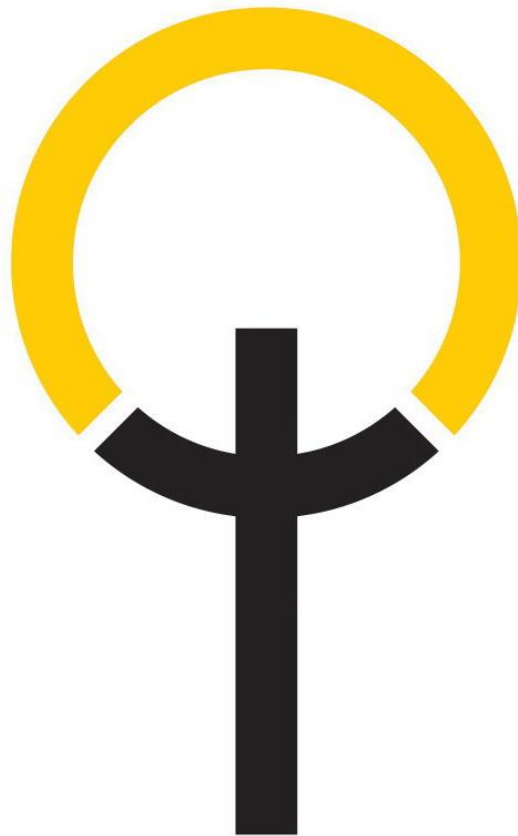


MINI-SERIES ON SYNODALITY

Led by Dr Peter Coughlan

6th, 13th and 20th October 2021, 4.00– 6.00 pm on Zoom



Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology

12 Grange Road
Cambridge CB3 9DU

www.margaretbeaufort.cam.ac.uk

Private Notes – Not for Circulation
© Peter Coughlan

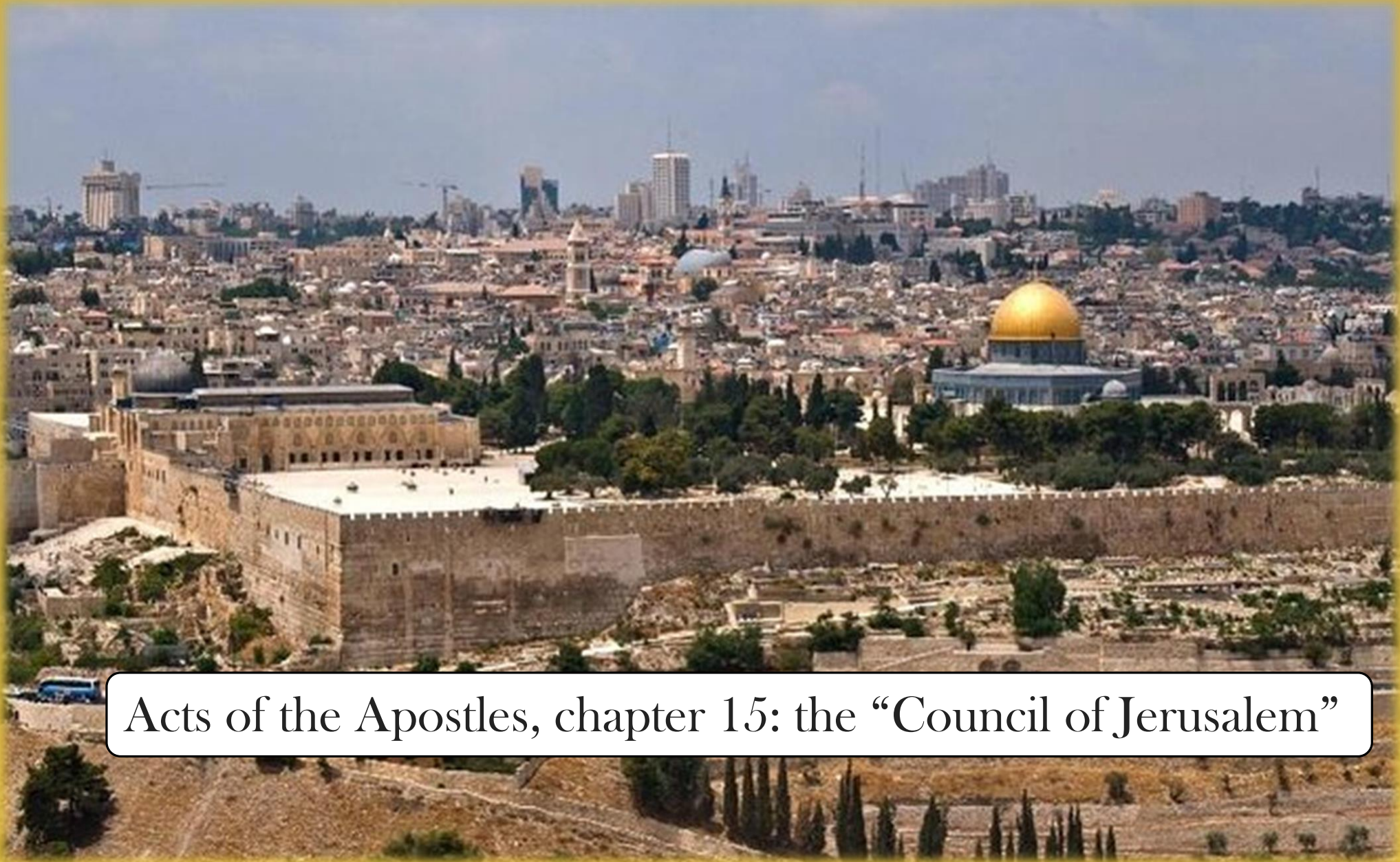
SESSION 1
6 October 2021

The word 'synod' presents us with the beautiful image of making a journey together



Isaiah 1:18: “Come, let us talk this over, says the Lord”





Acts of the Apostles, chapter 15: the “Council of Jerusalem”







JEAN-PAUL LAURENS.
1870

JEAN-PAUL LAURENS.



The much-needed “Gregorian Reform”, Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85



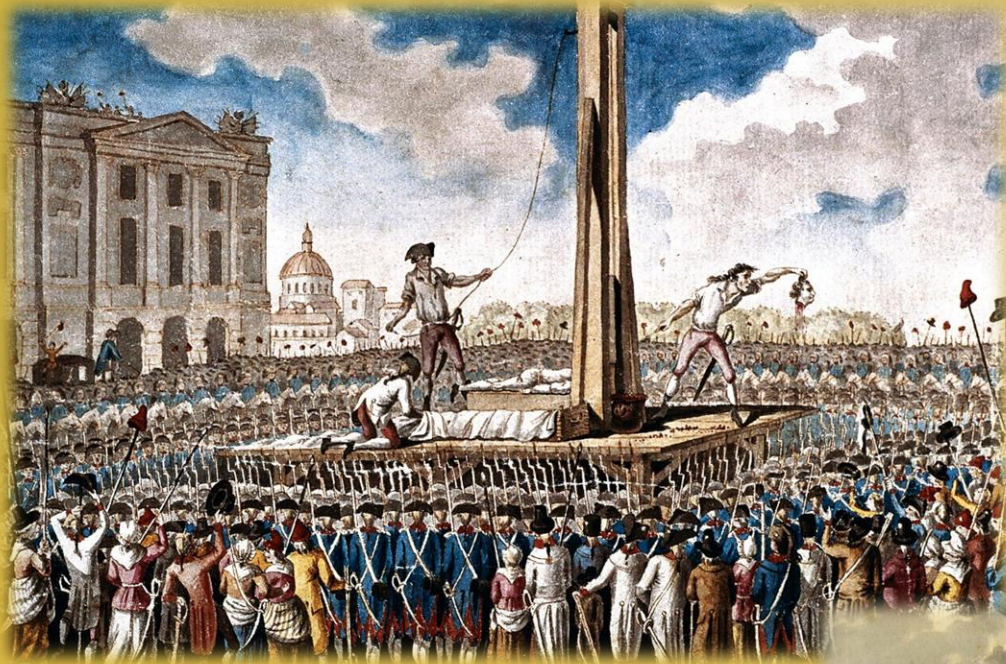


The Council of Constance, 1415,
and the challenge of “Conciliarism”

Points of difference:

- The way Conciliarism and other traumas influenced Vatican I, 1869-70
- The way Vatican II, 1962-65, moved in a conciliar/synodal direction

Traumas: Conciliarism, Protestantism, Gallicanism



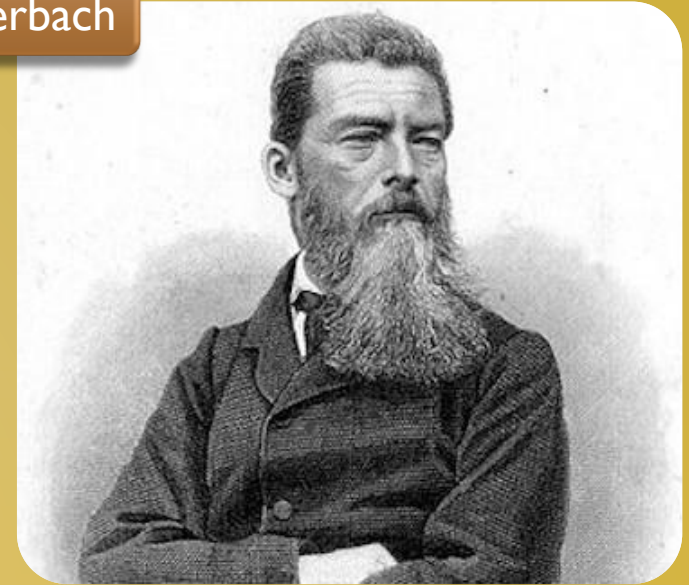
Trauma: the rising tides of nationalism;
threat to the papal states 1870



Voltaire

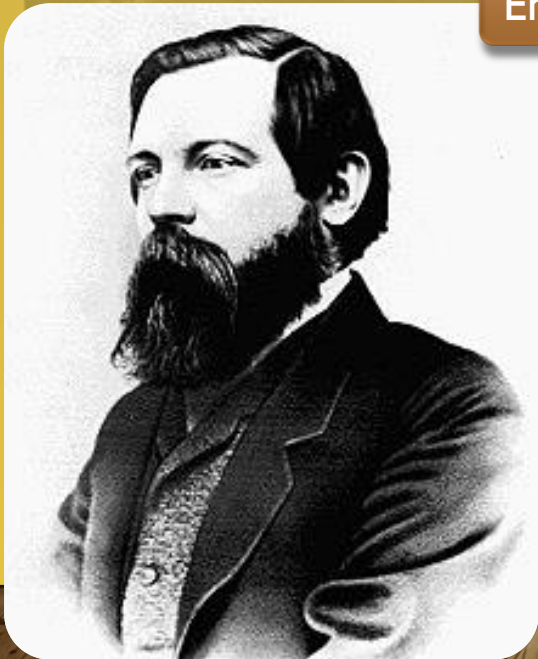


Feuerbach

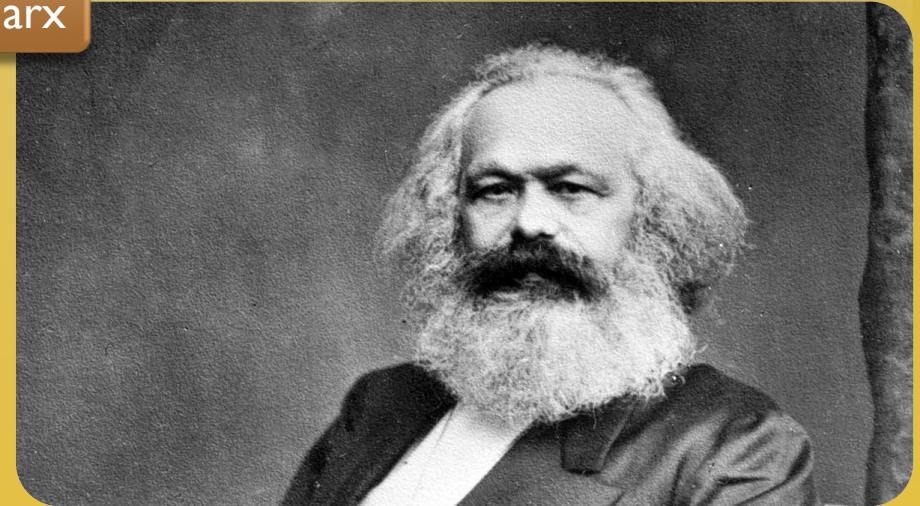


Traumas:
rationalism and atheism

Engels



Marx



Looking towards the papacy as a symbol of unity and defence against the “modern world”



Vatican I resulted in papacies, 1870-1958,
that were highly monarchical in style





Vatican II's Constitution on the Church,
Lumen Gentium:

- Collegiality of Pope and Bishop
- Pilgrim People of God

- Papacy in transition
- Within a Church in transition

Negative view: the laity = **NON-CLERGY?**

Positive view: the **ENTIRE COMMUNITY**, including the ordained ministers, of those who are baptised and believe in Christ, and who - by God's grace - are called to give witness to that faith in their words and in their lives

Vatican II's Constitution on the Church calls for:

the **participation** of all
in the **communion**
that is **mission**.

What is synodality? It is all about the attempt to give
effective expression to that call, that mission.

Paul VI: “This Synod, which like all human institutions, can be improved with the passing of time ... “

Good to bear in mind and apply words from Newman's famous "Second Spring" sermon at Oscott, 1852

We should not be surprised or disheartened if we encounter cold showers, storms, and disappointments on the synodal path

Beginning with the 1967 Synod in the Hall of the Broken Heads, the Synod of Bishops set out on its long journey into the future



SLIDE ONE:

The word 'synod' presents us with the beautiful image of making a journey together

The word "synod" as you probably know comes from two Greek words, "*syn*" meaning "together", and "*odos*" meaning path or journey. The word "synod" therefore presents us with the beautiful image of "making a journey together".

The word "council", on the other hand, comes from the Latin word "*concilium*" and throughout the history of the Church – until very recent times - it has been taken as equivalent to the word "synod". They have been practically interchangeable.

SLIDE TWO:

This evening, and in the following two sessions on the 13th and 20th, we will be looking at the theme of synods and synodality at the very moment when Pope Francis has invited the universal Church to join in what he describes as "the synodal path". As you know, he will open this two-year synodal path at the Vatican this weekend. We can see him here in our slide and wish him and the synodal process every possible best wish as the process is launched.

The purpose of this MBIT miniseries of three sessions is to try to understand synods and the synodal path more fully and, in the light of that, to consider how we might contribute to the process.

In order to achieve that aim the purpose of the talk section of the three sessions will be to attempt to offer ***an historical and theological context*** – a context within which we can reflect on the synodal path. The period after the break in each of the three sessions will seek, in different ways, to encourage an exchange of ideas, hopes and aspirations in regard to this topic.

Today, after this talk, we will have a ten-minute break and then we will go into breakout groups. In those groups everyone will be asked to focus on the question: what are our dreams for the Church, what are our hopes for the synodal path, what sort of priorities do these dreams and hopes begin to suggest.

The central theme of the talk this evening will be the links and, especially, the differences regarding synodality that we find at the First Vatican Council, 1869 to 1870, and the Second Vatican Council, 1962 to 1965. Those two Councils, however, need to be seen within a wider historical context if we wish to grasp their significance. What I want to do now is to look – even if very briefly - at that historical context, and then at the way synods have emerged again in the Catholic Church over the last 55 years.

SLIDE THREE:

Isaiah 1:18: *Come, let us talk this over, says the Lord*

We can begin to get a glimpse of the wider context if we look at verse 18 of the first chapter of the prophet Isaiah where God says to Isaiah: ***Come, let us talk this over.*** The central idea in that text from Isaiah is that of a conversation with God, listening to his voice, talking with him. And that takes us straight into the theme of what synods – our journeying together - are all about. Talking with one another and listening to one another on our life journey is at the heart of the very idea or concept of “synods”.

However, I want to emphasise at the outset ***a point of maximum importance*** in our reflection. What makes Christian synods different from parliaments, senates, town hall meetings or other human assemblies of various kinds is ***faith*** ... faith that God our Father has spoken to us in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and that through the action of his Spirit he speaks to us now through and in the Church, our fellow members in the People of God.

That is why faith, prayer and a profound desire and readiness to listen – aware that God can and does speak to us through one another - are crucially important to the way we understand the nature and purpose of Christian Synods. “Come, let us talk this over” – and we could add, “Come, let’s try to discern what God says to us”.

SLIDE FOUR:

Pope Paul VI reading out a text at the Vatican Council

It was on 15th September 1965, at the beginning of the fourth and last session of the Second Vatican Council, that Pope Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops. By this act he set the Church on a trajectory that will be of major and growing importance as the third millennium develops. That word “millennium” reminds us that Pope Paul’s institution of the Synod took place just 35 years before the end of the second millennium ... and where councils and synods are concerned there was a marked difference between the first millennium and the second millennium.

To put it in very general terms, one of the major characteristics of the Christian Church in the first millennium was the use of synods as a process of discussion and consultation that gradually led to decisions. These synods were concerned with matters of Christian belief, namely doctrine, or Christian behaviour, namely Church discipline.

SLIDE FIVE:

Acts of the Apostles, chapter 15: the “Council of Jerusalem”

In the Acts of the Apostles we already find, in chapter 15, what is sometimes referred to as the Council of Jerusalem. The key question there was: do you have to be circumcised in order to be a Christian?

This was all part of a question addressed at many points in the first half of the Acts of the Apostles: can the non-Jews – the Gentiles – be accepted as members of the Church of Christ without having to adopt the customs and traditions of Judaism. Resolving that question was of enormous importance for the future of the Church.

To quote the text, and we should note this – there was “a good deal of argument” among the apostles and elders as to whether this should be allowed. “A good deal of argument” – we should be ready to accept that in synods. People struggle to see and understand, and to reach the right decision. The result of the discussion and argument in Jerusalem all those centuries ago was that the Gentiles could be accepted without having to take up the Jewish customs.

This pattern of consultation and discussion through a synodal or conciliar process is found through most of the first millennium, especially once Christianity was established as the favoured religion of the Roman Empire after the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.

SLIDE SIX:

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed that all the major Christian Churches still use today, and that we use now at Sunday Mass, resulted from the great ecumenical Councils of Nicaea in 325 and Constantinople in 381. We can regard those councils or synods – and the ecumenical councils that followed up until the end of the eighth century – as the highest peaks of a vast mountain range, with hundreds of local synods in the east and the west forming the important lower peaks or foothills.

SLIDE SEVEN:

I want to give two very different examples of synods in the first millennium. The first is the Synod of Whitby, a town on the coast of North Yorkshire. It took place in the year 664.

At that time the conversion of Anglo-Saxons was very recent and had not yet taken deep root. King Oswy of Northumberland - which in that period was the most important of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms – wanted to resolve a problem. He was very concerned about the confusion caused by differences between the two Christian traditions that had been involved in the process of converting Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. These two traditions were, on one side, the Lindisfarne tradition - with its roots in Iona in Scotland, and before that in Ireland - and, on the other side, the Roman tradition that resulted from the mission given by Pope Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury.

These traditions, while sharing the same faith, differed on a number of points. Those differences included the date on which Easter – Christianity’s principal feast – should be celebrated. After the two sides of the argument had presented their positions, King Oswy decided to adopt the Roman tradition throughout his kingdom, a decision that had a major influence on Christian practice throughout Britain.

SLIDE EIGHT:

That Synod stands in stark contrast to my second example, the so-called Cadaver Synod of 897, which, I must admit, was not a typical synod. It took place in a period - stretching from around the middle of the ninth century to the middle of the tenth century - when the papacy was at the lowest ebb in its entire history. Pope Stephen VII had the corpse of his predecessor, Pope Formosus, disinterred. Formosus was then dressed in full pontifical vestments and subjected to a formal trial in the Basilica Church of St John Lateran. Unsurprisingly, Formosus was condemned and Stephen then had the corpse of Formosus stripped of its vestments and thrown ignominiously into the Tiber.

That ghastly example can remind us that if we feel at times that the Church is going through a very bad patch, we could bear in mind that there were moments when things were worse, much worse. As you will have noticed, the Church and papacy survived. And - in spite of secularisation in what is sometimes called "An age of unbelief" - they are still very much around.

From the latter years of the eighth century the synodal tradition began to weaken. This tendency increased when the differences between the Western and the Eastern halves of the Church increased to the point when, tragically, the two Churches excommunicated each other and separated in 1054.

SLIDE NINE:

The much-needed "Gregorian Reform", Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85

In the West, and within the first century of the second millennium, the pontificate of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085, brought a vigorous and much needed reform in a whole series of spheres of Church life. However, this same reform also tended to exaggerate the powers and the role of the papacy. The result was that while the synodal tradition continued in the West, it was less prominent and effective than it had been in the first millennium.

SLIDE TEN:

Two centuries after the Gregorian reform, in the pontificate of Innocent III (1198-1216) – whom we must thank for his approval of the extraordinarily important Franciscan Order, and his successor, Honorius likewise approved the equally important Dominican Order in 1216 – we find that "the idea of a world-wide papal theocracy reached its peak. Innocent III referred to the pope not only as the Vicar of Christ, but also as Vicar of God". He declared that "the pope is the meeting point between God and man ... who can judge all things and be judged by no one" – a declaration that, I think you will agree, is more than a little over the top.

In the course of time there were, understandably, reactions against this. By the end of the fourteenth century the Church was confronted with the Great Schism, in which no fewer than three different bishops were recognised as pope by different groups within the Church – a process intensified by the considerable political interference from kings and princes.

SLIDE ELEVEN:

The Council of Constance, 1415, and the challenge of "Conciliarism"

In 1415 the Council of Constance managed, after years of struggle, to heal the schism before it elected the new pope, Martin V. That Council, however, is also remembered for one major decision. It committed itself to the principle of the superiority of any general council over the pope – a view that is summed up in the word "Conciliarism". This view was not accepted by subsequent popes and Pope Eugenius IV formally rejected it at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, 1438-45. Nevertheless, Conciliarism cast a long shadow – a trauma that refused to go away – over subsequent centuries.

SLIDE TWELVE:

Points of difference:

- The way Conciliarism and other traumas influenced Vatican I, 1869-70
- The way Vatican II, 1962-65, moved in a conciliar/synodal direction

And so we come to the comparison and contrast between Vatican I and Vatican II that I mentioned earlier. To understand the synodal path that was opened up by Paul VI and that has become central to Pope Francis' pontificate - and to the direction in which Francis is seeking to point the Church - we need to understand two things:

- firstly, the way in which Conciliarism and other traumas influenced the path and direction taken by the First Vatican Council, 1869-1870;
- secondly, the way in which the Second Vatican Council, 90 years later, deliberately and profoundly altered that path in a conciliar or synodal direction.

In 1868 Pope Pius IX published *Aeterni Patris*, the Apostolic Letter formally convoking the First Vatican Council. It actually opened on 8th December 1869. Let me read to you from that Letter because it conveys the way the Pope and the majority of bishops at the Council viewed the world around them at that time. The tone of the Letter was pessimistic, defensive, and fiercely resistant to the modern world. It looked towards a strong papacy as a defensive bulwark or fortress rather than to a synodality that they feared might be tainted with Conciliarism:

"It is now evident and clear to everyone how terrible is the storm that tosses the church and how great are the evils besetting civil society. The Catholic Church is attacked and trampled on by the enemies of God and man. Everything that is sacred is held in contempt, ecclesiastical possessions are seized, and ministers of religion are harassed on every side ... Not only our holy religion but human society itself is plunged into an indescribable state of chaos and misery".

In that almost apocalyptic context the First Vatican Council was seen by Pope Pius IX and the majority of the bishops – certainly not all, but the majority – as a way of affirming and strengthening the papacy, and thereby the Church. The atmosphere

was certainly not conducive to promoting synodality. Let me describe briefly the main traumas that lay behind Vatican I's rejection of so much of the modern world.

SLIDE THIRTEEN:

Traumas: Conciliarism, Protestantism, Gallicanism

In the first place there was the theory and threat of Conciliarism which I have just mentioned. In its various forms, Conciliarism was seen as inseparable from the cataclysm of the Protestant Reformation. Gallicanism, which developed in France in the late seventeenth century and continued into the eighteenth century, had many of the features of Conciliarism. It held that the pope is subject to ecumenical councils and, further, that the church in each country should be under the joint control of the pope and the monarch. The majority at Vatican I were convinced that the affirmation of a strong papacy was essential to the unity and survival of the Church and in order to resist conciliarism, Protestantism, and Gallicanism.

SLIDE FOURTEEN:

Traumas: French Revolution; Napoleon; 1848 uprisings

Secondly, the actual historical experience of the previous 80 years also played a powerful part in the Church's sense of being under attack: the trauma of the French Revolution of 1789, which included a fierce attack on the Church and the associated guillotining of nobles and clergy, was intensified by the traumatising impact of Napoleon. It was Napoleon who kidnapped Pope Pius VI and dragged him off to France, where he died in 1799. Pius VII, the next pope, had to be crowned with a tiara of papier-mache because the French troops had earlier seized all papal tiaras. Napoleon then went on to imprison this pope too!

The shock of these experiences for the Church were brought home personally to Pius IX, pope at the time of Vatican I, by his experience of 1848. That was a year of attempted revolutions across Europe, a year of violence that saw uprisings in many parts of Italy, including the papal states. Pius' prime minister in Rome was shot dead on the steps of the Quirinal, the papal residence at the time. Pius himself had to escape to Gaeta in the Kingdom of Naples, disguised as a simple clergyman to avoid attack and possible death at the hands of the Roman mob.

SLIDE FIFTEEN:

Trauma: the rising tides of nationalism; threat to the papal states 1870

A third trauma was the power of the surging nationalism developing throughout Europe in the 19th century. In the case of Italy, the armed troops of the Risorgimento – the nationalist movement that sought the unification of all Italy - threatened the very existence of the papal states and, it was thought, the independence and freedom of the papacy.

SLIDE SIXTEEN:

Traumas: rationalism and atheism

A fourth trauma was rationalism, regarded by many as the most serious threat of all. Arising out of the 18th century Enlightenment this rationalism was seen as threatening the bases of religious faith and as a challenge to Christianity's very existence. The mid-19th century saw the publication of Ludwig Feuerbach's book, *The Essence of Christianity*, which argued explicitly that God was a human projection, an invention. It was translated into English by Mary Anne Evans – more widely known to us as George Eliot, author of one of the most outstanding novels in English literature - *Middlemarch*.

Feuerbach's work is regarded by many as one of the reference points of modern atheism. Its influence was and has been considerable. For example, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels – and we are all aware of the seismic impact Marxism was to have on the history of the twentieth century - referred to Feuerbach's book as having a liberating effect. Why? Because it argued - successfully in the view of Marx and Engels - that human consciousness is the only consciousness or spirit that exists, and that human consciousness is dependent upon the physical existence of human beings merely as part of nature. Marx commented that Feuerbach had, intentionally or not, "given socialism a philosophical foundation".

SLIDE SEVENTEEN:

Looking towards the papacy as a symbol of unity and defence against the "modern world"

In reaction to a world of ideas and social and political movements that were seen as inimical to the Church and its faith, the overall attitude of Vatican I towards the world around it was defensive, distrustful, and suspicious. The Council turned to the papacy as a point of unity around which the Church could rally in reaction to the modern world. It was in that context that the focus on primacy and papacy was crowned by the solemn definition of papal infallibility.

It is not my intention here to enter into the theological aspects of this definition, which holds true in our time as it did then. I want to point out, however, that it RESULTED at that time in an exaggerated view of the pope, seeing him in almost solitary isolation from and above the rest of the Church. This has been described by one Church historian as "the papalisation of Catholicism".

It brought with it in its train a centralisation of Church authority in the pope and his Roman Curia. That was a situation where many considered that synods and councils were no longer necessary since regular collaboration with the bishops in the exercise of the teaching office was hardly regarded as required. The result was that the papal magisterium became inflated. In practice, the role of bishops was too often seen as being that of simply communicating papal teaching faithfully to their flocks.

SLIDE EIGHTEEN:

Vatican I resulted in papacies, 1870-1958, that were highly monarchical in style

In practice Vatican I resulted in a papacy that was highly monarchical in style. Moreover, in the 90 years between Vatican I and Vatican II there was, in practice, a kind of “creeping infallibility” with ever more documents emanating from the Pope and Roman curia that contained teachings, regulations, or warnings on almost every aspect of Catholic practice and belief. Papal encyclicals held pride of place in this teaching, but a host of other documents such as apostolic exhortations, apostolic letters, and apostolic constitutions flowed out in ever-increasing numbers across the universal Church. This period was certainly not the heyday of synodality.

SLIDE NINETEEN:

At this point in our reflection the attitude of John Henry Newman is instructive. He accepted the Vatican I definition and encouraged others to do so, even if he had judged the definition inopportune because he felt that in the lop-sided insistence on centralising authority that characterised the Church of Pius IX it would be difficult for the doctrine to be rightly understood. He believed the Vatican I definition needed and would ultimately receive correction. He wrote: “The late definition does not so much need to be undone, as to be completed. It needs safeguards to the Pope’s possible acts – explanations as to the matter and extent of his power ... Let us be patient, let us have faith, and a new Pope and a re-assembled Council may trim the boat”.

SLIDE TWENTY:

It too another 90 years, but we can thank the good Lord that he sent a man – a humble and holy man who took the name of John XXIII - to call a Council that did indeed “trim the boat”. On 25th January 1959 John XXIII, whom Italians loved to describe as “il Papa Buono - the Good Pope”, surprised everyone by announcing his intention to convoke an ecumenical council.

In contrast to the dark and defensive tone of Pius IX’s *Aeterni Patris* that I quoted earlier, John XXIII’s tone was undeniably positive and open-hearted. The aim of the Council he said would be to promote “the enlightenment, edification, and joy of the entire Christian people” and “to extend a cordial invitation to the faithful of the separated communities to participate with us in this quest for unity and grace”.

In his opening address to the Council on 11th October, 1962, John invited the Council Fathers to avoid condemnations and “to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than severity”. In this Council and unlike Vatican I, the “Other” was seen “more as a potential partner than enemy, more an object of reconciliation than alienation”. I would add that Vatican II was truly a Council like no other before it. It deliberately set out to explore and articulate the Church’s identity and the way in which it should carry out its mission to, and in dialogue with, “the Other”.

An important point springs to mind here: our theme of synodality is now in 2021, a continuation and development of Vatican II’s exploration and articulation of the Church’s identity and purpose in response to the challenges, the signs of our time.

SLIDE TWENTY-ONE:

Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*:

- Collegiality of Pope and Bishop
- Pilgrim People of God

We could talk with one another for hours about the significance of *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, and the pathways or directions it opens before us - especially if we were to reflect on it alongside the other documents of the Council. This evening, however, I want to focus on **two aspects** that lead us towards a fuller understanding of why and in what way synodality is a path that Vatican II invited us to follow. **These two aspects are inextricably linked.** They are pillars that, theologically, underpin the development of synodality or conciliarity we are talking about today.

First aspect: the collegiality of the pope with the bishops.

It was above all Vatican II's recognition of the collegiality between pope and bishops in the service of the Church and its mission – together with the actual experience of the sharing and discernment that characterised Vatican II - that drew Paul VI to establish the Synod of Bishops.

What we see here is nothing less than **the papacy in transition** – a gradual transition from a monarchical papacy to an exercise of papal service and authority with and within the worldwide college of bishops. It is this above all that Paul VI sought to recognise and enhance.

Second aspect: the pilgrim People of God.

In Vatican II's Constitution of the Church we find a second element that places the collegiality of pope and bishops **within and at the service of** the entire communion of the baptised – speaking for the moment of the baptised within the Catholic Church.

In the discussions at Vatican II regarding the Constitution on the Church a deliberate change in the order of chapters reflects something of major theological and pastoral significance. After a first chapter on the mystery of the Church an earlier draft text had gone on to speak immediately of the hierarchical structure of the Church before going on to consider the Church as a whole. That represented a pyramid view of the Church – seeing it and understanding it from the top downwards.

In the Council's discussions – and this is the point I want to emphasise - the order of chapters was changed. A chapter carrying the title, "the People of God", was placed **BEFORE** the chapter on the hierarchical nature of the Church.

It is this understanding of the Church that lies at the heart of the synodality of the whole Church and that points out the path along which the People of God is invited to travel in this third millennium. That change, which puts the entire holy and faithful People of God, ordained and non-ordained, at the centre moves us away from the

pyramid view of the Church. We are called to see the Church as a communion of all the baptised and to see the sacrament of ordained ministry within and at the service of the communion and mission **of all those baptised WITH them in Christ.**

SLIDE TWENTY-TWO:

Negative view: the laity = NON-CLERGY?

Positive view: the ENTIRE COMMUNITY, including the ordained ministers, of those who are baptised and believe in Christ and who - by God's grace – are called to give witness to that faith in their words and in their lives?

We need to take on board what a profound change in the way of seeing things this implies. We can get a hint of how massive a shift this is if we remember that the 1917 Code of Canon Law described or defined the laity simply as NON-CLERGY. That means that the more than 95% of the entire Church was seen as a NON!

The Code of Canon Law has, of course, since been revised and a new Code was published in 1983. Nevertheless, the stance taken by the 1917 Code is a vivid reminder of how clergy-centred and hierarchy-centred the post-Vatican I Church had become. Make no mistake: the sacrament of ordained ministry – as delineated in chapter three of *Lumen Gentium* under the title, the hierarchical nature of the Church - is a necessary and given element in the life of the Church. But the balance brought about in Vatican II - and which is strongly reflected in Pope Francis' approach to synodality - is an important, and indeed necessary, corrective to the tendency to identify the Church with the hierarchy.

One of the most interesting periods of my work in the Vatican was when I was on the Asia desk of what at that time was called the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions – I really enjoyed and valued that experience. BUT, BUT the title of that department had a serious flaw: it described its partner in dialogue as a NON. It is never a good idea to approach “the Other” by regarding him or her as a NON ... be it non-clergy, non-white, non-black, or even ... non-male! The title of the department I referred to has, happily, been changed to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

And that reflects the truth that every human being is loved and valued by God. In Vatican II's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World there is a passage in art. 22 that Pope John Paul II loved to repeat: “Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling”. And that calling, I would add, is addressed to all women and all men.

SLIDE TWENTY-THREE:

Vatican II's Constitution on the Church calls for:

- the **participation** of all
- in the **communion**
- that is **mission**.

What is synodality? It is all about the attempt to give **effective expression to that truth**.

To focus again on synodality: I said that what we are witnessing is **the papacy in transition**. It is also true, however, that the entire Church – while always remaining the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church founded by Christ – is now passing through a particularly intense period of **ecclesial transition**

In spite of the constraints of time let me read to you from article 12 in the Constitution of the Church: “The whole body of the faithful, who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (that is, the Holy Spirit) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (the *sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when, 'from the bishops to the last of the faithful' they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals”.

You will remember that Pope Francis has chosen three words to express the direction of the synodal path presented to us for the next two years: communion, participation and mission. Those three words – reflecting Vatican II's focus on “the holy and faithful People of God”, as Francis loves to put it – point to something of fundamental importance in our reflection on synodality. Why? Because they express **the participatory role** all members are expected to play in all aspects of the Church's life.

To apply the three words Francis has chosen here: we can say that Chapter Two of Vatican II's Constitution on the Church calls for:

- the **participation** of all
- in the **communion**
- that is **mission**.

What is synodality? It is all about the attempt to give **effective expression to that truth**.

SLIDE TWENTY-FOUR:

Paul VI: “This Synod, which like all human institutions, can be improved with the passing of time ... “

At this point let's return to Pope Paul VI's institution of the Synod of Bishops in 1965. In the debates on the collegiality of the bishops with the Pope in the preparation of the Constitution of the Church, and also in the debates on the Decree on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishop, the idea had come up that there should be some type of

organism representing bishops from around the world that could work with the pope on matters of great importance for the life of the Church. Some spoke, for example, of the role of synods in the eastern churches in communion with Rome.

And so it was that Pope Paul instituted the Synod of Bishops. There is a phrase in Pope Paul's document founding the Synod that is very wise. He said, "This Synod, which like all human institutions, can be improved with the passing of time ..."

There you have it. Paul's establishing of the Synod was both courageous and cautious ... but he **knew and expected** that synods and synodality would grow and flourish from that cautious beginning. And right now THAT is what is happening.

SLIDE TWENTY-FIVE:

John Henry Newman: we should not be surprised or disheartened if we encounter cold showers, storms, and disappointments on the synodal path

However, it would be good to bear in mind John Henry Newman's famous sermon in 1852 at St Mary's, Oscott in Birmingham when the English Catholic bishops were meeting in Synod for the first time since the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850.

Newman spoke of his hopes for "a second Spring", but he also said: "Have we any right to take it strange, if, in this English land, the spring-time of the Church should turn out to be an English spring, an uncertain, anxious time of hope and fear, of joy and suffering – of bright promise, and budding hopes, yet withal, of keen blasts, and cold showers, and sudden storms".

We too should not be surprised or disheartened if we encounter cold showers, storms, and disappointments on the synodal path. The People of God is a pilgrim people and the long history of the Church offers abundant evidence that the journey can be bumpy – extremely bumpy!! - and very bruising! But, because we are pilgrims, walking with the Lord Jesus at our side on our way to the homeland of the Father, we must always walk in hope and never, never lose trust in the promise of the God who loves us and in the presence with us of his Holy Spirit!

SLIDE TWENTY-SIX:

Beginning with the 1967 Synod in the Hall of the Broken Heads, the Synod of Bishops set out on its long journey into the future

To return to the 1960s. The first of the newly established Synod of Bishops was in 1967 and the location in which it took place was a relatively cramped space in the Vatican that bore the decidedly ominous name of "the Hall of Broken Heads". I am sure that Paul VI was hoping this first Synod would not end up with the broken heads of bishops littering the floor! The Hall was in fact a space in which incomplete parts of Greek and Roman statues had been stored – thus the name.

That 1967 Synod was positive. It was above all concerned with the implementation of matters the Council had called for, such as approval of the direction in which the Council's liturgical reform was moving. The Synod also called for the Code of Canon

Law to be thoroughly revised, and in addition it opened the way for an International Theological Commission to be established – something Paul VI wanted in order to foster greater collaboration between the papal magisterium and theologians.

With that the Synod of Bishops was setting out on its long journey into the future

Next time, on the 13th of October, we will look at how things developed from that point on.

Let's break now and meet here again in ten minutes, that is at:

This evening's session will be divided into *four main sections*:

- The synods, 1967 to early 1980s, need to be seen within the rapid changes and profound challenges in world and church in those years
- The significance of the Extraordinary Synod of 1985
- A reflection on strengths and weaknesses in the synods, 1967-2013
- Pope Francis makes it abundantly clear synodality is central to his vision of church renewal and evangelisation

Section One: Rapid changes and
challenges in world and Church,
1965 to early 1980s

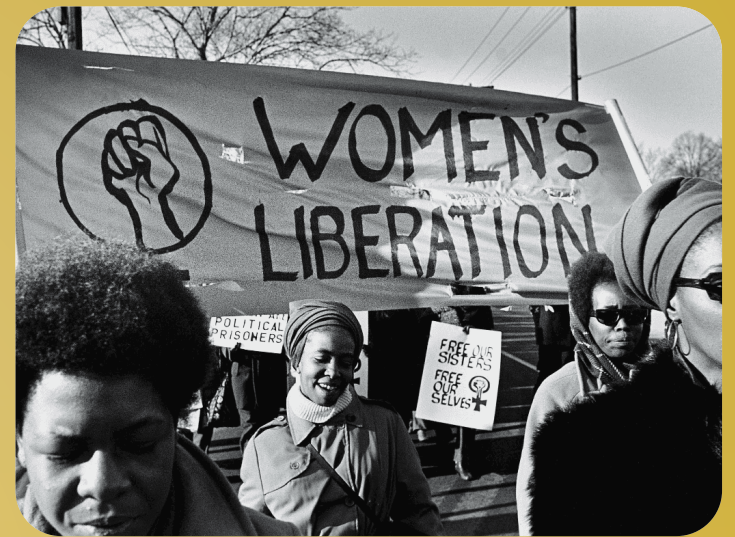


1960s: a period of intense political mobilisation and conflict, together with dramatic cultural changes



Wars were raging; revolution was in the air



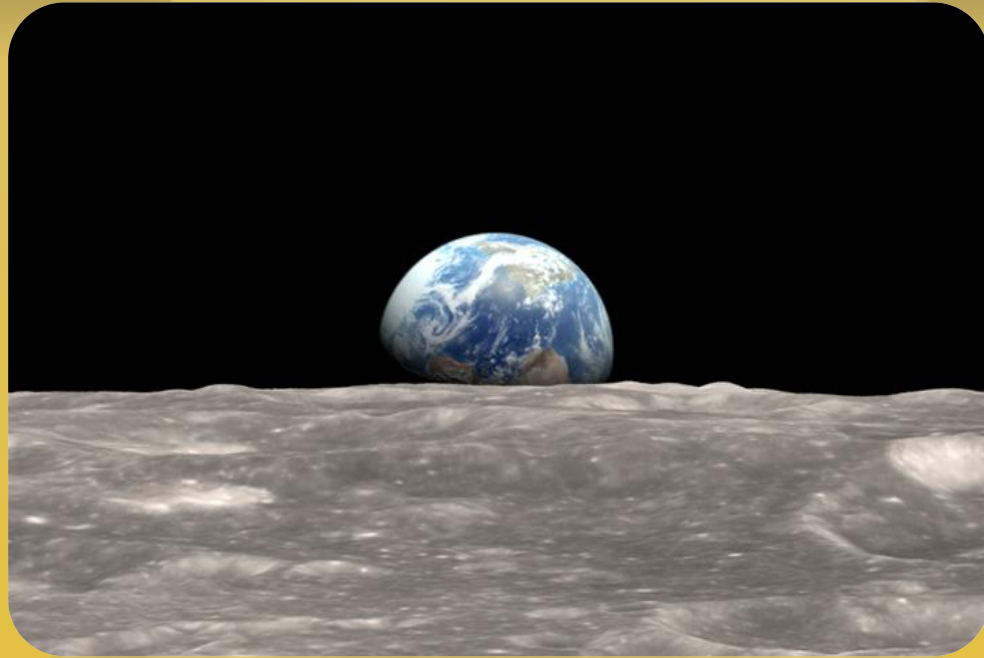


Political activism
related to and
connected to deeper
cultural change

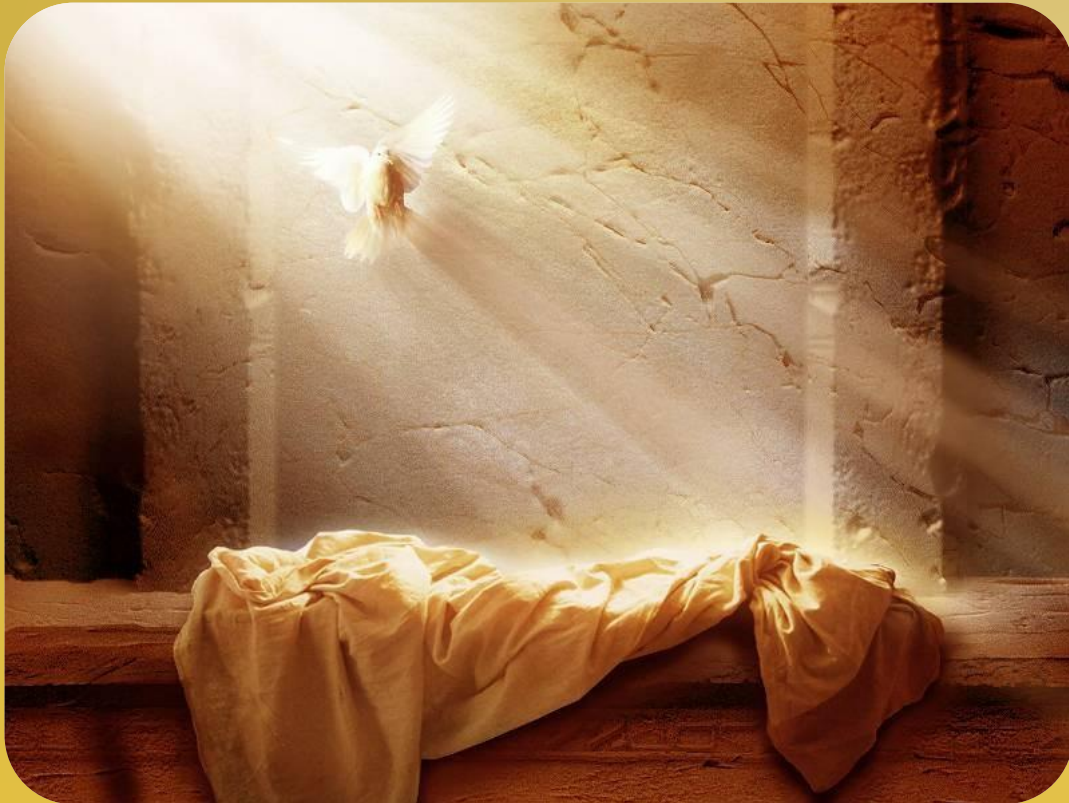


1968: A year regarded as symbolising the thorough-going changes of the 1960s

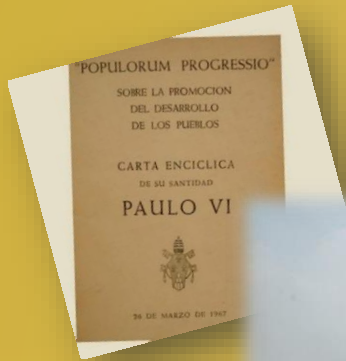




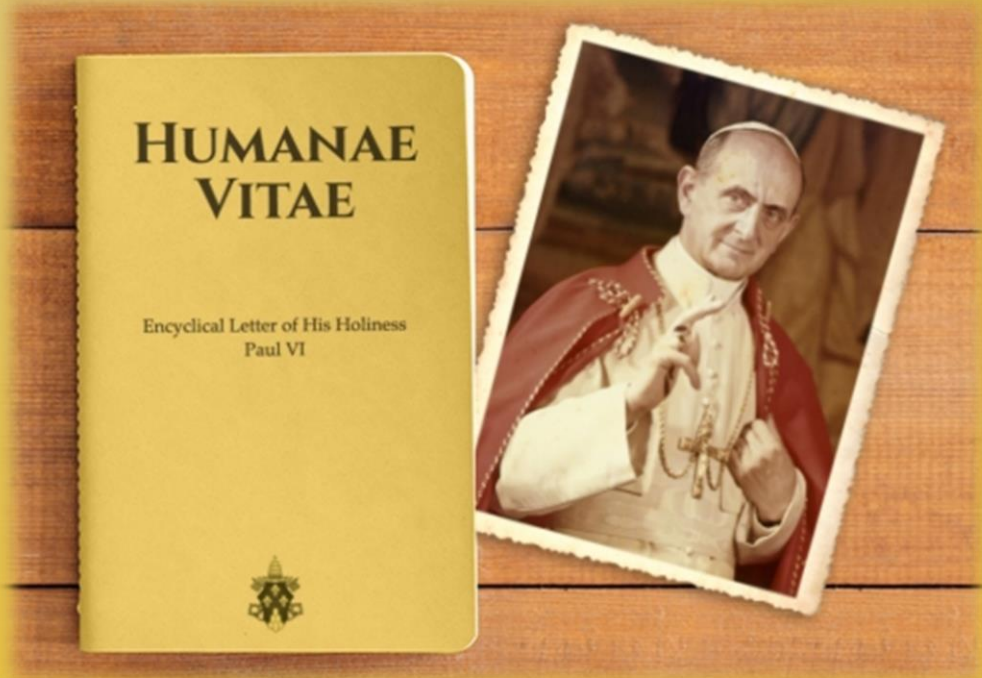
Goal of the first Synod of Bishops, 1967: the preservation and strengthening of the Catholic faith



“In the basic core, what shines forth is the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead” (EG, 36)

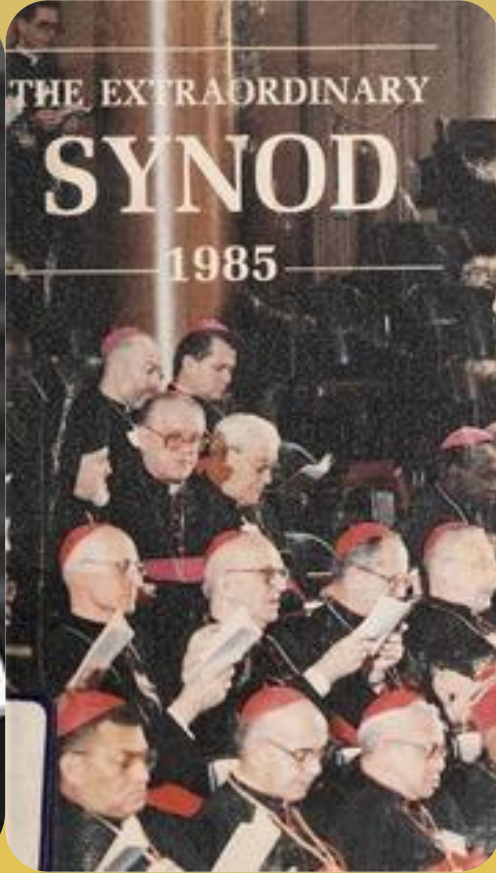
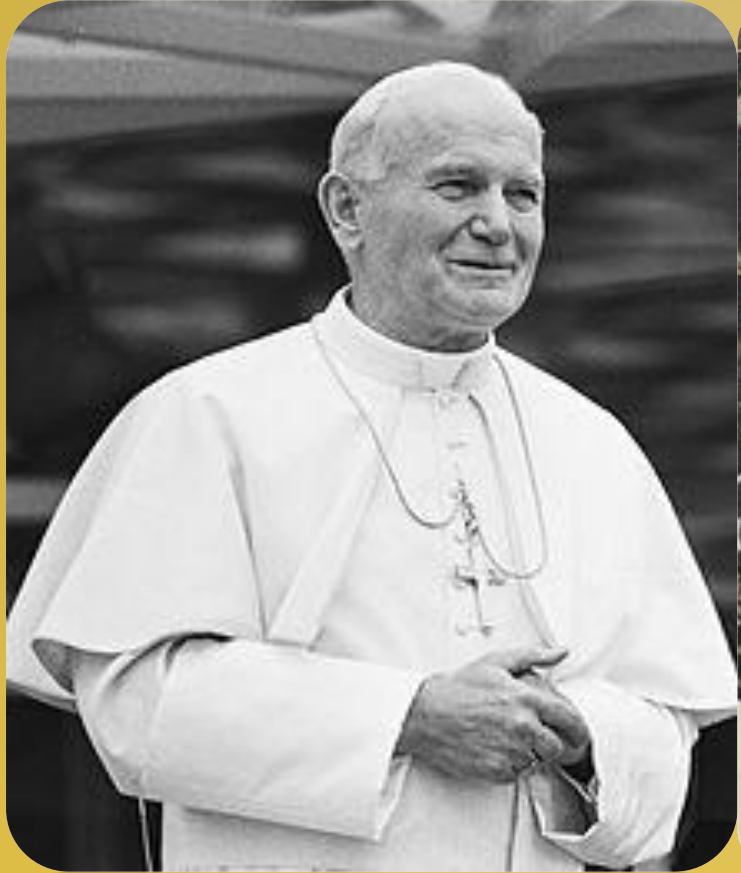


Two encyclicals: *Populorum Progressio*; *Humanae Vitae*



“Action on behalf of justice ... a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel”

“Evangelising is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity”



Section Two:
The significance
of the
Extraordinary
Synod of 1985.

Varying understandings of the title, “The People of God”

Schools of thought regarding the Church, the way of seeing the relationship between Church and world, and the attitudes, programmes and actions that follow as a result:

Neo-Augustinian; Communitarian; Forms of liberation theology

Section Three: A reflection on strengths
and weaknesses in the synods, 1967-2013



Positive aspects of the Synods of Bishops,
1967-2013:

Regular contact among bishops in a truly
global Church



Beginning to see synods, at the universal, continental, national, and diocesan levels, as regular and important aspects of life in the ecclesial community

Synods for Africa, America, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Oceania

The regular Synods of Bishops have studied topics of great importance

Topics: priesthood/justice; evangelisation; catechesis; family; penance/ reconciliation; formation of priests; consecrated life; bishops; eucharist; word of God

To some extent there has been consultation,
even if not always sufficiently effective

Less positive aspects of the Synods of Bishops: 1967-2013

Too much reading out of prepared speeches; not sufficient exchange of views



It was widely felt among bishops and their episcopal conferences that the process was being run by the Roman Curia rather than being an effective expression of the collegiality of pope and bishops



A considerable number of bishops
did not feel an honest expression of
their views would be welcome

Diocesan structures /communication methods in the local churches were not, it was felt, sufficiently developed or organised so as to implement the Synods' recommendations effectively *and in ways that would have local relevance*

Reflecting the previous point, it was felt that the two-way processes of consultation from and to the local churches and the central offices of the Church needed to be much improved



Section Four: With the election of Pope Francis, we have seen considerable development in regard to synods and synodality:

“From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I have sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council ... We must continue along this path. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church in the third millennium”

Jesus Christ is the
centre of
synodality,
NOT the Church
itself





Francis returns again and again to three words that, for him, sum up synodality:

Listening, Parrhesia (boldness), and Discernment

Firstly: a listening Church

Mutual listening in which
everyone has something to learn





Secondly: Parrhesia, a Greek word meaning boldness



Thirdly: Discernment

Seeking together, in faith and prayer

To discover and implement “God’s dream for us”

Discernment also has to do with the balance between the centre and peripheries



At the end of the last session I spoke about the first of the Synods that, following Paul VI's institution of the Synod of Bishops in 1965, took place at the Vatican in 1967 in the Hall of the Broken Heads.

SLIDE ONE:

This evening's session will be divided into **four main sections:**

- The synods, 1967 to early 1980s, need to be seen within the rapid changes and profound challenges in world and church in those years
- The significance of the Extraordinary Synod of 1985
- A reflection on strengths and weaknesses in the synods, 1967-2013
- Pope Francis makes it abundantly clear synodality is central to his vision of church renewal and evangelisation

SLIDE TWO:

Section One: Rapid changes and challenges in world and Church, 1965 to early 1980s

Christian life, like the Church itself, must be centred on God, on Jesus Christ, and on the gift of his Spirit – the papacy, like all other ministries and ecclesial activities, is at the service of and called to give witness to these central and abiding Christian truths. However, throughout its two thousand years' history, the Church has never existed in a vacuum or in a state of being that allows it to float above and outside of history.

In recent times, in a rapidly changing world, the papacy, together with the rest of the Church, has also needed to adapt rapidly – and rapid change can be very disturbing. The years of change from the 1960s up into the 1980s, the years in which the popes gradually sought to establish the Synod of Bishops, were both challenging and disturbing. ***I want to mention some of the changes in the world at large because they are a necessary backdrop against which we need to see the developments of synods and synodality in the Catholic Church.***

SLIDE THREE:

1960s: a period of intense political mobilisation and conflict, together with dramatic cultural changes

Across the globe – from a decolonised Africa and Asia to a Latin America galvanised by revolutionary movements following Fidel Castro's Marxist revolution of 1959 in Cuba – the 1960s were a period of intense political mobilisation and conflict as well as dramatic cultural changes.

We need to bear this in mind because life in the Catholic Church was **not only** deeply affected by the Second Vatican Council and the changes it brought, but **also by** wider currents of change in politics, society and culture.

I have just mentioned Castro's revolution, but that played into the far wider phenomenon of the Cold War between the West and the Communist world – even if the term “Communist world” actually embraced quite different realities.

With the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1963, and forays into various parts of Africa by the Soviet Union, the 1960s saw an intensification of the Cold War and the abiding threat of nuclear proliferation and war.

SLIDE FOUR:

Wars were raging; revolution was in the air

In 1965, the year Vatican II closed, President Lyndon Johnson – fearing that the violent struggles between North and South in Vietnam could result in more Asian nations following China's embrace of communism – landed US troops in Da Nang and sent warplanes to bomb the North Vietnamese forces. At this point the Vietnam war began to give rise to a huge opposition movement in the United States, and this anti-war activism fed into wider aspirations for political activism in North America and Europe.

Revolution was in the air in the '60s. In 1966 Mao Tse-Tung unleashed the Cultural Revolution in China, which had reverberations around the world.

Then too, the image and activities of the anti-imperialist and Marxist guerrilla Che Guevara in Latin America appealed to young people in many parts of the world as symbol of a reaction against what they saw as the stifling governments and institutions in their own countries. Later years saw the rise of the Red Brigade terrorists in Italy and the Red Army Faction in Germany.

SLIDE FIVE:

Political activism related to and connected to deeper cultural change

Political activism in the '60s also related to wider movements – for example, movements for the further emancipation of women, concerned above all with the social, political and economic equality of women and men.

To some extent related to that, but certainly not the same thing, was the rapid liberalisation of attitudes and laws regarding sex and sexual relationships in a number of countries. In many ways this amounted to a sexual revolution. The term “swinging sixties” referred to these developments alongside changes in youth culture, the entertainment industry, dress, and so on.

SLIDE SIX:

1968: A year regarded as symbolising the thorough-going changes of the 1960s

1968 is widely seen as the year in which these transformations and upheavals were particularly evident. In January the so-called Prague Spring began in Czechoslovakia, but was soon crushed by the Soviet armed forces, and - on the other side of the world - there was the successful Tet offensive by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong, which resulted in bringing opposition to the Vietnam war to its highest pitch in the United States. The student protests against the war that took place in the United States were, as you know, often linked to the civil rights movement for racial equality. Student protests also took place in 1968 in Poland, West Germany, Mexico, Italy, and beyond.

However, it was the student protests in France that in many ways symbolised the mood in many nations that year. The students were joined in their protests by up to eight million French workers, who found common cause with the students. Beginning in May 1968, this period of civil unrest spread throughout France, lasted some seven weeks and was characterised by demonstrations and general strikes, as well as by the occupation of universities and factories. At the height of events, the economy of France came to a halt. In the end President De Gaulle dissolved the National Assembly and called new elections. A year later he resigned.

In the words of one commentator: "At heart, the student complaint was about a repressive social environment, a rigid, unbending adult world; the workers' complaint had more to do with economics — the demand for better working conditions, a shorter work week, higher wages, the chance to share in the relative wealth of the nation. What both groups had in common was the sense that a rigid and complacent society needed a shakeup".

SLIDE SEVEN:

The tragic assassination of Martin Luther King in April, followed by the assassination of Robert Kennedy in June increased the sense of social and political dislocation in that year. And although 1968 ended on a positive note, with the astronauts of Apollo 8 becoming the first humans to orbit the moon and to give us the iconic image of the so-called "earth rise" ... the beautiful blue earth they looked back upon was a world characterised by rapid change and intense struggle.

SLIDE EIGHT:

Goal of the first Synod of Bishops, 1967: the preservation and strengthening of the Catholic faith.

My reason for going into all this is that it is the context in which the early synods took place. The goals of the First General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1967 tell us a great deal about what was on the mind of the pope and bishops. These goals were “the preservation and the strengthening of the Catholic faith, its integrity, its force, its development, its doctrinal and historical coherence”.

The goals of “the preservation and strengthening of faith” reflected an awareness that the secularisation that had been a feature of society in previous years accelerated rapidly in the 1960s. By 1967 many bishops were vividly aware of a growing alienation, particularly among the young, from the established institutions of society. In the summer of that same year, 1967, I remember being present at a huge Liturgy Conference in Kansas, Missouri, and I was struck forcibly at that meeting by a general sense of unrest in regard to life in the Church that mirrored the turbulence in society more widely. I remember that a book that had just come out in the States was titled, “Why a Priest is Leaving his Outdated Church” – a book that is long forgotten, but that was on the lips of many at the time.

These were years in which many institutions – including the churches - were challenged by “post-modernism”, an umbrella term that sought to capture the scepticism of many, especially youth, in regard to overarching explanations or ideologies which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races. Relativism and scepticism towards existing institutions was by no means total, but certainly more widespread. This in turn had a considerable impact on the mainline Christian Churches in terms of adherence and practice.

In this context - and as Walter Kasper put it, in the face of modern atheism - we must focus on the real foundation and content of faith, which is God, and develop anew the Christian message about the triune God, the God of Jesus, in its meaning for the salvation of men and women and the world.

The call at the 1967 Synod for an International Theological Commission – a body that could assist the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in a cultural context that was often hostile to Christian faith and practice - has to be seen in the general context of the second half of the sixties, and it resulted in the establishment of the Commission in 1969.

The Synod also looked at matters of importance in the daily life of the Church, calling for a revision of 1917 Code of Canon Law that would make it more pastoral and more contemporary in tone and emphasis. It also discussed and broadly approved the implementation of the Vatican’s II’s Constitution on the liturgy – the new Order of the Mass, with the new lectionary and eucharistic prayers and so on, that was taking place in those years.

SLIDE NINE:

Two encyclicals: *Populorum Progressio*, 1967; *Humanae Vitae*, 1968

In the tumultuous years of 1967 and 1968, that I described a few moments ago, Paul VI published two encyclicals. The first was *Populorum Progressio* in 1967. Its topic was the development of peoples and its central theme was that the economy of the

world should serve all humankind and not just the few. It met a generally positive response and is recognised as one of Paul's best encyclicals. It strongly influenced the meeting in Medellin, Colombia, of CELAM, the Council of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America in 1968, with its explicit option for the poor. That CELAM meeting in its turn had a long-term influence on the Jesuit Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who was ordained priest in Argentina in 1969.

The second encyclical was *Humanae Vitae*, 1968, which condemned artificial methods of contraception. This document was in general – and in contrast to *Populorum Progressio* – not well received. It fed into the general turbulence – especially among priests, religious and theologians - which by that time was affecting the Catholic Church quite widely. It was a situation that the writer Peter Hebblethwaite summed up in a book titled, *The Runaway Church*.

By 1969, the year in which the first Extraordinary Synod of Bishops was held, with its theme of primacy and episcopacy, there was a high degree of restiveness among the clergy. Members of associations of Catholic priests in a number of countries gathered in Rome in that year as an alternative synod. It was rather disorganised and had little impact, but it was expressive of the considerable unrest in the Church.

The historian of religion, Philip Jenkins, claims that from 1968 to 1973 resignations of priests were so numerous that three-quarters of all ordinations in those years would have been required to make up the loss, not counting losses from death or retirement. In religious orders too it was a time of turbulence with thousands of religious, especially in the West, leaving their convents or religious houses.

SLIDE TEN:

“Action on behalf of justice ... a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel”

Two of the themes I have just referred to – namely, the challenging situation among the clergy and also the focus on justice with *Populorum Progressio* and the CELAM meeting on Latin America – were explicitly taken up in the second of the regular Synods of Bishops in 1971. Its themes were firstly, the ministerial priesthood, and secondly, justice in the world. **Those huge topics turned out to be just too much for any one Synod to handle**, although the closing document on justice included the often-repeated paragraph: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”

SLIDE ELEVEN:

“Evangelising is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity”

The following Synod, in 1974, sought to avoid the mistake of taking on too much for one synod and focused on a single theme: evangelisation. It resulted in Paul VI's 1975 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi – Proclaiming the Gospel*, a

document that in June, 2013, the recently elected Pope Francis described as “the greatest pastoral document ever written” – how’s that for praise!

Central to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is the statement: “Evangelising is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and resurrection”. 38 years later, in 2013, Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium - The Joy of the Gospel*, explicitly intended by him as a programme for his pontificate, echoed and applied Paul’s words to our own day.

SLIDE TWELVE:

Section Two: The significance of the Extraordinary Synod of 1985.

A Synod that reveals a great deal about different approaches within the Church

The Extraordinary Synod of 1985, called by Pope John Paul II to commemorate and celebrate the Second Vatican Council expressed renewed commitment to that Council in all its major features. It also ***focused on the theology of communion as central*** to the way in which the Council understood the nature and purpose of the Church and its mission. That word communion is the first in the three words Pope Francis has chosen to express the nature of the synodal path we are invited to pursue from this October through to October 2023 — communion, participation and mission. I suggest that we spend a brief moment looking at that Extraordinary Synod because it tells us a great deal about the way synods can reveal and express the challenges, the mood, and the way things are moving in the Church.

Against the turbulent background in world and church in the twenty years following the Council, it is striking to note that the overall tone was considerably less optimistic about the direction of secular society around the world than had been evident at Vatican II. ***This Synod pointed to signs of the times that highlighted the distinction between the Church and the world and focused explicitly on the theology of the Cross, and on the suffering and even martyrdom that Christians can expect.***

SLIDE THIRTEEN:

Varying understandings of the title, “The People of God”

Moreover, the theme of the People of God, which had been the focus of the entire second chapter of Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church, was practically absent from the Synod’s Final Report. The main reasons for this were that bishops in countries such as Belgium and Holland, Germany and France noted a tendency to make a false opposition between the hierarchical Church and a “people’s Church”.

In addition to that, some bishops from elsewhere, such as Latin America and parts of Asia, spoke of a tendency to read the theme of the People of God in an ideological perspective.

We need to remember here the tensions regarding aspects of various forms of liberation theology in the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, particularly but not exclusively in Latin America, with the contention that some of those forms were too closely linked to Marxist ideas.

I would note in passing that a “theology of the people”, as it was called and developed in Argentina, had deliberately rejected Marxist analyses and themes, and that Jorge Bergoglio, our present Pope, was a strong supporter of this Argentinian approach. As is clear from his writings and speeches, the phrase, “the holy and faithful People of God” is one of his favourite ways of referring to the Church and has returned to the forefront in reflections about the Church and its mission.

SLIDE FOURTEEN:

Schools of thought regarding the Church, the way of seeing the relationship between Church and world, and the attitudes, programmes and actions that follow as a result:

Neo-Augustinian; Communitarian; Forms of liberation theology

The Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles – later Cardinal Dulles – spoke of major schools of thought that were evident at this Extraordinary Synod, and I want to mention them briefly because awareness of these kinds of differences within the Church – differences among committed and faithful bishops, priests, religious, and people – can help us to be aware that there are also different schools of thought in our own time. ***This can remind us that honest differences need to be lived with, talked through, and worked through without condemning or fiercely attacking one another ... or without withdrawing into our own separate bubbles. Synods and synodality can help us do that.***

One school of thought identified by Dulles, represented by people such as Cardinal Ratzinger and Cardinal Hoeffner of Germany, tended to depict the Church as an island of grace in a world given over to sin. Dulles referred to this approach as “Neo-Augustinian” – the thought of the great St Augustine certainly cannot be reduced to those few words, but what Dulles was doing was contrasting approaches by highlighting significant differences.

The second major approach, represented by bishops such as Cardinal Hume of England & Wales, Bishop Malone of the USA and Bishop Hubert of Canada, was described by Dulles as more humanistic and communitarian, and more positively disposed towards the world. In their view, said Dulles, “the urgent need is for a further development of collegial and synodal structures that the Church may become a free and progressive society, a sign of unity in diversity, at home in every nation and sociological group”.

Dulles also referred to a third school of thought, not as prominent in this Synod and coming from the developing countries, which promoted forms of liberation theology, and a style that was more politically confrontational

A very important point about these different kinds of approach is that they imply different programmes for the future, different styles of being Church. The contrasting approaches taken in recent pontificates, for example, reflect these differences.

I now want to offer a quick – and, I must admit, superficial - overview of the synods leading up to the election of Pope Francis in 2013

SLIDE FIFTEEN:

Section Three: A reflection on strengths and weaknesses in the synods, 1967-2013

The Synods consisted basically of general sessions and sessions in language groups. I was present as a secretary to English-speaking language groups at each of the synods from 1971 to 1980, and present for much of the 1987 Synod on the laity. Reflecting on the progress of Synods of Bishops over the years I have gradually come to an awareness of what, in my view at least, are among the strengths and weaknesses of the synodal process from 1970s right up to the time when Francis became pope.

SLIDE SIXTEEN:

Positive aspects of the Synods of Bishops, 1967-2013:

Regular contact among bishops in a truly global Church

The synods had the truly positive value that bishops from all around the world met every three years for a period of around three weeks. They came to know one another and to share ideas, experiences and hopes. This had not really happened in the years between Vatican I and Vatican II. The spirit of communion fostered by this new Synod of Bishops, should not be underestimated. It mirrors what Karl Rahner described as one of the major features of the Church emerging from Vatican II: it is now, in a way that it has never been before, a truly global Church.

SLIDE SEVENTEEN:

Beginning to see synods, at the universal, continental, national, and diocesan levels, as regular and important aspects of life in the ecclesial community. Synods for Africa, America, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Oceania

Another value is that since Vatican II the Church as a whole has again become accustomed to the idea of synods. Besides the general synods, there were special continental synods of bishops for Africa, America, Asia, Europe, Oceania, and also for particular areas such as the Middle East.

These synods have been, in numerous ways, important for the churches of the different continents or areas. Pope John Paul II held no less than 16 synods of bishops of various kinds. He kept the synods going in these years and he sought to reach out across the universal Church.

SLIDE EIGHTEEN:

The regular Synods of Bishops, have to date, studied topics of great importance for all in the Church: priesthood/justice; evangelisation; catechesis; family; penance/reconciliation; formation of priests; consecrated life; bishops; eucharist; word of God

Futhermore, the themes of the various synods express the way in which a whole series of really important questions in the life of Church were deepened and emphasised in the course of the synods. I would love to have said much more about the value of these synods and their topics.

SLIDE NINETEEN:

To some extent there has been consultation, even if not always sufficiently effective

And then too, although the consultation before the synods varied according to the theme of each synod - and on the effectiveness or otherwise of the consultation methods in different countries - there was at least a degree of consultation. The 1987 synod on the laity was one of the best examples of this consultation.

SLIDE TWENTY:

Less positive aspects of the Synods of Bishops: 1967-2013

Too much reading out of prepared speeches; not sufficient exchange of views

On the more negative side of the ledger: the synodal process, with much reading out of prepared papers, meant there was often not sufficient time for real exchange. I remember Cardinal Marty of Paris saying openly at one point – I think it was the 1977 Synod on catechetics - that a certain lassitude had fallen on the Assembly ... a comment that reflected the lack of dynamism and energy that was the experience of participants only too often.

SLIDE TWENTY-ONE:

It was widely felt among bishops and their episcopal conferences that the process was being run by the Roman Curia rather than being an effective expression of the collegiality of pope and bishops

I think that the most important point on the negative side is that as the synods progressed a considerable number of bishops and their episcopal conferences felt that the process was being run by the Roman Curia, ***rather than being an expression of effective collegiality of the world's bishops with the pope.***

At its heart, there was the view among many that Rome showed great reluctance in sharing the decision-making process with the episcopal college. And over the years this contributed to what many felt was ***a growing sense of stagnation*** where the synods were concerned.

When Cardinal Bergoglio became Pope it is said he recalled how in the Synod of October 2001 he and Cardinal Egan of New York had been appointed as Relators – Relators being those responsible for helping run a particular Synod. However, the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks meant that Egan had to return frequently to his diocese of New York so that, he, Bergoglio, had to do most of the Relator’s work. An Argentinian theologian, who knows the Pope, remarked that, “A Vatican official at the 2001 Synod came and told him what to do. That, said the Argentinian theologian, won’t happen any more” (Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*, 2015, p.329)

SLIDE TWENTY-TWO:

A considerable number of bishops did not feel an honest expression of their views would be welcome

Linked to that point, some bishops were reluctant to express views they felt would not please the Pope or the Curia, or that they felt could appear to be disloyal.

SLIDE TWENTY-THREE:

Diocesan structures/communication methods in the local churches were not, it was felt, sufficiently developed or organised so as to implement the Synods’ recommendations effectively **and in ways that would have local relevance**

A further problem about the synods has been, in many cases, the lack in many local churches of structures, such as effective pastoral councils, that would enable bishops and diocesan leaders to relate synod highlights and recommendations to the local situation.

I would like to emphasise a very important point here. In the letter I sent to you all before the weekend I quoted the following quotation from the *Vademecum* regarding the synodal path: “The objective of this synodal path is not to provide a temporary or one-time experience of synodality, but rather to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term”.

I think this is central to Pope Francis’ aim in launching this synodal path, 2021-2023. It means that **we have to establish basic structures – at least the minimum of structures - that will enable and ensure that synodal consultation continues as a regular and effective part of Church life at different levels. What we are talking about in the synodal path is not just a one-off and rapid consultation, but a style of being Church** - journeying together - that is built into the very life of the Church and that continues and develops throughout the third millennium. **This is so important that I want to come back to thoughts and suggestions about this in the Breakout Groups**

SLIDE TWENTY-FOUR:

Reflecting the previous point, it was felt that the two-way processes of consultation from and to the local churches and the central offices of the Church needed to be much, much improved

And then there was, and remains, the huge question of how the views of Catholic lay women and men around the world can be represented more fully and effectively. ***It needs improvement. It needs thinking and working through further. If, by God's grace, synodality is to reach its full potential, it is essential to keep working at this challenge.***

There were, of course, cases where women's voices were heard directly. I vividly remember Pat Jones, from the Liverpool Archdiocese, delivering a speech during the Synod on the laity. "I have learned to avoid attitudes and language of 'us' and 'them', she said. "And I have learned that together we can share responsibility, criticism and praise" ... SHARE responsibility, SHARE criticism and SHARE the praise. Wise words! They can help us avoid falling into the trap, the never-ending refrain of "why don't THEY do this or that".

SLIDE TWENTY-FIVE:

Section Four: With the election of Pope Francis, we have seen considerable development in regard to synods and synodality:

"From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I have sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council ... We must continue along this path. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church in the third millennium"

The words of Pope Francis that you see in the slide, and which come from his speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, express beyond any shadow of doubt the importance he attaches to synods and synodality. ***"It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church in the third millennium"***.

Pope Francis makes it abundantly clear that synodality is central to his vision of church renewal and evangelisation

SLIDE TWENTY-SIX:

Jesus Christ is the centre of synodality, NOT the Church itself

For Francis, Jesus Christ is the centre of synodality, NOT the Church. It is extremely important that the Church should not be self-referential, turning in on itself and over-preoccupied with itself. The end-result of synodality must NOT BE a narcissistic Church.

Using the image of sun and moon Pope Francis stresses that Christ is the sun and the Church, like the moon, **reflects his light not its own**. “Before all else, says Francis, the Gospel invites us to three things:

- first, to respond to the God of love who saves us;
- second, to see God in others;
- third, **to go forth from ourselves** to seek the good of others”.

SLIDE TWENTY-SEVEN:

Pope Francis: three words sum up synodality

LISTENING, PARRHESIA (boldness, frankness), DISCERNMENT

Pope Francis sees synods as a process rather than an event, a “journeying together”, but observes that “journeying together – laity, pastors, Bishop of Rome – is **an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice**”.

He returns again and again to three words that, for him, sum up synodality: **listening, parrhesia, and discernment**.

SLIDE TWENTY-EIGHT:

Firstly: A listening Church

Mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn

Firstly: a listening Church, which means everyone involved in the synodal process must begin by seeking in prayer - in faith and in prayer - to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. And it also means a readiness and a desire to listen to each other ... **mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn**.

To repeat what I said last week: the synodal reality should bear witness to the collegiality of the pope and bishops within the reality of the entire People of God. **That is why genuine consultation is absolutely central to synodality and why Francis is determined to put wide and effective consultation front and centre**.

SLIDE TWENTY-NINE:

Secondly: Parrhesia, a Greek word meaning boldness

Secondly: parrhesia, a Greek word meaning boldness or frankness – the courage and honesty to say what you think – and in this context not being afraid of what the pope or others might think. The participants in the synods, insists Francis, must express themselves honestly and without fear. You know, it is extraordinarily **liberating** to hear a pope say this!

SLIDE THIRTY:

Thirdly, Discernment

Seeking together, in faith and prayer

To discover and implement "God's dream for us"

Thirdly: discernment. I would simply note that as we look back at the synods and councils of the two thousand years of the Church's history, discernment has to do with the inevitable tension between tradition and innovation. It has to do with the challenge of maintaining identity and fidelity to the Church's apostolic origins while adapting to new situations and responding to new insights.

SLIDE THIRTY-ONE:

Discernment also has to do with the balance between the centre and the peripheries

Discernment also has to do with the balance between the centre, which must offer firm but perceptive guidance, and the various peripheries responding to new pastoral situations.

John O'Malley, the Jesuit historian who has studied the Church's councils long and hard, offers thoughts here that I find very apposite. "Every institution, he observes, needs firm guidance from the centre and a firm hand at the helm. For the institution to remain vital, however, the authority of the centre must be balanced by a periphery empowered to act on its own authority. If the balance between these poles is lost, it will almost inevitably result in either stagnation, on one hand, disarray, on the other, or, in extreme cases, dissolution".



“We must continue along this path. It is precisely this path of synodality that God expects of the church in the third millennium”

VATICAN
NEWS



Bishops in the Hall of the Synod at the Vatican, October 2015

Following Vatican I: a loss of equilibrium between the hierarchical and communal aspects of the church

The emphasis on authority led to:

- a focus on a relationship of superiority and subordination
- a focus on elements of separation in ecclesiastical structures

“Listen to the Holy Spirit. Listen to each other. Do not leave anyone out”

“Walking together reveals a way forward that is horizontal rather than vertical”



The papacy, like the church, is capable of change without losing its identity or its continuity with the past

The Synod of Bishops is called to become ever more suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.



Consultation is fundamental to the way Francis sees synodality



“I do not want token consultation. I want to see real, not ceremonial consultation”





Francis sees structural change as important, but considers such change to be at the service of participation within the church



Development of participation throughout the church is **KEY** to understanding **HOW** and **WHY** Francis arranged the first synod of his pontificate– it was a “**SYNOD-IN-TWO-ACTS**”



The family synod was actually a lengthy two-stage process, 2014 - 2015





Listening (mutual listening)

Parrhesia (boldness, frankness)

Discernment

Genuine consultation requires
honest speaking if mutual listening
is to be fruitful



“The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect,
but a powerful medicine for the weak”



Two attitudes express synodality:

In the Spirit of the Lord we must say
everything we need to say

We must listen humbly and with an
open heart

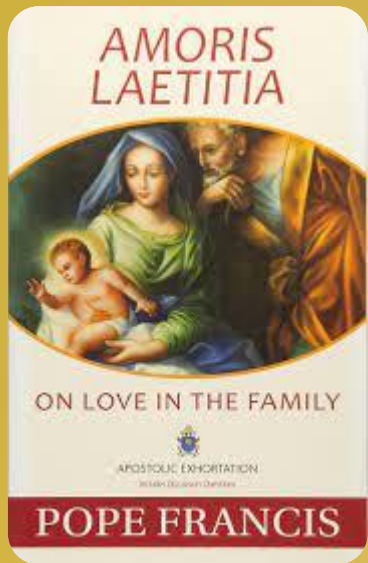


A synodal church:

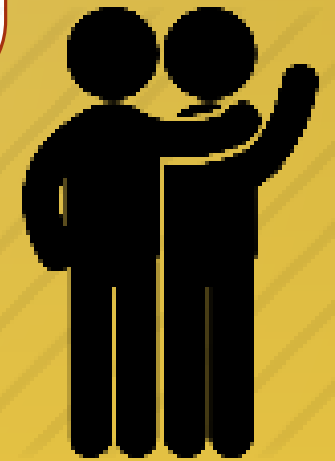
is a church of mutual listening

in which everyone has something to learn

and all seek to listen to the Holy Spirit



“Our teaching on marriage and the family must be inspired and transformed by Christ’s teaching of love and tenderness”
(*Amoris Laetitia*, art. 59)

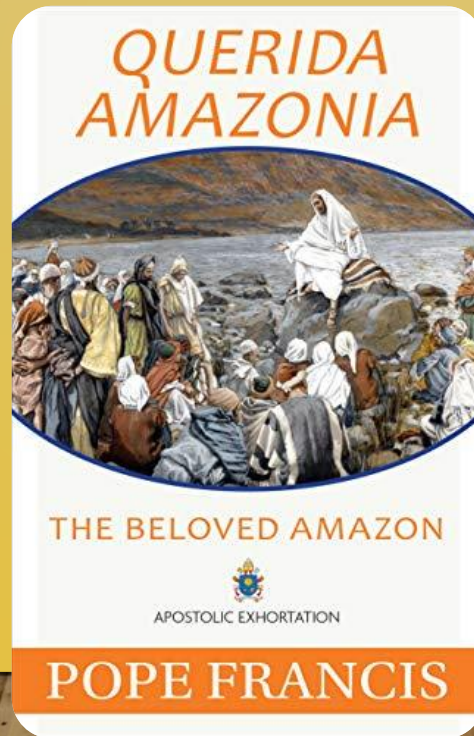


“Jesus wants a church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness” (*Amoris Laetitia*, art. 308)

Francis' hope is for a church that is
“a sign of mercy and closeness wherever
family life remains imperfect or lacks
peace and joy” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 312).

2018: Synod on Youth

2019: Special Synod: “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology”



Three features selected from these two Synods:

- Development in synodality
- Effective recognition of the voice and participation of women
- The climate crisis: integral ecology

Francis' approach to synodality is:

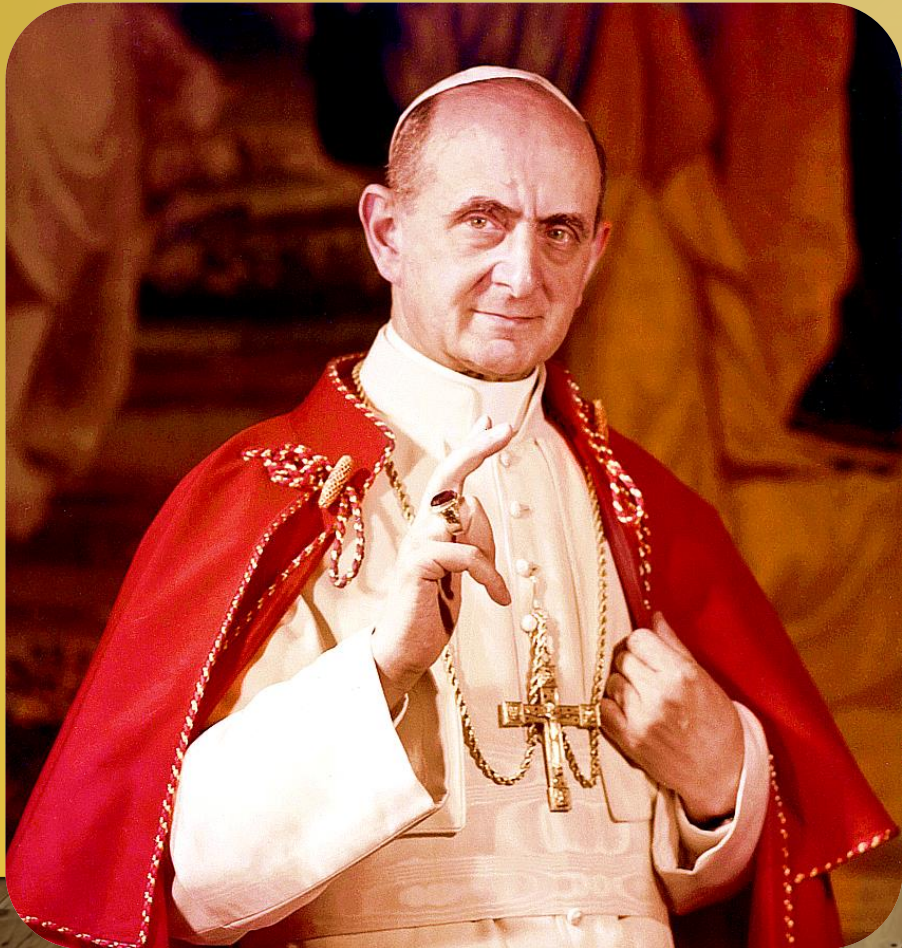
- that the synods should set processes in motion
- we should then allow time for these processes to mature

“Women’s leadership must be more fully assured in the heart of the church: it must be recognised and promoted” (Amazonian Synod, Final Document)

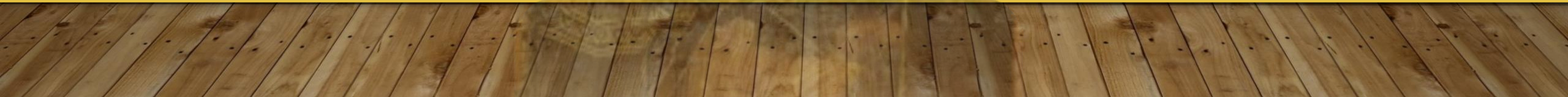
Overshadowing everything at the Amazonian Synod: the environmental crisis



“I thank you for having given me the opportunity to love you and to serve you” (Paul VI, 28th July 1978)







MBIT Synods SL Outline 20 October 2021

SLIDE ONE:

"We must continue along this path. It is precisely this path of synodality that God expects of the church in the third millennium"

At the end of the second talk about synods and synodality on 13th October I quoted from Pope Francis' speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops: "From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I have sought to enhance the synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council ... ***We must continue along this path. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church in the third millennium***"

Those of you who have taken part in these MBIT sessions on the 6th and 13th of this month will remember that I have suggested that at this point in the history of the Church we have been witnessing – from the early 1960s up to the present – a papacy in transition within a Church, the entire People of God, that has been and remains in a particularly intense period of transition. Such transitions bring painful tensions and loud disagreements - choppy waters that are not at all easy to navigate.

SLIDE TWO:

Following Vatican I: a loss of equilibrium between the hierarchical and communal aspects of the church

In my first talk on the 6th October I spoke of the years following the first Vatican Council in which the loss of equilibrium between the hierarchical and community aspects of the Church was only too evident. The relationship between the hierarchical ministry and the community of the baptised as a whole, and between the *Ecclesia docens* or teaching Church and the *Ecclesia discens* or learning Church appeared as a dichotomy, as an almost unbridgeable gap, rather than exemplifying the indissoluble unity of the Christian community. The great Dominican theologian, Yves Congar, referred to this way of seeing the Church as a "hierarchology".

SLIDE THREE:

The emphasis on authority led to:

- a focus on a relationship of superiority and subordination
- a focus on elements of separation in ecclesiastical structures

The emphasis on authority in this view led to a focus on a relationship of superiority and subordination, and a focus on the elements of separation in ecclesiastical structures. What is meant by the phrase "superiority-subordination" is vividly illustrated in the encyclical of Pope Pius X, *Vehementer nos*, of 1906:

“Therefore, this society [the Church] is of necessity and by its nature unequal, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these two categories that with the pastors alone rests the necessary right and authority to move and direct all the members towards the end of the society. The one duty of the multitude is to accept that they are governed, and to follow obediently the guidance of the pastors”.

SLIDE FOUR:

“Listen to the Holy Spirit. Listen to each other. Do not leave anyone out”

“Walking together reveals a way forward that is horizontal rather than vertical”

Last month, on 18th September, a hundred and fifteen years after Pius X’s encyclical, Pope Francis addressed the 1,000 or so representatives from the diocese of Rome – bishops, clergy, women and men religious, and members of the laity - in the Paul VI audience hall. “I have come here to encourage you to take this synodal process seriously, he told them, and to tell you that the Holy Spirit needs you”. “Listen to him. Listen to each other. Do not leave anyone out”.

Francis stressed that the diocesan phase of this synodal process is really and truly important because it makes it possible *to listen to all the baptised*. “There is considerable resistance, he said, to overcoming the image of a Church where there is a rigid separation between superiors and subordinates, between the one who teaches and the one who learns. Walking together, on the other hand, reveals a way forward that is horizontal rather than vertical”.

“We pastors, he added, walk with the people, sometimes ahead, sometimes in the midst, sometimes behind. The good shepherd should go forward in that way: ahead to guide, in the midst to encourage, and behind because the sheep have the ‘nose’, the capacity, to find new paths for the journey or to rediscover paths that have been lost.”

SLIDE FIVE:

The papacy, like the church, is capable of change without losing its identity or its continuity with the past

As we can see from that contrast between the approaches of two popes at different moments in history, the papacy - like the Church itself - is not immutable. It is capable of change without losing its identity or its continuity with the past. And that phrase, “continuity with its past”, reminds us that the papacy is among the oldest – if not the oldest - of continuous human institutions. The Roman Empire was only recently born when the early popes took their place on the chair of St Peter.

In the light of our synodality theme, the person of Pope Paul VI comes clearly to mind. The path on which the Church is now embarked emerged from the Second Vatican Council, which itself was one of the most important experiences of conciliarity or synodality since the great Councils of the first millennium.

We were fortunate at Vatican II to have had a Pope – Paul VI - who had the wisdom and courage to discern and accept, even if very cautiously, that a renewal of the synodal path was necessary in the Catholic Church.

When I say the Catholic Church, I am at the same time deeply convinced that the renewed take-up of synodality emerging from Vatican II could, as it develops in the course of time, be of enormous importance for the further and deeper development of ecumenical relationships among the Christian churches and communities around the world – moving us towards greater unity, even if the form that such unity could or should take is probably beyond our capacity to visualise at this point in time.

SLIDE SIX:

The Synod of Bishops is called to become ever more suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation

In Jorge Mario Bergoglio we now have a Pope who is convinced that it is necessary to develop synods and synodality much further.

“At a point in history, says Francis, when the Church is embarking upon a ‘new chapter of evangelisation’ requiring her to be ‘throughout the world ... permanently in a state of mission’, the Synod of Bishops is called, like every other ecclesiastical institution, to become ever more ‘suitably **channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation**”.

Francis has taken up the challenge of synodality with **an openness to the future that is deeply rooted in his hope in God**. The word “hope” in that phrase is important.

In his interview with Antonio Spadaro in August 2013, Pope Francis responded to the question: “how can we be optimistic in a world in crisis?”. He replied: “I do not like to use the word optimism because it refers to a psychological state. I prefer to use the word hope instead, according to what we read in the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter eleven ... Christian hope does not deceive. It is a theological virtue and therefore, ultimately, a gift from God that cannot be reduced to optimism, which is only human. God does not mislead hope; God cannot deny himself. God is all promise.”

SLIDE SEVEN:

Consultation is fundamental to the way Francis sees synodality

In that same interview Francis described how he had come to recognise the importance of consultation – consultation being fundamental to the way he sees synodality. Reflecting on his earlier life as Provincial of the Jesuits in Argentina at the young age of 36, he admitted: “My authoritarian and quick manner of making decisions created serious problems. Over time I learned many things. The Lord has allowed this growth in knowledge of government through my faults and my sins”.

Francis described to Spadaro how, later, as Archbishop of Buenos Aires he had a meeting with his six auxiliary bishops every six weeks, and several times a year with the council of priests. “They asked questions and we opened the floor for discussion. This helped me to make the best decisions. But now I hear some people tell me: ‘Do not consult too much. And, decide by yourself’. Instead, I believe that consultation is very important.

SLIDE EIGHT:

Aparecida, 2007: the significance of the Latin American Church for the Universal Church

The relevance of this slide to synodality and the importance of consultation in the synodal process might not, quite reasonably, be immediately clear ... and yet it actually relates profoundly to both. The slide deliberately points, even if there is not the time to develop the theme this evening, to the significance and importance of the Latin American Church for the universal Church – especially in these first 20 or more years of the third millennium. At the upper left we have the very large Basilica of Aparecida in Brasil, and on the lower right we have a photo of Latin American bishops in 2007 at the fifth plenary meeting of CELAM, the Council of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. You can see Cardinal Bergoglio in the front row, third from the right.

It is widely known that Cardinal Bergoglio came second in the voting in the conclave of 2005 that elected Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI – Bergoglio had pleaded at that time with those who were voting for him not to vote for him, but to put their votes behind Ratzinger and thus avoid the impression of division in the Church. It was with relief that he returned to Buenos Aires after the Conclave. But, as he said at a meeting in Peru a month later, he felt that it was time for the Latin American continent “to lend a service to the universal Church and to share the gifts that the Holy Spirit had showered on its people”. This led to the very successful meeting in Aparecida two years later, a continental meeting that was genuinely synodal in style – both in the consultation process throughout Latin America (which naturally had strengths and weaknesses in this place or that place, like many consultations) and genuinely synodal in the meeting itself. This experience of Aparecida’s synodal style is one of the things that Francis brought with him to the papacy.

But another unexpected aspect of all this is, as Austen Ivereigh has pointed out, that Benedict XVI, who had provided theological justification for Vatican centralism in the 1980s and 1990s, **put his strong backing - AGAINST the advice of some of his closest Vatican advisers - behind this CELAM meeting at Aparecida.** In the words of none other than Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the early proponents of liberation theology, “Aparecida mostly happened thanks to Ratzinger”.

As you can see, there is much to reflect upon and pray about in that extraordinary development. If nothing else, it points to the wisdom of our not making judgements too quickly and superficially.

SLIDE NINE:

“I do not want token consultation. I want to see real, not ceremonial consultation”

“The consistories of cardinals and the synods of bishops are, for example, important places to make real and active consultation. We must, however, give them a less rigid form. I do not want token consultations ... ***I want to see real, not ceremonial consultation***”.

On a personal note I would add that as dioceses around the world begin to take up the challenge of the synodal process, ***it is essential*** that diocesan consultation should be as honest as possible – not a form of window-dressing.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel*, published in November 2013, which Francis described as indicating a programme for his pontificate, he made clear that consultation meant that he too must be concerned with the conversion of the papacy.

SLIDE TEN:

Francis sees structural change as important, but considers such change to be at the service of participation within the church

“It is my duty, as the Bishop of Rome”, he said, “to be open to suggestions which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelisation. Pope John Paul II – and it is significant that he quoted John Paul II here – John Paul II asked for help in finding, to quote, “a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation”.

Pope Francis then stated bluntly: “We have made little progress in this regard. The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion”.

As I look back at the initiatives and words of Pope Francis over the last eight years, I have become convinced that while he sees structural change as important, he considers such change to be ***at the service of the development of participation within the Church***.

SLIDE ELEVEN:

Development of participation throughout the church is KEY to understanding HOW and WHY Francis arranged the first synod of his pontificate– it was actually a “SYNOD-IN-TWO-ACTS”

Development of participation throughout the Church is key to understanding how and why Francis prepared and arranged the first synod of his pontificate – that synod was in fact more in the nature of a “synod-in-two-acts”.

The focus chosen for that synod was the vocation and mission of the family in the Church in the modern world. However, instead of following the rhythm that had become customary in the Synods of Bishops called by his predecessors, Francis chose an approach that would do two things:

- firstly, an approach that would bring problem areas and issues to the surface rather than leaving them to lie buried and out of sight;
- secondly, an approach that would thereby achieve wide and deep discussion and consultation on those issues right across the worldwide Church. This was very different to the way the Synods of Bishops had been conducted up to that point.

SLIDE TWELVE:

The family synod was actually a lengthy two-stage process, 2014 - 2015

Francis set about doing that by making this entire family synod a two-stage process:

- an Extraordinary Synod in 2014
- an Ordinary Synod in 2015

The difference between these two types of synod is that an Extraordinary Synod basically consists of the heads of episcopal conferences, while Ordinary Synods consist of wider representation from the episcopal conferences, representatives of religious orders and congregations and so on.

SLIDE THIRTEEN:

Listening (mutual listening)

Parrhesia (boldness, frankness)

Discernment

Pope Francis' purpose in this process was to bring out more fully **the three dimensions** that he considers essential to effective synodality =

Listening, Parrhesia (boldness, frankness), and Discernment

First dimension: mutual listening

In order to promote mutual listening, Francis wanted to stimulate as much genuine consultation as possible:

- consultation of the faithful before the first Synod, 2014
- further consultation throughout the church after the first Synod, and before the second and longer Synod, 2015

The point of the second consultation was to try to achieve further and deeper reflection than the first. The aim was to ensure that a more mature and fruitful discussion would result in the second Synod, 2015. And that was, in fact, what happened.

It reminds me of something of great importance in the conciliar process that developed at Vatican II. The periods of roughly nine months between each session were periods that allowed, in the light of the session just ended, time for reflection and discussion, and time for the revision of draft documents in the light of the Council debates. That made the following session far more fruitful than would otherwise have been the case. Those “inter-session periods” were crucial to the success of Vatican II.

Going back to the two-stage Synod of 2014 to 2015, what I have just outlined was not the only decision by Francis that made the synodal process more dynamic. He also decided that instead of the synods beginning with each bishop making a speech – a long and laborious process that limited interaction and dialogue – the bishops were now asked to submit their presentations two weeks before the synod. The meeting would then begin with a summary of these presentations, leaving time for far more interaction than had been the norm.

SLIDE FOURTEEN:

Genuine consultation requires honest speaking if mutual listening is to be fruitful

Second dimension: parrhesia, meaning boldness or frankness

The listening dimension of synodality, which must include real and genuine consultation, also requires the dimension of frank, honest speaking – *parrhesia* – if this listening is to be fruitful.

As Pope Francis prepared for the two-stage synodal process on the family, he had in his mind a determination to raise and openly discuss something that was a major issue for many married couples and their pastors – an issue of which he was vividly aware from his pastoral experience in Latin America, as well as from the relatively recent debates at the 2005 Synod on the Eucharist. That issue was the question of access to eucharistic communion for the divorced and re-married.

Since statistics indicated that Catholics in many parts of the world were getting remarried in more or less similar numbers as the rest of society, this was a matter that could not be swept under the carpet. Many of the remarried wanted to put the problems of their earlier marriages behind them and make full participation in the Eucharist central to the practice of the faith for them and their families. The problem was that by church law they were not allowed to go to communion. In practice, however, there was often a gulf between theory and practice and there were wide disagreements as to what should or should not be allowed. The general direction in which Pope Francis was inclining in this matter had become clear in 2013, the first year of his pontificate.

SLIDE FIFTEEN:

“The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine for the weak”

In a response to questions from journalists on the plane returning from the World Youth Day in Brasil, he said: “I believe this is the time of mercy. The Church is a mother: she must reach out to heal wounds. This time is a *kairos* of mercy”. And in *Evangelii Gaudium* he had written, “The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (art.47).

Aware that there were widely differing views among bishops about how to deal with this issue, Francis decided to have everyone face it rather than leaving it festering beneath the surface. He knew that Cardinal Walter Kasper held the view that, while valid marriages remain indissoluble, there are conditions in which mercy could be shown to divorced couples who sincerely wanted to make their new marriage work. He asked Kasper to address this question at the Consistory of Cardinals in February, 2014.

Kasper warned that there would be strong reactions if he addressed the cardinals on the topic. Francis knew this, and there were indeed very strong reactions from some against Kasper’s view. “I would have been very worried if there hadn’t been intense discussion”, Francis commented afterwards: “The cardinals knew that they could say what they wanted, and they presented different points of view, which are always enriching. Open and fraternal debate fosters the growth of theological and pastoral thought. I am not afraid of this; on the contrary, I seek it”.

We have there a very clear statement of what Francis has in mind when he speaks of *parrhesia*. It is very different to the approach that predominated in the pontificates of his two immediate predecessors. The stark degree to which Francis’ approach was different became evident at the opening of the Extraordinary Synod in October, 2014: “One general and basic condition, Francis said to the assembled bishops, is this: speak out ... Nobody should say: I can’t say this or they will therefore think this of me”.

SLIDE SIXTEEN: text as below =

Two attitudes express synodality:

- In the Spirit of the Lord we must say everything we need to say
- We must listen humbly and with an open heart

In words that combined the way he saw real, genuine listening on one side and speaking openly and frankly on the other, as two necessary sides of the same coin, the Pope referred to a letter one cardinal had written to him following the heated debates occasioned by Kasper’s presentation in the February Consistory. Francis quoted the letter, which said: “Some cardinals didn’t have the courage to say certain things out of respect for the Pope, believing that the Pope may have thought differently’.

“That was not good”, declared Francis. “That is not what synodality is about. We must say everything we need to say, in the Spirit of the Lord, without pusillanimity and without fear. At the same time, we must listen humbly and embrace with an open heart what our brothers tell us. These two attitudes express synodality”.

Third dimension: discernment

Discernment is a word that expresses the overall approach of Pope Francis, as a Jesuit, to spirituality and to life. As someone who has guided many people over the years through the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, he seeks to exercise discernment in the midst of every activity and in all situations. Discernment means seeking to listen to, to be sensitive to, the way the Holy Spirit is moving our minds and hearts in the midst of everyday life.

As the American Jesuit Ralph Martin describes it, “Discernment is the practice of making decisions in a prayerful way, which takes into consideration not only the Gospels and church teaching, but also the way that God works through all of us, individually. We reflect on what insights and impulses might be coming from God, and which may not be. In discernment, we use both our heads and our hearts”.

SLIDE SEVENTEEN:

A synodal church:

is a church of mutual listening

in which everyone has something to learn

and all seek to listen to the Holy Spirit

Discernment - communal discernment in this case - is also central to Francis’ vision of becoming a truly synodal Church. In his address in October 2015, celebrating 50 years since Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops, he said: “A synodal Church is a Church of listening. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn: the faithful, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome; each listening to the others; and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Revelation 2:7).”

In other words, a synodal Church is a discerning Church, in which everyone listens to each other and - in and through this listening - seeks to be attentive to the Holy Spirit.

In his book *Let Us Dream* Francis speaks explicitly of the discernment that resulted at the end of the 2015 Synod on the family after much discussion. He referred to positions that, to his regret, had favoured “for” and “against” attitudes and encouraged debilitating conflict, resulting in each side being entrenched in “their” truth and imprisoned in their own positions. However, referring to the approach that found wide agreement in the synod’s final document he said, “the Spirit saved us in the end, in a breakthrough at the close of the second meeting on the family by turning to the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas ...

“Because of the immense variety of situations and circumstances in which people find themselves, Aquinas’ teaching that no general rule could apply to every situation allowed the synod to agree on the need for a case-by-case discernment ... by attending to the specifics of each case, attentive to God’s grace operating in the nitty-gritty of people’s lives, we could move on from a black-and-white moralism that risked closing off paths of grace and growth. It was neither a tightening nor a loosening of the ‘rules’ but an application of them that left room for circumstances that didn’t fit neatly into categories”.

SLIDE EIGHTEEN:

“Our teaching on marriage and the family must be inspired and transformed by Christ’s teaching of love and tenderness” (*Amoris Laetitia*, art. 59)

Five years ago, in April 2016, Pope Francis published the apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia - The Joy of Love*. This document, which gathers together the fruits of the two-synod process of 2014-2015, is one of the longest papal documents ever written. There is not time this evening to go into this document in depth, but I would commend it to your reading and prayerful reflection. The more I go into it the more I am convinced that *Amoris Laetitia* will be right up there with other great documents - engaging both heart and head - that Francis has given to the church: *Laudato Si*, *Fratelli Tutti*, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, and so many others.

For Francis, in all his teachings – as in his life – the first and living rule is the person of Jesus Christ, his humility, his gentleness, his joy and his love. And that is the spirit that permeates the pages of *Amoris Laetitia*. As Francis himself says: “Our teaching on marriage and the family cannot fail to be inspired and transformed by Christ’s message of love and tenderness; otherwise, it becomes nothing more than the defence of a dry and lifeless doctrine” (art. 59).

SLIDE NINETEEN:

“Jesus wants a church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness” (*Amoris Laetitia*, art. 308)

Accompaniment is a word that springs out of the document: “I sincerely believe, says Francis, that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness” (art. 308).

There is great depth, in that seemingly simple statement ... great depth!

Francis is inviting us to be attentive to goodness wherever it is found. As he says in *Gaudete et Exsultate – Rejoice and Be Glad*, “If we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit rather than our own preconceptions, we can and must try to find the Lord in every human life” (art. 42).

SLIDE TWENTY:

Francis' hope is for a church that is “a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 312).

Francis' hope, as expressed in *Amoris Laetitia* is for a Church that is “a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy” and he advocates above all “a pastoral discernment filled with merciful love” (art. 312).

On a practical level and as a continuing follow-through to the extraordinary process that was the two-event synod of 2014-2015, Pope Francis announced in December last year that five years after the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*, and beginning on 19th March this year, 2021, the feast of St Joseph, there was to be a year focusing on the family and conjugal love. The Roman department for Laity, the Family and Life has been in the process of encouraging forums, symposiums, video projects and catechesis as well as providing resources for family spirituality, pastoral formation and marriage preparation.

In *Amoris Laetitia* the Church has a beautiful and valuable resource. I mention this because it is enlightening and encouraging to see in this pastoral outreach, five years after the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*, that a synodal process focused on this or that – as was the two-stage synod process of the Synod on the family – can be a process that has its own internal dynamism, a dynamism that does not close with the end of a Synod but that continues to be fruitful in the life of the Church. ***In all of this we see synodality in action.***

SLIDE TWENTY-ONE:

2018: Synod on Youth

2019: Special Synod: “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology”

Besides the synodal event of 2014 and 2015 with its two closely linked Synods, there have been two other Synods held by Pope Francis prior to the synodal process he has now initiated for 2021 to 2023. They are the Synod of Bishops in 2018 on Youth, and the special assembly in 2019 of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian region on the theme: “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology”.

SLIDE TWENTY-TWO:

Three features selected from these two Synods:

- Development in synodality
- Effective recognition of the voice and participation of women
- The climate crisis: integral ecology

You will find it very worthwhile to go into these two synods in depth. This evening I am simply going to select just three important aspects or themes from among the many that those rich ecclesial experiences open up ... always remembering that these synodal experiences, at their best, point us towards signs of the times that the Church is called to discern so as to respond effectively to new situations and challenges while remaining faithful to the call and mission given it by Christ.

The first feature or point to which I would call your attention concerns our reflection on the development of synodality itself. It is a feature that illustrates, yet again, the intention of Pope Francis to move away from the monarchical model that was predominant in the Church in earlier times. He is seeking to move the entire church towards a synodal model – **a style of being Church** - whereby a process of continuing and widespread discernment leads us to the action that necessarily issues from that discernment.

We have seen in these talks that it had become customary since the synod on evangelisation in 1974 for the pope to gather what he judged to be the fruits of the synod and bring it all to closure through his authoritative interpretation in an apostolic exhortation.

SLIDE TWENTY-THREE:

Francis' approach to synodality is:

- that the synods should set processes in motion
- we should then allow time for these processes to mature

At the end of the Amazonian Synod Francis did not follow that pattern. Instead, he did something that at first sight might seem to be merely a technical matter of little importance. **It was, in fact, potentially very significant and quite deliberate on the part of Francis.** Instead of his apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (The Beloved Amazon) representing a papal act closing the Synod proceedings, he did three things that leave that particular synodal process open to further and ongoing development.

Firstly, he said: "I will not go into all the issues treated at length in the (Synod's) final document, nor do I claim to replace that text or duplicate it".

Secondly, he said something I find very refreshing. He said he wanted "to present the conclusions of the Synod, **which benefited from the participation of many people who know better than myself or the Roman Curia the problems and issues of the Amazon region** - since they live there, experience its sufferings and they love it passionately". Francis is stating that the centre can, and indeed must, learn from the many-sided periphery.

Thirdly, he added "I have preferred not to cite the Final Document in this Exhortation, because I would encourage everyone to read it in full".

Note this: the pope invites everyone to read his Exhortation AND the Final Document. We see here something that is distinctive of Francis' approach: **that of setting processes in motion and then allowing time for these processes to mature to the point where discernment and decision can be reached**. This is not kicking problems into the long grass – or kicking the can down the road as they say in the States – but allowing processes to develop.

SLIDE TWENTY-FOUR:

“Women’s leadership must be more fully assured in the heart of the church: it must be recognised and promoted” (Amazonian Synod, Final Document)

The second feature to which I would draw your attention is a feature that emerged strongly at both the Youth Synod and the Amazonian Synod: namely, **the growing recognition across the Church that the voice and participation of women in the Church must find effective recognition**. Already, on December the 8th, 1965, in his address to women at the close of Vatican II Paul VI said: “The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved”.

53 years later, in 2018, the Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Youth offered an unequivocal echo to those words: “The young also clamour for greater recognition and greater valuing of women in society and in the Church. Many women play an essential part in Christian communities, but often it is hard to involve them in decision-making processes, even when these do not require specific ministerial responsibilities. The absence of the feminine voice and perspective impoverishes debate and the Church’s journey, depriving discernment of a precious contribution. The Synod recommends that everyone be made more aware of the urgency of an inevitable change”.

That clear statement threw an ironic light upon a particular aspect of this Synod on Youth. Among the representatives of religious present at that synod two of the male superiors representing their religious congregations were non-ordained religious brothers, and they were recognised as members of the Synod with a vote. However, seven women religious superiors, representatives of their congregations, were also present ... but they were not recognised as members of the Synod with a vote. As you can imagine, this discrepancy occasioned a great deal of negative comment.

In 2019, the year following the Youth Synod, the Final Document of the Amazonian Synod in articles 99 to 103 was even stronger and more specific in its call for the recognition of women:

“The voice of women, it said, should therefore be heard, they should be consulted and participate in decision-making and, in this way, contribute with their sensitivity to Church synodality. We value the role of women, recognizing their fundamental role in the formation and continuity of cultures, in spirituality, in communities and families.”

In order to make the point even more clearly, the Amazonian bishops went on: “Women’s leadership must be more fully assumed in the heart of the Church, recognized and promoted by strengthening their participation in the pastoral councils of parishes and dioceses, and also in positions of governance”.

The bishops asked that the ministries of Lector and Acolyte be open to women, and Pope Francis responded positively to this In January this year. They also asked: “In the new contexts of evangelization and pastoral ministry in the Amazon, where the majority of Catholic communities are led by women, we ask that an instituted ministry of ‘women community leadership’ be created and recognized as part of meeting the changing demands of evangelization and care for communities.”

Here too Pope Francis has responded affirmatively by instituting for the universal Church in May this year the new ministry of catechist, open to women and to men – an important act on Francis’ part because it is an explicit recognition of lay leadership in many communities and situations.

And finally, “In the many consultations carried out in the Amazon, the fundamental role of religious and lay women in the Church of the Amazon and its communities was recognized and emphasized, given the wealth of services they provide. In a large number of these consultations, the permanent diaconate for women was requested. This, they said, made it an important theme during the Synod.”

Pope Francis has established a new commission to study this question. Whatever decision eventually emerges regarding the diaconate, one thing is clear: the process of synodality – as seen in both the Synod on Youth and the Amazonian Synod – has expressly raised the question of how, to quote: “the leadership of women may be more fully assumed in the heart of the Church”. It is a question that seeks and requires a constructive answer as the synodal path develops in the years ahead.

SLIDE TWENTY-FIVE:

Overshadowing everything at the Amazonian Synod: the environmental crisis

The third feature focuses out attention on a matter that - recognise it or not, and like it or not – touches every one of the almost 8 billion human beings on our planet, and, indeed, all life on our planet. **We are of course talking about climate change and all the other aspects of the environmental crisis in our time.** In this sense the Amazon Synod should be seen as a kind of son and daughter of the encyclical *Laudato Si*.

The final document of the Amazon Synod contained a series of proposals that go far beyond our possible considerations this evening. Overshadowing everything at this Synod, however, were the many threats facing the ecologically critical biome that is constituted by the Amazon.

If you have not had a chance to read the Final Document of the Amazon Synod and Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, *Querida Amazonia – Beloved Amazon ...* which is by far the most lyrical of Francis’ documents to date, and evidently deeply heartfelt ... the I would urge you strongly to take up both.

Behind them both - and at the heart of the Amazon Synod - stands article 139 of *Laudato Si'*, which presents the meaning of integral development, a concept central to the Christian vision of this Pope: "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature".

In *Querida Amazonia* Francis commented: "In a cultural reality like the Amazon region, where there is such a close relationship between human beings and nature, daily existence is always cosmic. Setting others free from their forms of bondage surely involves caring for the environment and defending it ... the Lord, who is the first to care for us, teaches us to care for our brothers and sisters AND the environment which he daily gives us. This is the first ecology that we need".

As we contemplate the UN's COP26 that is due to begin in Glasgow in eleven days' time, the danger of a gradual climate catastrophe around the globe – considered by many scientists to be arriving sooner than was anticipated - threatens every kind of life as the present century develops. To use the image of a train: the climate crisis train has long since left the station and is now gathering momentum ... rapidly gathering momentum.

Care for our common home, an integral ecology, are truly a sign of the times – a sign applied by the Synod to the Amazonian region in a special way - a sign that speaks to all our brothers and sisters, children of the Father who so loved the world that he sent his only Son.

SLIDE TWENTY-SIX:

"I thank you for having given me the opportunity to love you and to serve you" (Paul VI, 28th July 1978)

I am running out of time and I am in danger of abusing your patience. Forgive me! Before closing this last of my Mary Beaufort Institute talks on synodality, my mind goes back to the man who set the Synod of Bishops in motion: Paul VI. On the 28th of July, 1978, I was in Castel Gandolfo together with five colleagues from the Vatican's department for interreligious dialogue and 15 or so Buddhist leaders and Shinto leaders from Japan – Shinto being the most ancient religious tradition of Japan. We had been meeting together for four or five days of dialogue at a house of the Divine Word Father missionaries in the Alban Hills and we had been invited to conclude the meeting by a personal audience with Paul VI.

The Pope welcomed us and spoke with each of us. I can never forget his closing words: "I thank you all, he said, for having given me the opportunity to love you and to serve you" – **the opportunity to love you and serve you**, words that had the ring of truth in them when spoken by this man. He died at Castel Gandolfo from a heart attack ten days after our meeting with him.

That was the person who set the contemporary process of synods and synodality in motion in September, 1965 – a man who was and is a saint. May his intercession and that of all the saints, including John XXIII and John Paul II, accompany us in the present synodal process.

SLIDE TWENTY-SEVEN:

To close, I want to turn to Mary, Mother of God. I want to do this, perhaps rather eccentrically, through two images of her. Firstly, many of you will be familiar with the image of Mary, Untier of Knots, a devotion to Mary that is very dear to Pope Francis. He took it back with him to Argentina after a period of study in Germany. It is an image that might perhaps bring a smile to our faces while also contemplating the many knots that will have to be untied and serious obstacles to be overcome in the coming years along the synodal path. We can entrust the synodal path to the intercession of Mary, as Untier of Knots

SLIDE TWENTY-EIGHT:

I also want to turn to the intercession of the same Blessed Virgin Mary, presented here by an icon of great depth and beauty - the famous Our Lady of Vladimir, the *Theotokos* or God-bearer. This icon has long been venerated by the Orthodox Churches. May Mary intercede for us and the synodal journey, but also, on the eve of COP26 may she intercede in an especial way for all the efforts in these days, months, and years ***to heal and save our planet, humanity's common home.*** Thank you for your patience.