of bread and prayers. There is no reference to *koinonia* between Christians in isolation from *koinonia* with the apostles.

The last point is regarding *koinonia* being used in the sense of “contribution” and “sharing.” This is the conclusive test for the presence of genuine *koinonia*. The generous sharing of our material possessions with each other, especially with brothers and sisters in Christ who are in real want, is the metallurgical assay of the purity of our *koinonia*. It is not enough for us to offer each other the right hand of fellowship and agree on our missionary strategy (Gal 2:9). We must also remember the poor and be eager to do so (Gal 2:10; see also Rom 12:13, 15:25–26, 1 Cor 16:1, 2 Cor 8–9). It is not enough for us to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb 13:15). We must also “not neglect to do good and to share what [we] have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb 13:16). We must not be like Laodicean Christians who said to themselves, “I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing; not knowing that [they were] wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17). Rather, we must be like the Macedonian Christians who, although they were afflicted and extremely poor, also had an abundance of joy, and “overflowed in a wealth of liberality, [giving] according to their means . . . and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging . . . for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints” (2 Cor 8:2–4).

All these forms of *koinonia* are interrelated. Like the relationship between virtue and vice, strength in one will strengthen others, and weakness in one will weaken others. So, we cannot be content as long as even one is weak. As we grow in each one the centripetal force of *koinonia* will bring us closer and closer together with the Triune God and each other.

Homothumadon

The term *homothumadon* offers us a way of looking at relationships in the church and with God from the perspective of coming to a consensus. As such, it is of vital importance for the exercise of authentic synodality. We could say it is one of the fruits of *koinonia*. The term is used eleven times in the New Testament, ten of which are in the Acts of the Apostles.²⁸ It is translated as “of one accord,” and/or as “with one mind” or “of one mind.” However, these translations do not capture the full meaning of the term. Its root, *thymos*, expresses an outburst of passion. Theologically, it is defined

²⁸ See Acts 1:14, 2:46, 4:24, 5:12, 7:57, 8:6, 12:20, 15:25, 18:12, 19:29, Rom 15:6.

as “with one mind” and “with one emotion.” Lexically, it is translated as “same soul” or “same heart,” indicating not just intellectual unanimity but also emotional harmony. In other words, it could also be translated as “with or of one heart.”²⁹

In the Acts of the Apostles, four references to being *homothumadon* concern the relationships between the first Christians (Acts 1:14, 2:46, 4:24, 5:12). In the first three of these, it refers to them being of one accord in prayer; in the cenacle, the temple, and the house where the friends of Peter and John were staying. A reference in Romans also refers to Christians being of one accord in prayer (Rom 15:6). In Acts 15:24–25 it refers to the one accord eventually established, in the face of initial discord, at the Jerusalem assembly of the apostles, elders, and whole church.

From these instances two main points can be made. First, there is reference to what might be called a synodal *homothumadon* made manifest at the Jerusalem assembly. The purpose of this Council was to settle a soteriological argument; whether believers need to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be saved (Acts 15:1, 5).³⁰ We are told that the apostles and elders gathered to consider the matter. After much debate Peter testified that, in response to his preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, God gave to these Gentiles the same Holy Spirit he had given to Jewish believers, thus making no distinction between the two groups, but cleansing the hearts of the Gentiles through faith, just as he had done to Jews. Peter states that “we [Jews] believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:11). After listening to the account of Paul and Barnabas of the signs and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles, James declared his judgement that Gentile converts should not be burdened beyond a few things that will make it easier for Jewish believers to relate to them (Acts 15:21). Then we are told that “it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church” (Acts 15:22) to follow this advice, achieved through a process of becoming of one mind

²⁹ See Hans Wolfgang Heidland, ὁμοθυμαδόν, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. V (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 185–186; and ὁμοθυμαδόν, ὁμόφρων, in Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. James D. Ernest, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 580–582.

³⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson holds that it is “the prophetic witness of Acts 15 as a narrative [that] is critical to the theological reflection of the church because it gives the fullest picture in the New Testament of the process by which the church reaches decision.” See Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 78; see also 89–106, for the process of discernment involved in the decision of the Jerusalem assembly.

(*genomenois homothumadon*, Acts 15:25), and as a decision of the Holy Spirit first and themselves second (Acts 15:28).

The crucial point we should note about this episode is that the decision was arrived at through listening, but not just through listening to opinions or arguments. Rather, it was through listening to what God had manifestly done through grace.³¹ In this sense it was also “looking.” This is how they discerned what the Holy Spirit wished to say to them and were able to speak in the name of the Spirit: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). One thing we can take from this is the need to listen to contemporary “testimonies” of what the Holy Spirit is doing in the church.

Second, as mentioned, the first three references in the Acts of the Apostles, and the single reference in Romans, are all about *homothumadon* in prayer. This shows us that being *homothumadon* is not just about being one in relations with human persons but also being one in relation to God. Furthermore, it is revealing to see what this prayer is about. In the first instance, after returning to the upper room from the Ascension of Jesus, the 11 remaining apostles together with some women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brethren, devote themselves to prayer. In fact, we are told that as many as 120 people so devoted were present, at least at some time, between the Ascension and Pentecost (Acts 1:12–15). Why have these people devoted themselves to prayer? According to both Luke’s Gospel and Acts, Jesus had told them to wait in Jerusalem for him to send upon them the promise of his Father, the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they might be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4–8). While they are waiting, they pray. It seems reasonable to me that what they were praying for is that the promise of Jesus, the sending of the Holy Spirit, not be delayed, but fulfilled as soon as possible.

In the second instance we read, “And from day to day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they shared their food in gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people” (Acts 2:46–47). Here we see that their one accord in prayer in the temple is accompanied by other manifestations of unity: the sharing of meals not just joyfully, but with a singleness of heart, and giving praise to God.

In third instance, after Peter and John have been told by the Sanhedrin that they were not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, and threatened in some unspecified way, they went and reported this to the church. Then we read, “And when they heard it, they lifted up their voices with one accord to God” (Acts 4:24). Their subsequent

³¹ For recounting and listening to what God had done, and acting upon it, see Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 97–108.

prayer begins by acknowledging who God is and what the Jews and Gentiles did to his holy servant Jesus, followed by a plea that the Lord will “grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29–30). This prayer for a new empowerment to proclaim the Gospel, and have that proclamation confirmed by God’s power is, in essence, a prayer for a renewed manifestation of what occurred at Pentecost, and it is immediately answered.³²

In the last instance in Romans we read, “And may the God of patience and comfort grant you the same way of thinking among each other according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:5–6). Here we see that glorifying the Father in prayer together is the result of having the same way of thinking as Christ, and that this way of thinking is a gift from God. Ultimately, *homothumadon* is a grace from God. When it is *homothumadon* in prayer, we learn that that prayer has two foci: praising and glorifying God and asking to be empowered to evangelise. These should be the foci of common worship in any “synodal process.”

CONCLUSION

This essay began with the assertion that “listening” is not enough if we are to discern what the Spirit is saying to the churches. We also need to be “looking” for what the Holy Spirit is already “doing” in the churches. To do this we must not just attend to the “body” of synodality, the practical details of how to have a synod, or exhort each other to listen to the Holy Spirit. We need to be living in the Holy Spirit if we are to recognise the work of the Holy Spirit. If we do not also attend to this “soul” of synodality we will just end up with a corpse.

Unfortunately, complete consensus is rarely possible.³³ On this point of the near inevitability of some disagreement, Paul offers us a useful perspective. He sought to bring unity to the church in Corinth in the face of serious disputes, divisions, and failures in fraternal charity (1 Cor 1:10–13, 6:1–8, 11:17–22, 14:26–33). In the Corinthian church, as well as great *charismata*, there were also great *schismata* (divisions) and *haireseis* (factions).³⁴ These will always be present in the church to some degree. Indeed, Paul says that “there must be factions among you so that those who are tried and true may be made

³² See also Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 84–85.

³³ For example, see the voting results, Plenary Council, “Motions and Voting.”

³⁴ The exercise of many charisms does not guarantee *koinonia* and *homothumadon*.

manifest” (1 Cor 11:19). How can we identify factions? It is by their primary focus on “issues,” and real or imagined grievances, rather than on personal relationships, that is, *koinonia*, first with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then *ad intra* between believers, then *ad extra* in their relationships with non-believers, seeking to draw them into this *koinonia*.

Vis-à-vis synodality, we need to look at the quality of the relationships within the Body of Christ. Do we see in those who deliberate in a synodal situation “works of the flesh” such as “enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, dissension, party spirit, [and] envy” (Gal 5:20–21), or the “fruit of the Spirit”: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal 5:22–23)? We can identify those “tried and true” by looking for brothers and sisters in Christ who bear this fruit, as well as praising and glorifying God together, praying together for the power of the Holy Spirit, evangelising together, serving each other, forgiving each other, bearing each other’s burdens, materially supporting each other, and reaching out in compassion to all who are suffering, or ignorant of the Good News.

The danger is that the deliberations of those who primarily focus on “issues” and grievances will come to dominate, since it is a common human tendency for those who have a grievance to speak up while those who are content remain silent. This is another reason for seeking out “affirmations” of and “testimonies” to the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. To discern what the Holy Spirit wishes to say to the church it is necessary to get a clearer picture of what the Holy Spirit is already doing in the church. In essence, this is what Peter did when he reported to the apostles, elders, and brethren, first in the church in Jerusalem, and then at the first “synod” of the church, about how the Holy Spirit had been given to Gentiles just as he had to Jews (Acts 11:1–18, 15:6–11). Such affirmations and testimonies today should not be limited to those of individuals but should especially be testimonies from bodies of believers living *koinonia* and *homothumadon* in some substantial way. Indeed, testimonies could be drawn from those communities, ministries, initiatives, and institutions that can be affirmed as already building up the body of Christ and participating in its mission.

If we are to discern the work of the Holy Spirit, we need to see not just people in *koinonia* and *homothumadon* with their pastors, and pastors who have the “smell of the sheep,” but pastors in *koinonia* and *homothumadon* with each other, even to the extent of being willing to practice fraternal correction for the sake of their corporate ministry (Gal 2:11–14). We must look for “living” *koinonia* and *homothumadon* as the ultimate sign of the fruitful action of the Holy Spirit. We need to look for *koinonia* and *homothumadon* in *leitourgia* (worship),

kerygma (proclamation), *martyria* (witness), and *diakonia* (service), that is, in the priestly, prophetic, and royal mission.³⁵ We need to look at those who corporately manifest not just a *sensus fidelium*, but also a *sensus sperantium* and a *sensus amantium*. It is to those corporately living out these gifts from God that we should listen with special attentiveness and openness. Coming back to *syn hodos*, we need to attend to those truly “travelling together” in the Spirit. **M**

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³⁵ See Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 25, www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html.