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ARTICLE

Catholic synodality: episcopacy, clergy, laity

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Abstract

Other articles in this issue of the *Journal* have examined different levels of government, whether in the Catholic Church or in the Anglican Communion, and presented the notion and practice of synodality at that level of the institution in question. This article takes a different methodological approach by examining the various categories of the faithful, and discusses their different roles in the processes and structures provided for in Roman Catholic canon law that might be called 'synodal'.

Keywords: Roman Catholic Church; synodical government

Introduction

Since ours is an exercise in what is sometimes called 'receptive ecumenism',[1] this article's title perhaps owes more to Anglican structures than those of the Catholic Church. The trichotomy of episcopacy, clergy, and laity presumably comes – whether consciously or unconsciously – from the tricameral structure of the General Synod and diocesan synods of the Church of England[2] and similar assemblies in other provinces of the Anglican Communion. I will follow the trichotomy broadly, albeit with a certain flexibility and without enslaving myself to it. In concluding, I will suggest categories that appear to be a better fit for the structures of synodality in the Catholic Church.

For reasons of brevity, much of what follows is largely limited to the structures of the Latin Church to which over 98% of Catholics belong; but it is important to note that the Eastern Catholic Churches have distinctive synodal structures that should not be forgotten even if they are beyond the scope of this paper.

Bishops

The introductory canon on 'bishops in general' reminds us that by divine institution they succeed to the place of the apostles and are constituted pastors in the Church

[1] For example, cf. P Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism' (2014) 51–2 *The Ecumenist* 1–8.
[2] cf. Synodical Government Measure 1969.

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in the threefold office of teaching, sanctifying and governing (cf. canon 375 §1).[3] The paradigm for the episcopacy is the diocesan bishop (cf. canons 381–402), to whose governance a particular church is entrusted; indeed the diocesan paradigm is so strong that even those bishops who do not have their own diocese to govern for the most part receive the notional title of some extinct diocese.

In his own diocesan church, the diocesan bishop is the centre of synodality. He convokes and presides over the diocesan synod (cf. canon 462), and is the sole legislator in the synod (cf. canon 466). While the synod is neither obligatory nor a permanent institution, the diocesan bishop is, however, required to constitute a presbyteral council, described as the 'senate of the bishop' (canon 495 §1), college of consultors (cf. canon 502 §1) and finance council (literally, 'council for economic affairs' – cf. canon 492 §1). The bishop may also constitute a pastoral council consisting especially but not exclusively of lay people (cf. canon 512 §1), although this structure is not obligatory – at least not yet. It is for the bishop to convoke, determine the agenda, and preside over all these organs (cf. canons 500 §1, 502 §2, 492 §1, 514 §1), although this does not mean he cannot invite proposals, and many bishops find it convenient to delegate chairing of meetings to others.

A coadjutor bishop with right of succession must be appointed as a vicar general, and auxiliary bishops must be appointed at least as episcopal vicars (cf. canon 406); they are members *ex officio* of the diocesan synod (cf. canon 463 §1, 1°), and one would expect the diocesan bishop to make appropriate provision for their presence in the other consultative and governance structures of the diocese.

Besides their functions in the particular churches, the bishops as a whole form a college which, together with the Roman Pontiff and never without him, 'is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church' (canon 336). This synodal college can be expressed in various ways, whether solemnly in an ecumenical council (of which all catholic bishops are members), or by joint action of the bishops spread throughout the world (cf. canons 337 and 339 §1). The worldwide episcopate is made manifest at the Synod of Bishops, whose function is to advise the Roman Pontiff on various important issues for the Church (cf. canon 342). As the name suggests, the bulk of the membership of the general assemblies of the Synod of Bishops consists of bishops chosen or elected from around the world (cf. canon 346).

At a national level, all diocesan, coadjutor and auxiliary bishops are members of the episcopal conference (cf. canon 450 §1) with either deliberative or consultative voice according to the statutes (cf. canon 454 §2).[4] Only exceptionally do non-bishops participate as members of the Conference.[5]

[3] References to canons in this paper are to the 1983 *Codex Iuris Canonici* unless indicated otherwise. In the case of canons amended subsequently, the year of the amendment is given.

[4] Essentially, 'consultative voice' means the right to speak; 'deliberative voice' means the right to vote when it comes to decisions of the conference.

[5] Those equivalent in law to a diocesan bishop are also members of an episcopal conference (cf. canons 450 §, 381 §2, 368): this would include such figures as territorial prelates, territorial abbots, ordinaries of personal ordinariates, etc., who preside over a particular church without necessarily receiving episcopal ordination; it also includes those who govern a particular church *sede vacante* and who might well only be in presbyteral orders. But these are exceptions to the rule, and the overwhelming majority of members of the episcopal conference will be bishops.

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Diocesan, coadjutor and auxiliary bishops are members of plenary and provincial councils on the still relatively rare occasions when these take place (cf. canon 443 §1). Other bishops – in particular those who are retired – can also be convoked; all participating bishops, and only the bishops, have deliberative voice (cf. canon 443 §§1–2).

Presbyters

Having considered bishops, our title might lead us to expect that we now turn to the 'clergy'; but that is not really appropriate for Catholic structures. In the Latin Church, clerics are either bishops, presbyters or deacons (cf. canons 207 §1, 266, 1009 §1). Clerics in the order of the episcopate we have already dealt with. Presbyters and deacons participate in synodal structures in very different ways, as might be expected from the distinction between the priest's 'mission and faculty of acting *in persona Christi Capitis*', and the deacon's empowerment 'to serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word, and charity' (canon 1009 §3 *CIC/2010*[6]).

The Church's tradition speaks of presbyters as 'cooperators of the episcopal order',[7] and so if the bishops are at the centre of synodality, the presbyters are to be found alongside them. The diocesan bishop is obliged to listed to the presbyters as individuals (cf. canon 384); however, the law speaks not only of individual presbyters but especially of a 'presbyterium' – that is, the presbyters of a diocese considered as a cohesive order.[8] This presbyterium is a constitutive element of the diocese (cf. canon 369). Unless they are themselves bishops, the diocesan bishop must appoint his vicars (general, episcopal and judicial) from the presbyterium, and typically many other diocesan offices, even if not strictly reserved to presbyters, will in fact be filled by presbyters.

At the parish level, the presbyter who is appointed as parish priest is called to know and hear the faithful in his care (cf. canon 529); in particular he presides over the consultative parish pastoral council (cf. canon 536). Somewhat in parallel with the bishop as the centre of synodality in the diocese, the parish priest should be at the centre of this common journey in his parish. A parish priest will often by assisted by other presbyters appointed as parochial vicars (often called 'assistant priests'); as presbyters they are cooperators of the episcopal order; but the canons describe them also as 'cooperators' of their parish priest (cf. canon 545 §1). The parish priest and his vicars are expected to work together so that 'through common efforts, [they]

[6] That is, as modified by Benedict XVI, motu proprio *Omnium in mentem*, 26 October 2009 in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis* 102, 8–10.

[7] cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 21-xi-1964 in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis* 57, 1–71, at n. 28, citing (in footnote 108) the preface for the ordination of presbyters in the then current *Pontificale Romanum*; id., Decree on Ministry and Life of Presbyters *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 8-xii-1965 in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis* 58, 991–1024, at nn. 2, 4, 7, 12. The same expression is retained in the post-conciliar rite of ordination of presbyters – cf. John Paul II, *De ordinatione episcopi, presbyterorum et diaconorum*, editio typica altera (Civitas Vaticana 1990) – with an allusion also in canon 757.

[8] It should be noted that the 'presbyterium' does not consist only of the presbyters incardinated in the diocese, but to other presbyters living and/or working there who might be incardinated in another particular church, religious institute or other structure.

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are able to provide for the pastoral care of the parish for which they are together responsible' (canon 548 §3). In particular, the parochial vicars are members *ex officio* of the parish pastoral council (cf. canon 536 §1).

At the diocesan level, perhaps the most obviously synodal structure which is particular to the presbyterium is the presbyteral council (cf. canon 495–502). All of the presbyters either incardinated in the diocese or exercising some office for the good of the diocese have active and passive voice[9] in the election of members of the presbyteral council (cf. canon 498). These elected members make up about half of the Council, while the other members are either *ex officio* (e.g. the vicars general, episcopal, and forane[10]) or appointed by the bishop (cf. canon 497). The presbyteral council, which is obligatory in every diocese, functions as a 'senate of the bishop' (canon 495 §1) assisting him in the government of the diocese, and whose advice he is obliged to seek in certain cases provided for by law.[11] Nevertheless, the role of the council is merely consultative (cf. canon 500 §2).

From the members of the presbyteral council, the diocesan bishop appoints a college of consultors, whose advice[12] or consent[13] he is required to seek according to law. The College also has the responsibility of verifying certain formal acts,[14] and has particular functions when the see is vacant[15] or impeded.[16]

The presbyterium has a significant role in the diocesan synod: the vicars general, episcopal and judicial are all members *ex officio*, as is the rector of any diocesan major seminary. Likewise, the members of the presbyteral council participate in the synod *ex officio*, as do the canons of the cathedral. From each vicariate forane the vicar forane and another presbyter participate. The bishop can also convoke other presbyters (cf. canon 463). In all, an appreciable proportion of the presbyterium will participate in the synod, and those presbyters are likely to make a very significant proportion of the membership of the synod.

The presbyterium of each diocese is also well represented in plenary and provincial councils. Vicars general and episcopal participate *ex officio*, and each cathedral chapter and presbyteral council send two of their members to a provincial council. Rectors of seminaries in the territory elect some of their number to participate, and it is possible for some other presbyters to be called to participate

[9] That is, they have the right to vote (active voice) and are eligible to be elected (passive voice).

[10] In England and Wales, a vicar forane (cf. canons 553–555) is typically called a 'dean' and his vicariate, usually consisting of a number of neighbouring parishes, a 'deanery'.

[11] In particular: the convocation of a diocesan synod (cf. canon 461 §1); erection, suppression or notable change to parishes (cf. canon 515 §2); remuneration of clerics performing parochial functions (cf. canon 531); establishment of parish pastoral councils (cf. canon 536 §1); building of churches (cf. canon 1215 §2) and their relegation to profane use (cf. canon 1222 §2); setting a diocesan tax (cf. canon 1263); designation of group of assessors for cases of removal of parish priests (cf. canon 1742 §1).

[12] The college of consultors must be heard concerning the appointment or removal of the diocesan treasurer (cf. canon 494 §§1 and 2).

[13] The diocesan bishop requires the consent of the college of consultors to place acts of extraordinary economic administration (cf. canons 1277 and 1292 §1); the diocesan administrator also requires the college's consent to grant excardination or incardination (cf. canon 272) or to grant dimissorial letters (cf. canon 1018 §1, 2°).

[14] In particular, the taking of office of a diocesan or coadjutor bishop (cf. canons 382 §3; 404 §§1 and 3);

[15] For the vacant see, cf. canons 419, 421 §1, 422, 485, 501 §2, 833, 4°.

[16] For the impeded see, cf. canon 413 §2.

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(cf. canon 443). These presbyters only have a consultative vote, but their contribution will be important for the bishops who exercise a deliberative vote.

At an international level, the Synod of Bishops and ecumenical councils are essentially episcopal in constitution, and when there is participation of presbyters it is because of special expertise or offices, rather than as a representation of a notional 'worldwide presbyterium'. The current 16th general assembly of the Synod of Bishops (the so-called 'Synod on Synodality') is something of a special case, to which we will return below.

Deacons

The diaconate is the first degree of the sacrament of holy orders (cf. canon 1009 §1), and deacons are therefore clerics (cf. canon 266 §1). As we have seen, however, deacons do not act *in persona Christi Capitis*, and while their service to the People of God (canon 1009 §3 *CIC/2010*) certainly implies a close link to the bishop, they are more his assistants than his co-workers or 'cooperators'. According to the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, this difference in theology between presbyterate and diaconate is clearly seen in the liturgy: deacons may have a prominent role at the side of the bishop, but unlike presbyters they do not join with the bishop in priestly actions.

The Second Vatican Council opened the possibility of restoring the diaconate 'as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy'[17] as opposed to a transitional order reserved to those preparing for the presbyterate. While the permanent diaconate is now a normal part of the life of the Church in many parts of the world, it is not obligatory, and nor is a college of deacons considered a constitutive element of a diocese in the way the presbyterium is (cf. canon 369). So a diocese with no permanent diaconate and no final-year seminarians will have no deacons at all; another diocese might have hundreds.[18]

Because of the theological difference between the diaconate and the presbyterate, the deacons are not simply grouped with the presbyters when it comes to participation in structures of synodality. They will, if assigned to an office assisting with the pastoral care in a parish, be *ex officio* members of the parish pastoral council (cf. canon 536 §1). Some of the clerical members of the diocesan pastoral council (cf. canon 512 §1) might be deacons. But deacons are not members of the presbyteral council or college of consultors of the diocese.

Perhaps because of the great variation in numbers of deacons serving in different dioceses, there is no guaranteed participation of deacons in a diocesan synod (cf. canon 463) or in plenary or provincial councils (cf. canon 443). The competent authority may make some provision for the presence of deacons in these structures, but they would fall under the heading of 'other clerics' in the case of a diocesan synod (cf. canon 463 §2) or 'other members of the christian faithful' in the case of

[17] *Lumen Gentium*, 29.

[18] One notable – albeit not uncontroversial – example is that of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, which according to the 2022 *Annuario Pontifico* had 446 permanent deacons, but just 135 diocesan presbyters, serving 57 parishes and 1.6m catholics.

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particular councils (cf. canon 443 §4). Where deacons are relatively numerous some such presence would likely be expected.

Like presbyters and the lay faithful, some deacons might be invited to participate in the Synod of Bishops or an ecumenical council, without changing the essentially episcopal nature of those assemblies.

There is thus a certain 'double contingency' when it comes to the participation of deacons in synodal structures: the structures in which they can participate are currently largely optional; and even when they do exist, there is no requirement of law that deacons be among the members.

Consecrated life

The tripartite division of episcopacy, clergy and laity passes over in silence a significant slice of the faithful, namely the members of institutes of consecrated life and similar structures. For brevity I will limit myself to religious institutes (cf. canons 607–709) although much of what I say will apply to other kinds of institute or society. There continue to be considerably more religious in the world than clerics.[19]

Consecrated life 'does not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church', but rather 'to her life and holiness' (cf. canon 207 §2). It is appropriate to mention it here partly because synodality is evident in the governance of religious institutes themselves, partly because those religious institutes therefore have a spirituality of synodal governance which they can share with the rest of the Church, and partly because the synodal structures of the Church reserve a place for religious.

A full survey of how synodality is lived in various religious institutes is beyond the scope of this paper. But every religious institute has at least a general chapter – that is, a collegial and representative organ of governance of the whole institute (cf. canon 631). Many institutes also have chapters at provincial and local level (cf. canon 632). At least the 'supreme moderator' (i.e. superior general) of each institute is elected by the general chapter. It should be noted that general chapters (and likely other chapters) are not merely consultative bodies: they have the power to elect or appoint officials, to make binding norms, and to make strategic decisions for the institute or its parts. Some might even go so far as to call them 'democratic', although I suggest that would be to mistake the source of authority in a religious institute.[20] Nevertheless, chapters are certainly exercises in walking a path together, and therefore can reasonably be considered examples of synodality.

Besides the internal synodality of each religious institute, religious have a role to play in the wider synodality of the Church. Religious holding pastoral offices in a parish are *ex officio* members of the parish pastoral council (cf. canon 536 §1). Some religious superiors must be convoked to a diocesan synod (cf. canon 463 §1, 9°), and other members of institutes of consecrated life may be chosen by the pastoral

[19] According to the 2024 *Annuario Pontificio*, in 2022 there were 5353 bishops, 407,730 presbyters (both diocesan and religious), and 50,150 permanent deacons; there were 49,414 non-clerical male and 599,228 female religious.

[20] cf. B Earl, 'Quis tibi dedit hanc potestatem?' in L-M Le Bot (ed), *La tradizione domenicana del diritto* (Roma, 2023), 125–138.

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council or the diocesan bishop to participate (cf. canon 463 §1, 5° and §2). Some major religious superiors, both of men and women, elected by and from among themselves, must be convoked to a plenary or provincial council (cf. canon 443 §3, 2°). These religious might bring something of their experience of synodality to the table; but they would also have to unlearn some of that experience if they expect anything more than a consultative vote.

The Synod of Bishops, when it meets in extraordinary or ordinary general assembly, includes some clerical members of clerical religious institutes (cf. canon 346); while in principle these are chosen by the superiors general of clerical religious institutes,[21] in the 16th Ordinary General Assembly (the so-called 'Synod on Synodality') the Roman Pontiff has determined that there be five men and five women religious elected by the respective unions of superiors general,[22] in addition to other religious invited to be part of the expanded membership of this assembly.

Lay faithful

It has often been suggested that the role of the laity, at least prior to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, was to 'pray, pay and obey'. I have not been able to trace the origin of the phrase, but I suspect it was never meant entirely seriously. Certainly St John Henry Newman once had occasion to observe to Bishop Ullathorne that the Church 'would look foolish' without the laity;[23] many of the great institutions, constructions and works of the Church could not have taken place without significant initiative, active participation, and direction from lay people, and not just their money.

In the context of synodality it should be noted that the first ecumenical council, at Nicea in 325, was convoked not by any bishop, but rather by a layman – indeed, at the time a mere catechumen – the Emperor Constantine. He also paid for it, which no doubt helped in its success.

The Church has also long held and continues to affirm that the 'entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief'.[24] The lay faithful make up the vast majority of this 'entire body of the faithful'; it is proper that they be heard, and indeed the canons affirm their right and at times their duty to make known their needs, desires and opinions (cf. canon 212 §§2–3). This is not to say that the opinion of many, or even a majority, of the lay faithful should be taken as the *sensus fidelium* or the *sensus fidei*.[25] But that the faithful – including in particular

[21] cf. Francis, apostolic constitution *Episcopalis communio* on the Synod of Bishops, 15-ix-2018, in *AAS* 110, 1359–1378; General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Istruzione sulla celebrazione delle Assemblee Sinodali e sull'attività della Segreteria Generale del Sinodo dei Vescovi* in *L'Osservatore Romano,* 1-x-2018.

[22] cf. General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Regolamento della XVI assemblea generale ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi, prima sessione, 4–29 ottobre 2023* (Città del Vaticano, 2023), Art 2 §2.

[23] J Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine,* edited with an Introduction by J Coulson and foreword by D Worlock (London, 1986), 18–19. The exchange takes place in the context of robust discussion of Newman's essay, rather than in the original text itself.

[24] *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

[25] cf. International Theological Commission, *Sensus fidei in the life of the Church* (Vatican City, 2014).

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the lay faithful – should be consulted on important matters of the Church seems only sensible.

The canons foresee several structures that can be used to consult the lay faithful. The parish pastoral council, and indeed the parish finance council, will be mostly lay bodies (cf. canons 536 and 537). The diocesan pastoral council is made up 'especially' of the lay faithful (canon 512 §1). The diocesan finance council is not required to have lay members, but if it is to have 'true experts' as required by canon 492 §1 it is likely that it will. The diocesan synod is required to have lay members (cf. canon 463 §1, 5° and §2). It is not strictly required that a provincial or plenary council have non-consecrated lay members, but as each diocesan pastoral council sends two of its members to a provincial council (cf. canon 443 §5) it is likely that there will be at least some.

Nevertheless these structures are not currently obligatory, except for the finance councils, which obviously have limited scope. This is in contrast to at least some of the structures for the consultation of the presbyterate, which are obligatory (cf. canons 495 §1 and 502 §1). Furthermore the vote of lay members of these optional structures is 'only consultative'.[26]

It is nevertheless noteworthy that the 'Synthesis Report' from the first session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops contains proposals for making the pastoral councils obligatory structures.[27] The *instrumentum laboris* for the second session even suggests that the expression *tantum consultivum*[28] be deleted from the Code of Canon Law;[29] but this is not about giving lay people (or even priests) a deliberative vote in structures of synodality. Rather it is a question of using language that values the contribution of all, even if ultimately deciding what is to be done is an episcopal function.

The Synod of Bishops itself does not *per se* number any of the lay faithful among its members (cf. canon 346), although in fact it has long been the case that some lay people have been invited to participate in its deliberations. For the 16th Ordinary General Assembly the Pope has determined that there should be 70 additional participants from the various continents: presbyters, deacons, consecrated persons, and lay faithful.[30] Of these, just over half (38) are lay people; the lay Prefect of the Dicastery for Communications is participating *ex officio*, and two other lay persons were appointed by the Roman Pontiff. Thus there are a total of 41 lay people participating as members of the synod, in addition to various lay guests, experts and officials.[31] Obviously this does not come close to proportional representation of the lay faithful, and the synod remains overwhelmingly a synod of bishops; but it

[26] Note, however, that the diocesan finance council does have to take deliberative votes to consent to alienation over the minimum sum and other acts of extraordinary economic administration (cf. canons 1292 §1 and 1277).

[27] XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, First Session, Synthesis Report *A Synodal Church in Mission* (Vatican City, 2023), 12(k) and 18(h).

[28] This expression occurs in canons 443 §§3–5, 444 §2, 450 §1, 500 §2, 514 §2, 536 §2.

[29] XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Second Session, *instrumentum laboris How to be a missionary synodal Church* (Vatican City, 2024), 70.

[30] cf. General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Regolamento della XVI assemblea generale ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi, prima sessione, 4-29 ottobre 2023* (Città del Vaticano, 2023), Art 2 §3.

[31] cf. Sala Stampa della Santa Sede, *Bollettino*, 21-ix-2023 and 16-ix-2024.

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would not be surprising if this increased lay participation were to become a stable feature for future synodal assemblies.

Praying, paying and obeying have never, of course, been exclusive to the lay faithful; indeed they are listed in the code among the obligations of all the faithful (cf. canons 210, 222 §1, and 212 §1). But the lay faithful also share in the right, and sometimes obligation, of all the faithful to make their views and desires known (cf. canon 212 §§2–3). This contribution seems likely to be enhanced by an increasing consciousness of synodality. The model of synodality present in the canonical structures nonetheless insists on the consultative nature of this participation, and the prerogatives proper to the bishops.

The old description of the function of the laity might therefore need a certain updating to 'pray, pay, have your say … and then obey'. Those hoping for a rather more revolutionary development in the government of the Catholic Church may be disappointed.

Conclusion

The structures of synodality in the Catholic Church are not parliamentary. While members of the faithful participate according to their status and function in the Church, they do not do so as distinct 'houses' with proper constitutional functions. The trichotomy of episcopacy, clergy and laity is not an appropriate way of approaching synodal participation, and even the pentachotomy presented here, while corresponding better to Catholic ecclesiology and life, is not in fact the way that participation in synodal structures is presented in the law.

The ordinary governance structures of the Church are monarchical; that is, the governance of the universal church, the diocese, and even the local parish, is entrusted to a single person. Ultimately, it is for that individual, whether Supreme Pontiff, bishop or parish priest, to decide what is to be done. Nevertheless these 'monarchs' are not to lord it over the faithful as kings,[32] but rather are to be shepherds or pastors after the model of Jesus Christ.[33] Pope Francis, addressing the priests of his diocese at the 2013 Chrism Mass, famously asked them to be shepherds 'with the smell of the sheep', that is, close to them.[34] Christ says the Good Shepherd knows his sheep,[35] which surely implies not only that he should know their smell, but also that he should listen to them.

The pastor of the Church must not govern alone or remotely. The synodal structures and processes of the Church provide a place for the pastor(s) to be close to co-workers and to the sheep, to get their smell, to get to know them, to hear them, to appreciate their needs and desires, and their ideas and talent. If we must impose divisions on these structures then we ought to talk of the dichotomy of pastor and faithful, or perhaps the trichotomy of pastor, collaborators, and faithful.

[32] cf. 1 Peter 5:3.
[33] cf. John 10:1–21.
[34] Francis, Homily for the Chrism Mass, 28-iii-2013.
[35] cf. John 10:14.

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Nevertheless, whatever labels we give to those participating in these processes, the key thing is that the process is one undertaken together.

In canon law we naturally want to look at the legal structures of synodality. But despite renewed interest in the term, we have yet to see a new explosion in celebration of diocesan synods, provincial councils and plenary councils. Sixty years on, we are still digesting the last ecumenical council, and probably are not quite ready for another. Rather the focus seems to be on promoting a culture of synodality. It strikes me, however, that we should not be expected to choose between 'synodal structures' and 'synodal culture'. Each should nourish the other in a symbiotic fashion: appropriate and functioning synodal canonical structures ought to foster a healthy culture of synodality; and a healthy culture of synodality pervading the Church ought to help the synodal canonical structures function appropriately. No doubt there is much still to be done in improving both the structures and the culture.

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