

1 **The Theology, Practice and Style of a Synodal Church**

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Parramatta — Launch of the Diocesan Plan for a Synodal Church (10 August 2024)

2 **My Brief**

- Bishop Vincent's invitation:
 - “focus on the theological underpinnings of synodality, its implications for the Church today, and practical ways communities can actively participate in this ecclesial vision”.
- Hence my title: “*The Theology, Practice and Style of a Synodal Church*”

3 **The 7 Principles of the Pastoral Plan**

1. The Action of the Holy Spirit
2. Common Baptism
3. The *Sensus Fidei*
4. The People of God Walking Together
5. The Diversity of Gifts and Charisms
6. A Communal Search in the Way Forward When Making Ecclesial Decisions
7. A Way of Seeing the World and all Creation Through Relationships

4 **Today—Exploring the Theological Foundations of the 7 Principles**

- Pope Francis' deepening reception of Vatican II's vision for renewing the “style” of being church
- Pope Francis on “synodality” and “synodal conversion”
- The benchmark for reimagining the church as synodal: Jesus' “style” of ministry
- Importance of “ongoing formation” in synodality: tips from a John Paul II teaching on “ongoing priestly formation” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*)
- Along the Way: highlights from the Diocesan Plan

5 What is “Synodality”?

- simply means: Pope Francis’ summary of Vatican II’s vision of the church, both
 - *ad intra*: how the People of God should relate to one another among themselves
 - *ad extra*: how the People of God should engage with “the world” within which it exists
- My summary: “Synodality is Vatican II in a nutshell.”
 - With his vision of “a synodal church... a church which listens”, we have entered a whole new phase in the reception of Vatican II; *to understand “synodality”, we have to understand Vatican II*

6 The Underlying Intention of Vatican II

- The interpretation of historian John O’Malley, writing in 2008:
- In its desire for renewal and reform of the Catholic Church, Vatican II sought to bring about “a conversion to a new style of thinking, speaking, and behaving, a change from a more authoritarian and unidirectional type to a more reciprocal and responsive model.”
- John O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 11

7 The Vocabulary of Vatican II: A Change of “Style”

“Among the words are brothers/sisters, friendship, cooperation, collaboration, partnership, freedom, dialogue, pilgrim, servant (‘king’), development, evolution, charism, dignity, holiness, conscience, collegiality, people of God, priesthood of all believers. Liberty, equality, and fraternity as well as other formerly unwelcome guests knocked at the door [of Vatican II] and gained entrance to the feast. A simple pairing of the models implied by this vocabulary with the models it replaced or balanced conveys the import of this [issue of ‘style’]...”

8 A Change of “Style” (cont’d)

“... It suggests, indeed, that at stake were almost two different visions of Catholicism: from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from definition to mystery, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to

integrated, from vertical to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from rivalry to partnership, from suspicion to trust, from static to ongoing, from passive acceptance to active engagement, from fault-finding to appreciation, from prescriptive to principled, from behaviour modification to inner appropriation.”

John O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 306–307

- 9 **Francis’ call to be “a synodal church... a church which listens” is thus Vatican II’s call for**
- “a conversion to a new style of thinking, speaking, and behaving, a change from a more authoritarian and unidirectional type to a more reciprocal and responsive model.” [John O’Malley]

- 10 **Pope Francis’ call to “synodal conversion”**

“Synodality is a ‘style’ to which we must be converted... If the Gospel proclaims justice, we must be the first to try to live transparently, without favouritism or cliques. If the Church follows the path of synodality, we must be the first to be converted to a different style of work, of cooperation and communion. All this is possible only by following the path of humility. Without humility, we cannot do this.”

Address to the Roman Curia, Christmas 2021

- 11 **The Importance of “Style”**

“Let us keep going back to God’s own ‘style’, which is closeness, compassion and tender love. God has always operated that way. If we do not become this Church of closeness with attitudes of compassion and tender love, we will not be the Lord’s Church. Not only with words, but by a presence that can weave greater bonds of friendship with society and the world. A Church that does not stand aloof from life, but immerses herself in today’s problems and needs, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God. Let us not forget God’s style, which must help us: closeness, compassion and tender love.”

Official opening of the 2021–2024 Synod on Synodality

- 12 **Pope Francis’ call in 2015 for “a synodal church... a church which listens”**

“A synodal Church is 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” (Jn 14:17), in order to know what the Spirit ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7). The Synod of Bishops is the point of convergence of this listening process conducted at every level of the Church’s life.”

Address on the 50th Anniversary of the Creation of the Synod of Bishops, 2015

13 **“Synodal” Aspects in Vatican II**

1. the church as the *People of God* (the Father), the *Body of Christ*, the *Temple of the Holy Spirit*;
2. the whole body of the faithful as the recipient of divine revelation;
3. the participation of all the baptised, lay and ordained, in the mission of the church;
4. the participation of all the baptised, not just the hierarchy, in the so-called three offices of Christ: the *prophetic* office, i.e., the teaching office of the church; the *priestly* office, i.e., the sanctifying office of the church; and the *kingly* office, i.e., the governing office of the church;

14 **“Synodal” Aspects in Vatican II (cont’d)**

5. the inextricable relationship between “the mission of Christ” and “the mission of the Holy Spirit” (“Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 2:7, et al.)
6. regarding the prophetic office, the Holy Spirit in baptism bestows “the supernatural sense of the faith [*sensus fidei*] of the whole people [= the *sensus fidelium*]” (LG 12)
7. the call for dialogue, not only with other Christians, with other religions and with unbelievers, but first and foremost, dialogue within the church, not only within a local church, but also between all the local churches that make up the church catholic;
8. the magisterium as, not above the word of God, but is its servant;

15 **“Synodal” Aspects in Vatican II (cont’d)**

9. the notion of collaboration between pastors and laity;
10. the notion of the local church as the Catholic Church fully in that place;

11. the notion of “communion” between all these local churches, and of the Catholic Church as a communion of churches;
12. *** the dignity of the individual baptised person—(a) of their sensus fidei, (b) of their charisms, and (c) of their conscience.

16 **E.g. (9): Collaboration between pastors and laity**

“Even though the priests of the new covenant by reason of the sacrament of order fulfil the preeminent and essential function of father and teacher among the people of God and on their behalf, still they are disciples of the Lord along with all the faithful and have been made partakers of his kingdom by God, who has called them by his grace. Priests, in common with all who have been reborn in the font of baptism, are brothers among brothers and sisters as members of the same body of Christ which all are commanded to build.”

Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 9

17 **The Church as the Whole People of God**

- Pope Francis: Vatican II wanted to “invert the pyramid”
 - a pyramid: the classic image in the centuries before the council
 - The pope at the top, then bishops, priests, and then “the people” (the laity)
 - The top = “the teaching church”; the bottom = “the learning church”
 - * The weakness of “pyramid” language [it’s too “vertical”; synodality is more “horizontal]
 - Vatican II: the church is primarily “the People of God” (now, “the people” are not just the laity, but ALL the baptised: laity, religious, ordained), who are, together, constantly “learning” from the Holy Spirit (in order, then, to be able to teach according to the mind of God)
- The game-changer: chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium*, “The People of God”
 - the church is all the disciples of Jesus: all the baptised faithful (lay, consecrated religious, ordained)

18 **Synodal Participation in the 3 Offices of Christ**

1. The prophetic office (Christ the Prophet)

- the preaching/teaching office (proclamation of the Gospel)
- 2. The priestly office (Christ the Priest)
 - the sanctifying office (prayer and sacraments)
- 3. The kingly office (Christ as King or Pastor/Shepherd)
 - The governing office (leadership and pastoral service)

19 Mission

- *Lumen Gentium* 5 teaches: the church “receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom”.
- That is captured neatly in Roger Schroeder’s definition of “mission”: “mission is proclaiming, serving, and witnessing to God’s reign of love, salvation, and justice.” [*What is the Mission of the Church?*]
- Preface of the Feast of Christ the King: “a kingdom of justice, peace, and love.”

20 The Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit guides the church on its mission, and enables the church to interpret the Gospel of Jesus Christ *in new contexts, times, and places*
 - DV 8: “Thus God, who spoke in the past, dialogues without interruption with the spouse of his beloved Son. And the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the church—and through it in the world—leads believers to the full truth and makes the word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness.”
- And what is the Spirit’s medium of communication? *Sensus fidei*
 - Along with the gift of faith (*fides*), the Spirit bestows a gift for interpreting faith (*sensus fidei*)

21 “Conversation in the Spirit”

- “Conversation in the Spirit is a tool that, even with its limitations, enables authentic listening in order to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. Its practice has elicited joy, awe and gratitude and has been experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups, and

the Church.”
Synthesis Report, 2 (d)

22 **“*Sensus fidei*” (a sense for the faith)**

• *Lumen Gentium*, 12: “The holy people of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office. The whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from the holy one (see 1 Jn 2:20 and 27) cannot be mistaken in believing. It shows this characteristic through the entire people’s supernatural sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*), when, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful,” it manifests a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals. By this *sensus fidei*, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the people of God, guided by the magisterium which it faithfully obeys, receives not the word of human beings, but truly the word of God, “the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The people unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply through right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.”

- Pope Francis on this passage: “The *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between an “*ecclesia docens*” [a teaching church] and an “*ecclesia discens*” [a learning church], since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church.” (2015 Address on Synodality)

23 **Dialogue**

Gaudium et Spes, 92:

“In virtue of its mission to enlighten the whole world with the message of the Gospel and to gather together in one spirit all women and men of every nation, race and culture, the church shows itself as a sign of that amity which renders possible sincere dialogue and strengthens it.

Such a mission requires us first of all to create in the church itself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, and to acknowledge all legitimate diversity; in this way all who constitute the one People of God will be able to engage in ever more fruitful dialogue, whether they are pastors or other members of the faithful”

24 **“Dialogue”: Learning from Differences**

- Pope Francis: “Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns. Based on their identity and experience, others have a contribution to make, and it is desirable that they should articulate their positions for the sake of a more fruitful public debate.” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 293)

25 **The “human” dimension of synodal formation**

An Exemplar for All : A synodal parish priest:

“Of special importance is the capacity to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a ‘man of communion.’ This demands that the priest not be arrogant, or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and fraternal relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console. People today are often trapped in situations of standardization and loneliness, especially in large urban centers, and they become ever more appreciative of the value of communion. Today this is one of the most eloquent signs and one of the most effective ways of transmitting the Gospel message.” (*PDV*, 43)

26 **Conclusion: Humility**

Pope Francis on synodal conversion and the path of HUMILITY:

“Humility is the ability to know how to ‘inhabit’ our humanity, this humanity beloved and blessed by the Lord, and to do so without despair but with realism, joy and hope. Humility means recognizing that we should not be ashamed of our frailty...”

“Once we strip ourselves of our robes, our prerogatives, positions and titles, all of us are lepers, all of us are in need of healing.”

Address to Roman Curia, 2021

** Humility is the synodal virtue par excellence!

27 **End**