**SYNODALITY**

Austen Invereigh, D.Phil.

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The overhaul of the Synod of Bishops in Rome, and Pope Francis’s bid to introduce synodality into the life of the Church, may well come to be seen as his greatest reform. The modern synod of bishops, inspired by the Councils of the early Church, was created by Pope Paul VI in 1965 to make it easier for the Pope and the Curia to listen to the local Church and engage the faithful. But under the long pontificate of St John Paul II, the traffic was mostly in the other direction: the synod became simply another means used by Rome for making sure the bishops listened to the Vatican.

Having been a delegate at various synods, one of which (2001) he chaired, Bergoglio was convinced that as it was then constituted, the synod could never be a means of discerning, by the light of the Holy Spirit, responses to doctrinal and pastoral challenges.

“Either there is a pyramidal Church, in which what Peter says is done, or there is a synodal Church,” he told the Belgian magazine, *Tertio.* He defined this “synodal Church” as a kind of inverted pyramid, “in which Peter is Peter, but he accompanies the Church, he lets her grow, he listens to her, he learns from this reality and goes about harmonizing it, discerning what comes from the Church and restoring it to her.”

It was what Francis lived at Aparecida that led him confidently to tell the bishops in the 2015 Synod that “it is precisely this path of synodality that God expects of the Church of the third millennium”. His speech, marking the 50th anniversary of Paul VI’s refounding of the synod during the final session of the Second Vatican Council, so inspired Archbishop Mark Coleridge that the Archbishop of Brisbane returned with the idea of what became the Plenary Council for Australia.

Synodality takes seriously the Church as the People of God walking together, led by the Holy Spirit that makes itself felt in free speech and humble listening. Synodality understands that there could be no clear distinction between the “teaching” (*Ecclesia docens*) and the “learning’ Church (*Ecclesia discens*); to teach means to listen; you cannot evangelize without listening. When the People of God evangelizes itself, it listens to the Holy Spirit.

“Speak boldly, listen humbly”, Francis said at the start of the Synod in 2014.

Synodality takes seriously the participation of the People of God in the governance and direction of the Church. It is to restore the ancient church principle that *quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet* —what affects all should be discussed by all. It is also key to fostering the kind of adult Christian culture required by a Church of missionary disciples.

Participation, consultation, collaboration, mutual listening, discernment — these are the hallmarks of an evangelizing Church, rather than a clerical, paralyzed one, or a liberal, worldly one.