

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN ECCLESIAL ASSEMBLY

OVERFLOW OF THE SPIRIT



**ASAMBLA
ECLESIAL**
DE AMÉRICA LATINA
Y EL CARIBE

THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN ECCLESIAL ASSEMBLY. OVERFLOW OF THE SPIRIT

PRESENTATION

We are walking together –that is what synodality is about- towards the Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly. This unprecedented event holds at its core, something we cannot fully distinguish but it can become the transformation seed and strength of the Spirit in the Church.

Pope Francis started this pastoral process by inviting and presenting the Ecclesial Assembly this past January 24 of 2021. Since that day, there has been a constant increase of interest and enquiries. Many have joyfully received the invitation and have been actively participating. Although, there are environments in which we still see reluctance due to skepticism or to the conceptual framework difficult to leave behind. We see different paces, and that is normal.

The different members of the People of God will participate at the Ecclesial Assembly. Every vocation, charisma, ministry and state of life is invited. Women and men, young and adults, from the cities and countryside.



This event is not spontaneously emerging nor is a random result. Latin America and the Caribbean have a rich tradition and synodal experience throughout the centuries. It is the result emerging from the roots which marked the identity of the Church in the Continent since the beginning of Evangelization: Provincial Councils, Synods and General Conferences of the Episcopate, being Aparecida, the last one, taking place in May of 2007. PhD. Gianni La Bella contribution is set in this historical journey.

We must also remember, as universal background, the development of the Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, its effect in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Popes' Magisterium. More than a new language, synodality is found in the Church, which is self-understanding and presents to the world, as People of God, sent to proclaim Jesus as the savior of humanity. Fr. Mari Galli enlightens us with his theological reflection.

We must also say, that is not a mere methodological novelty spontaneously emerging from a desk. There are canonical foundations supporting the Ecclesial Assembly. The text issued by Fr. Pablo Gonzalez and Fr. Alphonse Borrás covers the legal validity of this original event.

We thank the authors for their contributions which have made us take ownership of the synodal path in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Since the beginning of his ministry as the successor of Saint Peter, Pope Francis has shared with us the dream of a missionary option capable of transforming everything, also the conversion of the papacy, (EG 32) and of the different ecclesial instances (EG 27-31). It encourages us to obtain *“structures which can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.”* (EG 27). This entails a change of mindset carrying a many times slow but much needed process, with progress and setbacks. Recognizing that time is greater than space *“enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results”* (EG 223).

The present publication seeks to encourage us and to be open to the impulse of the Holy Spirit. As expressed by the Holy Father, this path “must increasingly become a privileged instrument for *listening* to the People of God: For the Synod Fathers we ask the Holy Spirit first of all for the gift of listening: to listen to God, that with him we may hear the cry of the people; to listen to the people until breathing in the desire to which God calls us»” (Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* 6).

It is important to consider the continental path from the perspective of the Universal Church preparing to start the journey in October towards the Synod of 2023: “A Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.” These are not coterminous and even less conflicting processes.

We are moving forward to discern together the new challenges of evangelization we must face as People of God. On this path, there is no surplus or exclusion. As expressed in the slogan of the Ecclesial Assembly, “*we are all missionary disciples going forth.*”

+ Fr. Jorge Eduardo Lozano

Archbishop of San Juan de Cuyo

Secretary General of CELAM

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1. THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL FOUNDATION

Fr. Carlos María Galli

“ALL OF THEM WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT... THIS IS WHAT WAS SPOKEN THROUGH THE PROPHET JOEL: ‘IN THE LAST DAYS IT WILL BE - GOD DECLARES - THAT I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL FLESH’... BEING THEREFORE EXALTED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, AND HAVING RECEIVED FROM THE FATHER THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, HE HAS POUR OUT THIS THAT YOU BOTH SEE AND HEAR” (ACTS 2,4,17,33).

This contribution, requested by the Preparatory Committee of the Latin America and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly, seeks to set the basis of this new experience of the People of God in our region. This ecclesial, collegial and synodal proposal has historical, theological, pastoral and canonical roots, and it is a new step towards shaping *“the Latin American and Caribbean face of our Church”* (ApD 100). A renewed synodality emerges from personal, community, institutional and pastoral conversion of the entire Church and of everyone in the Church, supported on the overflow of the love of the Spirit of God and of the proclamation of the Gospel. The regional Church wishes to hear to “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 2,11) to channel God’s surprises. This theological reflection is located in the context of a double synodal process: on the one hand, the invitation to the (first) Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly 2021, and on the other, the path to the Synod of Bishops, which in 2022, will get together to discuss the matter: *“for a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.”*

This theological-pastoral reflection is oriented towards considering what this Ecclesial Assembly means as a new regional figure in our continent, based on the theology of synodality of the Church. The discourse follows four steps: (1) it starts from the recent synodal and collegial experience of our Church, (2) it analyzes the life of the Church gathering in assemblies and (3) the renewed theology of synodality of the People of God. (4) In these ecclesiological contexts it presents some aspects of this new regional Ecclesial Assembly and (5) it points out the synodal style behind it according to the overflowing logic of the Spirit.



1.1. The conciliar, synodal and collegial experience of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean

This new initiative must be oriented towards a process of continuity of change and of change in continuity, in the collegial and synodal tradition of Latin America and the Caribbean. Episcopal collegiality and ecclesial synodality shape the unique face of our Church since its origins. Since 1942, the Church has been present in America. In the XVI and XVII centuries, provincial councils took place in the archdioceses of Mexico and Lima, as well as many diocesan synods seeking to embrace the pastoral guidelines of the Council of Trent. This praxis contributed in shaping the Latin American heart and mestizo face of our Church. For three centuries, the local churches multiplied. Which in the processes of emancipation, suffered a great fragmentation. The Latin American Plenary Council, took place in Rome in 1899, summoned by Leo XIII after the request of the bishops of the region, strengthening ecclesial organization and renewing pastoral life. At the beginning of the XX century, the “bishop conferences” emerged, a meeting of bishops from the same country, in order to comply with a conciliar regulation. In 1942, the Episcopal Secretariat of Central America – SEDAC, was established, a collegial body of all Central American bishops.

In the fifties, the national bishop conferences were founded as permanent bodies. The General Conference of Bishops, a new way of collegial assembly in which the different episcopates are represented was created in this scenario. The I General Conference of Latin American Bishops, summoned by the *Ad Ecclesiam Christi* Letter of Pius XII and held in 1955, played a decisive role in the Latin American development. On Title XI of the final document we find a request to the Holy See for the creation of a regional body. Months later, the same Pope established the *Latin American Episcopal Council* – CELAM, whose firsts statutes were redacted in 1956 and authorized in 1957. Since then, the CELAM has been a body for contact and collaboration, and has provided a service of communion and coordination to the bishop conferences, currently made up of twenty-two.¹

Latin America is the first ecclesial region to have an episcopal body of collegial nature.

Albeit, the Latin American bishops requested the CELAM central offices to be located in Rome, it was Pius XII who suggested to be established in our continent. The choice was Bogota because of its equidistance from different geographical points. However, to express his closeness, the Holy Father established the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (CAL), in April 21, 1958. Later, other regional institutions were established, gathering together different members and ecclesial institutions: The Latin American Seminars Organization (OSLAM, 1958); the Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR, 1959); the Latin American Catechetical Institute (ICLA, 1960). In 1959, as an initiative of CAL, the first Inter-American meeting took place, gathering bishops from very region of the continent. During that time, Pope John XXIII promoted the joint pastoral.

The II Ecumenical Vatican was the greatest ecclesial event of the XX century. The dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* presents the mystery of sacramental communion of the Church, carried out by the pilgrim and missionary People of God in the world. This ecclesiology of communion presents the doctrine on apostolicity, sacramentality and collegiality of the episcopate in organic hierarchical communion with the bishop of Rome. Within that frame, it states that “In like manner the Episcopal bodies of today are in a position to render a manifold and fruitful assistance, so that this collegiate feeling may be put into practical application” (LG 23). The *Christus Dominus* decree on the pastoral mission of the bishops, when addressing the collaboration between the local churches of a region,

1 Cf. E. CÁRDENAS, “La Iglesia latinoamericana en la hora de la creación del CELAM”, en: CELAM, *CELAM: elementos para su historia 1955-1980*, Bogotá, CELAM, 1980, 27-110; L. ORTIZ, “El Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano: 60 años al servicio de la colegialidad episcopal y de la integración latinoamericana”, en: *CELAM: 60 años*, Bogotá, CELAM, 2016, 309-213.

it pushed the holding of provincial and plenary councils, and diocesan synods (CD 36); and promoted the creation of national bishop conferences (CD 37-38). In 1966, the *Motu proprio Ecclesia Sanctae* regulated the creation of conferences there where there were none and the renovation of the already existing Statutes.

After the Council, four general conferences took place, in Medellin (1968), Puebla de los Angeles (1979), Santo Domingo (1992) and Aparecida (2007), whose final documents contributed to the evangelizing task and integration of Latin America.² Our Church has been a pioneer in building a regional figure. CELAM was a decisive protagonist in the initiative, preparation, celebration and reception of the four post-conciliar conferences. These processes increased the Latin American ecclesial self-awareness, generated a dynamic of tight participation, aid in the outline of common lines for evangelization, and marked the different stages of the service of CELAM to collegial communion among bishops and to pastoral life of the churches. Our conferences are an original form of an assembly of bishops expressing collegiality different from that of continental synods and regional councils. These are possible because there is a shared ecclesial history, similar socio-cultural situations and communication in Iberian languages, since 90% of the Spanish-speaking population lives in America and 95% of those Portuguese speakers, live in Brazil. Because of their nature as “conferences,” our assemblies are community subjects of collegial decisions generating their own conclusions and documents, later submitted for the approval of the Pope.



² Cf. LATIN AMERICAN EPISCOPAL COUNCIL, *The five general conferences of the Latin American Bishops*, Bogota, CELAM - Paulinas – San Pablo, 2014; A. BRIGHENTI; J. PASSOS (orgs.), *Compêndio das Conferências gerais dos bispos da América Latina e Caribe*, São Paulo, Paulinas – Paulus, 2018.

During the Council, ties grew closer among the bishops of each country and the episcopates of the region, heirs of a common tradition, but separated by distance. In this context the initiative for a second Conference developed. Paul VI summoned it with the slogan: “*The Church, in the current transformation of Latin America, in light of the II Vatican Council.*” In August of 1968, Paul VI kissed Colombian ground, blessed the official see of CELAM in Bogota and opened the assembly, which later moved to Medellin. The sixteen final documents had a first collegial, situated and creative reception of conciliar teaching. In the post-Medellin period, CELAM pushed a fruitful exchange between Latin American reflection and universal magisterium, as expressed in the synodal assemblies of 1971, on justice, and in 1974, on evangelization.

In 1975, Paul VI published the *Evangelii Nuntiandi* exhortation, which focused the Church in its mission and had great impact in our region. In 1977, he summoned the III Conference with the slogan “*Evangelization in the present and future of Latin America.*” In January



of 1979, John Paul II began his missionary pontificate traveling to Mexico and opening the Assembly in Puebla. His document was a pastoral summary focused on the evangelization of culture from popular piety and freedom from the perspective of the option for the poor, encouraging communion and participation.

On October 12, 1983, John Paul II made his first summoning to *a new evangelization in her zeal, methods and expressions*. And sustained it in 1984, on his pilgrimage to Santo Domingo and starting the novena of preparatory years to the V Centenary of the Christian faith in America. He further a new evangelization, born “in” Latin America and not just tailored “for” this continent. Later, it expanded to countries of ancient Christianity and to young churches. In 1992, John Paul II opened the IV Conference with the slogan “*New evangelization, human promotion, Christian culture*.” The proposal of a new evangelization includes the comprehensive promotion of the peoples and enculturation of the Gospel in modern and postmodern society on major cities.

Benedict XVI opened the V Conference, at the Marian sanctuary of Aparecida, pushing the permanent continental missionary movement, with the slogan “*Disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that the peoples may have life in Him*.” It gathers the proposal of Santo Domingo: “pastoral conversion of the entire Church for a new evangelization” (SD 30) and stated that “all ecclesial structures and all pastoral plans, must be imbued in this missionary



decision” (ApD 365). Aparecida contributes to model “the Latin American and Caribbean face of the Church” (ApD 100) and presents the identity and mission of CELAM as a fraternal episcopal body serving the Bishop Conferences, the particular churches and regional evangelization.

“CELAM is an ecclesial body of fraternal support among bishops, whose primary concern is to work together for the evangelization of the continent. Over the course of its fifty years, it has provided very important services to the bishops conferences and to our particular churches, among which, we highlight general conferences, regional gatherings and study seminars in its various agencies and institutions. The result of all this effort is a brotherhood felt between the bishops of the continent and a theological reflection and a common pastoral language that fosters communion and exchange between the churches” (ApD 183).

New ecclesial bodies were envisioned from the perspective of an ecclesiology of communion of the churches in the People of God with a wide regional and continental vision.

“The People of God is built up as a communion of particular churches, and through them, as an exchange between cultures. In this framework, bishops and local churches express their concern for all the churches, especially for those closest, united in ecclesiastical provinces, regional conferences, and other forms of interdiocesan association within each nation or between countries of the same region or continent. These varied forms of community

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vigorously stimulate the “relationships of brotherhood between dioceses and parishes,”⁹³ and foster “greater cooperation between sister churches” (ApD 182).

In 1950, Yves Congar stated that many reforms come from the peripheries and are confirmed by the center.³ On the second half of the century, the Church in Latin America, which was a marginal region of Catholicism, completed its modest entering into world history. In 1968, Paul VI, was the first successor of Peter to travel to Colombia and set foot in Latin America. In 2018, half a century later, the first Latin American Pope canonized the first Pope of the region.

This papacy is rooted in the pastoral project of Aparecida. In this Conference, cardinal Jorge Bergoglio presided the Redaction Committee and the issuing of the conclusive document. In 2007, he served Aparecida, and since 2013, Aparecida collaborates with the ministry of Francis. The synodal vitality that the Pope of the end from the world gives to the entire Church, is an essential part of his Latin American experience and his participation in the V Conference. In his pontificate, the synodal dynamic of pastoral conversion, driven from the Latin American periphery, contributes to the missionary reform of the entire Church. Francis invites the People of God to move forward in synodality through pastoral and missionary conversion: I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything” (EG 27). The importance of the poor, discarded and people in the peripheries are secured with our South American Pope.

Aparecida had the prophetic vision of inviting the sister churches in the Amazon region to collaborate, anticipating the process started with REPAM in 2014, and culminated with the Synod for the Amazon (2019) and the Apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonía*.

3 Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*, Paris Cerf, 1950, 277.



“Create consciousness in the Americas of the importance of the Amazon for all humankind. Establish a collaborative ministry among the local churches of the various South American countries in the Amazon basin, with differentiated priorities for creating a development model that puts the poor first and serves the common good.” (ApD 475).

In *Querida Amazonia*, Francis provided “a brief framework for reflection” (QA 2) to enculturate the life and mission of the Church in the Amazonian reality according to the logic of Incarnation.

“Everything that the Church has to offer must become incarnate in a distinctive way in each part of the world, so that the Bride of Christ can take on a variety of faces that better manifest the inexhaustible riches of God’s grace. Preaching must become incarnate, spirituality must become incarnate, ecclesial structures must become incarnate. For this reason, I humbly propose in this brief Exhortation to speak of four great dreams that the Amazon region inspires in me” (QA 6).

In 2020, the *Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon – CEAMA* was created in analogy with the conferences of Major Superiors, due to its associative and collaborative nature, and with the Bishop conferences, because of its collegial and regional condition. It has been constituted as a mixed ecclesial group, representative and permanent, with bishops and



other members of the Amazonian Church who are not members of the College of Bishops. CEAMA, ascribed to CELAM, is a *Conference*, due to its associative and active nature. A conference is an ecclesial group, subject to common action in specific cases, as per the canon law. This ecclesial, regional, Inter-Diocesan and international identity is new to the life of the Church.

1.2. The Assemblies in the synodal tradition of the Church

In the First Testament, the assembly is “*the meeting of the People of God*” (Judges 20,2). The Hebrew term, *qahal* designates the assembly summoned and gathered by God to hold the covenant at Mount Sinai (Ex 24,6-8) renewing later it in the promise land (Jos 24,1). This word is often translated to the greek ἐκκλησία, which means “*summon*” (*ekklèsia*, from the verb *ek-kalein*). The choice and summon grant the People, free from slavery, the dignity as God’s speaker, with the awareness of being of His exclusive property (Dt 5,1-22) or “*holy convocation*” (Nm 29,1). The Lord, the pastor of his people, present through Moses (Jos 8,30-35). To Him, the Judges (Ex 18,25-26), the Elders (Nm 11,16-30), the Levites (Nm 1,50-51) are associated. The holy assembly includes not only men, (Ex 24,7-8), but also women, children and foreigners (Jos 8,33-35). The *qahal* is the *partner* summoned by God to renew the covenant (Dt 27-28; 2 Kings 23). It is the original way in which synodal vocation of the People of God is expressed, whose religious nature is manifested in the celebration of liturgical feasts (2 Cr 1,3-13; Ne 8,1-18). After a story of rupture, exile and diaspora, God promises to give a new heart to his People (Ez 11,19) and to establish a new covenant (Jr 31,31-34). The meeting of Israel will expand to the nations for I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh (Jl 3,1-4).

In the Greek culture, and above all, the Roman, the *ekklèsia* was the public assembly of the demos (Acts 19,32.39). Such meeting only included citizens, meaning, free males— which amounted to only 10 to 15 percent of the population— and excluded women and slaves. It took place on a regular basis and confirmed the magistrates’ decisions to amend a regulation and elect officers. It started with prayers and sacrifices to the gods of the city. Decisions were only valid if made by a selected number of votes. At the same time, the word *ekklèsia* is the most used term in Greek text in the Old Testament, *ekklèsia* appears 114 times, of which 62 belong in the *Corpus paulinum*. If we remember “the congregation in the wilderness” (Acts, 7,38), normally *ekklèsia tou Theou* calls the eschatological summon of the People of God through the meeting of Christian communities (Acts 8,1-3; 3 Jn 1-9;

Rev 2,1-8). As noted, the same word designated different assemblies, one at political level, another at religious level. In the Mediterranean world, it referred to the plenary assembly of citizens, whose rights lied in the *polis*; in the translation of LXX *ekklèsia*, it referred to the community of the Holy People summoned by God to a solemn meeting. The *ekklèsia cristiana* included the religious summon of the Hebrew people and the family reunion in the Mediterranean city⁴. Thus, the ecclesial use, assumed a breakthrough meaning and combined holiness with citizenship.

The newness of the Church of Jesus is expressed in the denomination '*ekklèsia tou Theou* (1 Co 1,1; 15,9), and also, in that other one, "Church of God in Jesus Christ" (Ga 1,22). If the Roman popular assembly was linked to a city, the Church is the group of Christians summoned by God in Christ, and gathered in communities made up in different human areas. For the moment, in every city of the ecumenist Mediterranean. For this reason, Paul greets the "Church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Co 1,2) or in "Galatia" (Ga 1,3). The Apostle refers to a region (1 Th 1,1: "the Church of the Thessalonians"), a city (Rm 16,1: "the Church which is at Cen'chre-ae"), a house (Pm 2: "the Church in your house"), or an assembly (1 Co 11,18)⁵. Also, Paul innovates before the first Testament since he uses the term church in plural: "the churches of Galatia" (Ga 1,1), "the churches of God" (1 Co 11,16), "the churches of the gentiles" (Rm 16,4), "the churches of Judea" (1 Th 2,14). The use of this term, dates back to Jesus himself, who says "my Church" (Mt 16,18) to refer to the messianic community established by the New Covenant in his blood (Mt 26,28). Built on the cornerstone of Christ, the Christian community is a "holy convocation" (1 Pe 2,10; Rm 1,7).

4 Cf. C. GIL ARBIOL, "La primera generación fuera de Palestina", en: R. AGUIRRE (ed.), *Así empezó el cristianismo*, Estella, Verbo divino, 2019, 166-173.

5 Cf. L. RIVAS, *Pablo y la Iglesia. Ensayo sobre 'las ecclesiologías' paulinas*, Buenos Aires, Claretiana, 2008, 5-9; W. KASPER, *Chiesa cattolica. Essenza - Realtà - Missione*, Brescia, Queriniana, 2012, 151-154.

Giving herself the name “Church”, the first Christian communities are recognized as heirs of the Assembly of the People of God (Acts 5,11). In her, God summons his People from every place on earth (Acts 15,14: *laós ex ethón*). In the Christian language, the “Church” designates a liturgical assembly (1 Co 14,19.28), also a local community (1 Co 16,1), and even, the community of the faithful (1 Co 15,9; Phil 3,6). These three meanings are inseparable. The Church is the People God gathers in and from the entire world, it exists in the local communities and it is carried out in liturgical assemblies, especially the Eucharist. The Church lives from the Word and Body of Christ, and in this way, she herself is the Body of Christ. In the new community, Jews and pagans are “one” in Christ (Ga 3,28), the New Man gathering two peoples (Eph 2,15). It is the meeting of the citizens of God representing the messianic people constituted in public spaces. Christians who came from paganism, alienated from the “commonwealth (*politeías*) of Israel” (Eph 2,12), are now “fellow citizens (*sympolítes*) with the saints and members of the household (*oikeíoi*) of God” (Eph 2,19).

The Church of Christ, as an assembly of the Holy People of God, gathers in assemblies. Today, it is called to further a synodal reform of all its communities and institutions. Synodality enlightens her life and mission. This new word has the background of a Greek verb *συνοδεύω* (*synodeúō*), which means “to go with,” “to be on a path together,” “to accompany”. In the present participle, it designates the “companions,” as the men who were traveling with Saul on their way to Damascus (Acts 9,7). The noun *συνοδία* (*synodía*) means a “group of people on their way,” as the caravan integrated by the family of Jesus and the pilgrims who were going back from the Easter feast (Lc 2,44). The noun “synod” does not appear in the New Testament. It is comprised by the preposition *σύν* and noun *ὁδός*. It states the path traveled by Jesus’ followers, men and women, making up a “caravan” (Acts 9,2). The expression refers to Jesus, who is introduced as «the way, the truth and the life» (Jn 14,6), and to the fact that since the beginning, the members of his community were called “the disciples of the way” (Acts 19,9.23; 22,4; 24,14.22).

The Apostolic assembly held in Jerusalem (Acts 15,1-35; Ga 2,1-10) was a stop in the evangelizing path providing the key for ecclesial catholicity. The Jewish crisis, pretending to impose circumcision before Baptism, challenged the Church to avoid enclosing within the limits of a sect. In the face of danger, the Apostles exercised community discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who confirm the universal vocation of the community of Jesus to become the Holy People, taken out of the peoples (ἐξ ἐθνῶν λαόν; Acts 15,14). The Apostles and priests, with the whole Church, participated in such assembly (σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ)” (Acts 15,22). After deep prayer, dialogue and debate, they were able to discern the will of God manifested through the Holy Scriptures and in the wonders of the Gospel. The letter addressed to the community of Jerusalem, to the brethren in Antioch announces the unanimous decision of opening the doors with a formula in which limelight of the Spirit is recognized: “*For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...*” (Acts 15,28). Such event, opened the People of the New Covenant to every culture and established the paradigm of synodal and conciliar tradition in the history of the Church.

For the first Christian generations *σύννοδος* it meant to travel together, and later, to meet in assemblies, especially in episcopal meetings. In Greek patristic the Word was used to designate a common path, the summoned assembly and even the same ecclesial communion⁶. Saint John Chrysostom wrote a beautiful formula: Ἐκκλησία συνόδου ἐστὶν ὄνομα⁷. Discussing Psalm 149, he contemplated the Church as the *company* of those who walk together, the *chorus* harmoniously singing a symphony of praise to God, a *system* in which there is unity because its different parts comprise a coordinated whole. For Chrysostom, Church is the “name indicating to walk together.” Thus, today we can say that Church, is the name for Synod, and Synod is the name for Church.



6 Cfr. G. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, 1334-1335.

7 Cf. SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Exp. in Psalm*, 149, 1; PG 55, 493.



The word *σύνδοδος* was translated into Latin as *synodus* or *concilium*. *Concilium*, used in the secular environment, described an assembly summoned by a lawful authority. Albeit the roots of the word “synod” and “council” are different, the meaning coincides with the notion of assembly. Even more so, “council” enriches the semantic content of “synod” since it is related with the Hebrew term *qahal* and its translation *ekklèsia*, clearly expressing that the summon of the People, is the work of God. In the first centuries, the word “synod” took on a specific meaning to designate the ecclesial assemblies summoned at various levels—diocesan, provincial or regional, patriarchal, universal— to discern doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral matters. “And on the II century, at least fifty synods took place in Palestine, northern Africa, Rome, Gallia and other places.”⁸ Up until Modern Age, important deliberations were carried out at councils and synods, terms used as synonyms, including over a hundred local assemblies. Ecumenical councils were self-defined as Synods, as confirmed at the II Vatican Council when it asserts: “this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit” (LG 1).

8 J. O’MALLEY, “For a Missionary Reform of the Church”, en: C. M. GALLI; A. SPADARO (eds.), *La reforma y las reformas en la Iglesia*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2016, 98.

Conciliar ecclesiology presents the mystery of the Church as the sacramental communion of the pilgrim and missionary People of God. The concept *communio* designates union with the Trinity and unity among people in communion with the Spirit Christ. After the II Vatican Council, there is a wide variety of sectors of the People of God in which the communal nature of the Church has matured generating positive experiences of synodality at diocesan, regional and universal levels. In which, fifteen ordinary General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops took place; the activity of the Bishop Conferences was consolidated in each country or region and there has been many synodal assemblies in many places; Councils were established favoring communion and cooperation among Churches and Episcopates in various continents.



This synodal praxis fosters historical, theological, canonical and pastoral research. In the current literature, the noun “synodality” became popular, in correlation to the adjective “synodal,” both derived from the Word “synod.” This new language gives testimony of mature acquisition in the ecclesial consciousness because of the experience at local churches and at the universal Church. Notwithstanding, the term not being explicitly found in conciliar teachings, Synodality is at the heart of its renewal work. After the II Vatican Council, magisterium and theology are providing a renewed understanding of Collegiality of Bishops and Synodality of the Church.

Pope Francis presents a renewed understanding of Synodality. He uses the expression *holy People of God*, completing a conciliar formula (LG 12a)⁹. His programmatic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* introduces the Church going forth in mission and sets the course of his synodal teachings. It is clear that he “wishes to personally reinforce the synodal aspects in the Catholic Church”¹⁰. The recent book-journal *Let Us Dream*, refers to Synodal life and confesses a wish:

“My concern as Pope has been to encourage such overflows within the Church by reinvigorating the ancient practice of synodality. I have wanted to develop this ancient process, not just for the sake of the Church, but as a service to a humanity that is so often locked in paralyzed disagreements. The word comes from the Greek *syn-odos*, «walking together», and that is its goal: not so much to forge agreement as to recognize, honor and reconcile differences on a higher plane where the best of each can be retain.”¹¹



9 Cf. C. M. GALLI, «El 'retorno' del 'Pueblo de Dios'. Un concepto - símbolo de la eclesiología del Concilio a Francisco», en: V. R. AZCUY; J. C. CAAMAÑO; C. M. GALLI, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, Buenos Aires, Agape – Facultad de Teología UCA, 2015, 405-

10 C. M. GALLI, “La figura sinodal de la Iglesia según la Comisión Teológica Internacional”, en: R. LUCIANI; M. T. COMPTE (eds.) *En camino hacia una Iglesia sinodal. De Pablo VI a Francisco*. Madrid, PPC, 2020, 111-132.

11 FRANCIS, *Let Us Dream. The Path to a Better Future. Conversations with Austen Ivereigh*, Buenos Aires, Penguin Random House, 2020, 84.

In 2015, at the Commemoration of the 50^o Anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops by Saint Paul VI¹². Francis asserted: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”¹³ Expressed with the parrhesia of the Spirit, this affirmation is combined with other bold expressions: “what the Lord asks, in some way, is all contained in the word ‘Synod’” and “Synodality is the constitutive dimension of the Church.” His teachings are validated by processes for participation, listening, dialogue and discernment promoted in the assemblies on love and family (2014/15), the faith of the Young people (2018) and the Church in the Amazon region (2019). The post-synodal exhortations *Amoris Laetitia*, *Christus Vivit* and *Querida Amazonía* are ripe fruits of this Synodal and Collegial practice.

The International Theological Commission undertook the study of the subject from 2014 to 2018 and issued an ecclesiology document which was approved by the end of 2017 and published in 2018. *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church* (SIN) exhibits the synodal figure of the Church.¹⁴ It provides a methodical, systematic, and synthetic development which integrates contributions of the biblical exegesis, the history of the Church, patrologia, systematic theology, pastoral theology, canon law, spiritual theology, liturgy, ecumenism and social doctrine.¹⁵ It teaches to speak not only about synodality *in* (agencies of) the Church, but also, and above all, Synodality *of* the Church. This is a dimension which configures the Church as People of God on the way and in Assembly summoned by the Lord. It indicates her way of living and acting, manifested and carried out in traveling together, in the gathering in assemblies and the active participation of her members in the mission. The People of God is the subject of Synodality, which indicates the *style*, the ordinary essence and work of and in the Church; it includes the *structures* and *processes* expressing Synodal communion at institutional level; it integrates the *events* in which the Church acts in Synodality at local, regional and universal levels. The *ecclesial assemblies*, from the diocesan synods to the ecumenical councils constitute privileged moments for communion and discernment at the service of evangelization (SIN 70).

12 SAINT PAUL VI, *Motu Proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo* (September 15, 1965) II: AAS 57 (1965) 776.

13 FRANCISCO, *Discourse at the Celebration of the 50 Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops* (October 17, 2015): AAS 107 (2015) 1139.

14 INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, Buenos Aires, Agape, 2018. The text is quoted with the Acronym SIN.

15 Cf. C. M. GALLI, “La figura sinodal de la Iglesia según la Comisión Teológica Internacional”, en: R. LUCIANI; T. COMPTE (eds.), *En camino hacia una Iglesia sinodal. De Pablo VI a Francisco*, Madrid, PPC, 2020, 111-132.

Synodality designates the pilgrim style of the Church of Christ on the way towards the house of the Father, in communion with the Holy Spirit in the convergent exercise of her charismas and ministries. Traveling the path together to carry out the project of the Kingdom of God and share the joy of the Gospel includes the fact to make a stop, gather and be together in assemblies that celebrate the worship of love for the Risen, discerning the voice of the Spirit who speaks to the churches. The work of the Spirit in the Body of Christ is the transcendental principle of Synodality. The Spirit vitalizes the communion among the faithful and the churches. The *nexus amoris* in the Trinity, shares that same love with the Church which is built as a “communion in the Holy Spirit” (2 Co 13,13: ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος). The gift of the Spirit creates a synodal communion among the faithful (*communio fidelium*) and among the churches (*communio ecclesiarum*), from which personal and community responsibilities emerge.¹⁶

The Spirit is the gift of God in whom the communion of the Church is possible. “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Co 12,4). The Spirit turns unity in diversity and diversity in unity. In Pentecost of 2020, Francis talked about the Spirit as the only gift in all, uniting and encouraging to self-giving –not to possession– as the root of unity in diversity.

“The secret of unity in the Church, the secret of the Spirit is *gift*. For the Spirit himself *is* gift: he lives by giving himself and in this way he keeps us together, making us sharers in the same gift. It is important to believe that God is gift, that he acts not by taking away, but by giving. Why is this important? Because our way of being believers depends on how we understand God. If we have in mind a God who takes away and who imposes himself, we too will want to take away and impose ourselves: occupying spaces, demanding recognition, seeking power. But if we have in our hearts a God who is gift, everything changes. If we realize that what we are is his gift, free and unmerited, then we too will want to make our lives a gift. By loving humbly, serving freely and joyfully, we will offer to the world the true image of God. The Spirit, *the living memory of the Church*, reminds us that we are born from a gift and that we grow by giving: not by holding on but by giving of ourselves”¹⁷.

16 Cf. H. POTTMEYER, “Dal sinodo del 1985 al grande Giubileo dell’anno 2000”, en: R. FISICHELLA (ed.), *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, Torino, San Paolo, 2000, 11-25.

17 Cf. FRANCISCO, *Homily at the Solemnity of Pentecost*, May 31, 2020.

The ancient tradition of the diocesan synod pumps the oxygen into the two lungs of the Church. In the synodal praxis, we see the diocesan Synod in Churches of Latin ritual and the Eparchial Assembly in Churches of Eastern ritual.¹⁸ Both represent the “vertex of participation structures in the Diocese.” In them, the People of God gathers in the local church summoned in the name of Christ, under the chair of their Bishop, to seek new paths for the mission, and in the close listening of the Spirit, collaborate actively to make appropriate decisions.

“Being at the same time “an act of episcopal governance and an event of communion”, a Diocesan Synod or an Eparchial Assembly renews and deepens the People of God’s awareness of co-responsibility. They are both called to give a real profile for the participation of all the members of the People of God in mission according to the logic of “all”, “some” and “one”. The participation of “all” is put in motion through *consultation* in the process of preparing the Synod, with the aim of reaching all the voices that are an expression of the People of God in the local Church. Those who take part in Assemblies or Synods *ex officio*, and those who are elected or are appointed by the Bishop are the «some» whose task it is to *celebrate* the Diocesan Synod or Eparchial Assembly. It is essential that, taken as a whole, the participants give a meaningful and balanced image of the local Church, reflecting different vocations, ministries, charisms, competencies, social status and geographical origin. The Bishop, the successor of the Apostles and Shepherd of his flock who convokes and presides over the local Church Synod, is called to exercise there the ministry of unity and leadership with the authority which belongs to him” (SIN 79).

From the main analogue of the Synod, the life of a local Church is carried through assemblies, councils, departments, meetings, rectories, deaneries, parishes and other organizations. The lay is called, from their baptismal and ecclesial vocation, to participate in synodal diocesan structures. They constitute the vast majority of the People of God and contribute plenty to the life and mission of ecclesial communities, popular piety and joint pastoral, as they apply their unique abilities in the various areas of family, social and cultural life.

“SYNODALITY DESIGNATES THE PILGRIM STYLE OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ON THE WAY TOWARDS THE HOUSE OF THE FATHER, IN COMMUNION WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT”

18 Cf. CIC 460-468; CCEO 235-243. In Eastern Tradition, the word “Synod” is assigned to the Assembly of Bishops; cf. CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, *Directory Apostolorum Successores*, AAS (2004) 166-176.

Since it took place in Latin America, in the last decades many assemblies have taken place to incorporate the teachings of the II Vatican Council. The International Theological Commission manifests

“in various local Churches, to boost the implementation of the teaching of Vatican II, there are Assemblies which express and promote communion and co-responsibility and contribute to integrated pastoral planning and its evaluation. These Assemblies are of great significance in the ecclesial community’s synodal journey, as the setting and ordinary preparation for enacting the diocesan Synod” (SIN 82).

Many diocesan synods have taken place after Vatican II; there were also many assemblies of the People of God in dioceses and parishes to establish common lines but different objectives. Dioceses are invited to commit to the synodal reform. The Bishop conferences of various countries held assemblies of different nature and continuity. Today they must find new ways for pastoral communion. The ongoing meetings of the Church in Germany and Italy are well known. In the XXI century, other synodal experiences took place, such as the Church processes in Venezuela and Australia.¹⁹ There were also special assemblies of the Synod of Bishops in some countries, such as the Netherlands and Lebanon. In 2021, there are fifteen international organizations –councils, federations, associations, assemblies, symposiums– gathering the different Bishop conferences. Since 1991, two continental Synods took place in Europe, two in Africa, one in Oceania, one in Asia and one in America, in addition to the Aparecida Conference. It is in these meetings where continental pastoral goals are set. The Spirit of communion is raising new synodal ways in regional and continental churches.

19 Cf. recent report *The Light from the Southern Cross. Promoting Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*, May 2020; <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TXZd4SP-EBk4VtH9JyB9PMSmjY9Mfj7E/view>; R. BORD, “El concilio plenario de Venezuela. Una buena experiencia sinodal (2000-2006)”, en: LUCIANI; SILVEIRA, *La sinodalidad en la vida de la Iglesia*, 293-328.

The Spirit of God blows like a strong wind from the global south. In 1910, 70% of the baptized Catholics lived in the north and 30% in the south. In 100 years, the geo-cultural structure of Catholics changed. In 2010, 32% lived in the north and 68% in the south: 39 in Latin America, 16 in Africa, 12 in Asia, 1 in Oceania. Today, two of every three Catholics live in Africa, Latin America Latina and Asia. In the last decade, there was a rise in Catholicism of 6% which comprise 18% of the world population. The greater growth is in the African continent. This process is expediting the shift to a global Church. After the first millennium, marked by Eastern Churches, and a second, led by the Western Church, we glimpse a third millennium invigorated by the churches of the south in a renewed intercultural catholicity. Presided in the love for the Church of Rome, an institutional, cultural and polycentric set up is consolidated. With Francis, the Catholic Church started to reduce institutional asymmetries between the north and the south. Two examples suffice: The appointment of cardinals in poor peoples, such as Haiti, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Vietnam, and the Pope travel to countries with a large population of Catholics, such as Brazil, Mexico, Philippines, United States, Poland, Colombia; and in addition, his travel to other countries with a Catholic minority or in conflict, such as Sri Lanka, Armenia, Bangladesh, Madagascar, Morocco, Thailand, Iraq.

1.3. **Synodality: ethos of the pilgrim People of God at a regional level**

The Church is Catholic because it carries the universal in the particular and the particular in the universal. In the universal Church, particularity is carried out inwardly as is the universality of a particular Church. Communion among churches is nurtured by its differences. The successor of Peter is “permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion” (LG 18) and “protects legitimate differences, while at the same time assuring that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute toward it” (LG 13). The *articular churches* “fashioned after the model of the Universal Church, in and from which churches comes into being the one and only Catholic Church” (LG 23). They are composed by human beings who participate, for many reasons, in the theology life of the faith and of historical reality of cultures. In them, the People of God and other peoples come together. They are ecclesial subjects who establish the one and only People of God in many original and concrete cultural ways. Their versatility, comprised by the many ecclesial disciplines, liturgical rituals, theological heritage, spiritual gifts and canonical laws, “evidence the catholicity of the undivided Church” (LG 23).

Synodal pilgrimage travels time in history through the many socio-cultural environments. A particular Church, is “part of the People of God” (CD 11) in a “portion of concrete humanity” (EN 62). A local Church, is the true Church of Christ living in a limited historical and human space. It is a complete Church – even though is not the entire Church – if in communion with other churches and the See in Rome (LG 26). The Church of God is present in a “particular human group” (AG 19). The Vatican II made a call to the local churches to be inserted in the culture of the peoples “in likeness of the economy of Incarnation” (AG 22^a). Because of enculturation processes, the Church has a beauty of a varied faced given by the different cultures (EG 116). Catholicity is carried out in the diversity of cultures and contributes to generate “the variety of local churches” (LG 23), whose dynamism “in no way harms its unity, rather it manifests it” (OE 2). Synodal communion is manifested through reciprocal exchange among churches.²⁰ Every “great socio-cultural territory” (AG 22b) marks the face of a Church or a group of churches.

Synodality implies a common journey for different churches through various communion bonds. The collegial life among bishops is intrinsically tied to the communion among churches.²¹ Ecclesial synodality is greater than episcopal collegiality since it implies communion among churches and all its members at every level. The second, is the sacramental and apostolic communion among the members of the episcopal college, led by the Bishop of Rome. Collegial union is carried out in the joint action of the college gathered in the assembly of an Ecumenical Council or scattered in the ministry of the shepherds giving way to the existing ecclesial, communion, conciliar, synodal and collegial nature of the various bonds.

20 Cf. C. M. GALLI, “Hacia una eclesiología del intercambio”, en: M. ECKHOLT; J. SILVA (eds.), *Ciudad y humanismo. El desafío de convivir en la aldea global*, Talca, Universidad Católica del Maule, 1999, 191-208.

21 Cf. H. LEGRAND, “Réformer la papauté pour servir l’unité entre les Églises”, *NRT* 136 (2014) 565-576.

Episcopal or Collegial Synodality, takes on a peculiar expression in the different assemblies held among bishops. It is fully manifested to the entire Church in the activity of the college together with the Pope. Its supreme realization is the Ecumenical Council; a true, partial and analogue way is embodied in the current assemblies of the Synod of Bishops. Synodality is also manifested in binding power –but limited to church groups– in provincial or plenary councils, and in the national, regional and continental bishop conferences.

The *Episcopalis Communio* Constitution of Pope Francis renewed the doctrine, law and praxis of the Synod of Bishops. He understands it as a process for reciprocal listening of the voice of the Spirit from conciliar theology of the People of God, Collegiality and primate with the participation of three different but united subjects: People of God, Episcopal College, Peter's successor, and in the context of a completely synodal Church. There, he highlights the three subsequent phases of the synodal process: preparation, consultation and listening to auscultate the *sensus fidei fidelium*; the holding of the synodal Assembly focused in common discernment of what the Spirit is saying to the communion of Churches presided by the Bishop of Rome; the phase of action or acceptance of the guidelines given in synodal documents and post-synodal apostolic exhortation.²²

The *Bishop Conferences* groups the various dioceses to favor communion in a given country or region, manifesting collegiality and serving evangelization. They are a valuable instrument for regional actions in Synodality and Collegiality,²³ and can be established in a nation or region according to pastoral needs (CCC 447/1). The Apostolic see can create conferences in regions of larger or smaller dimensions than those of a nation (CCC 447/2).

22 Cf. FRANCESCO, *Costituzione Apostolica Episcopalis Communio sul Sinodo dei Vescovi*, Città del Vaticano, 2018, 7.

23 “National or regional Episcopal Conferences are a recent institution, which emerged in the context of the rise of nation states and as such were given a higher profile by Vatican II (LG 23, SC 36-38) in the perspective of the ecclesiology of communion. They demonstrate episcopal collegiality and their principal objective is co-operation between Bishops for the common good of the Churches



Pope Francis invites to live Synodality in the different levels of the life in the Church: local, regional and universal. Thus, inverting the order of reference, given in the last decades, going from universal to particular. At the second regional level, it places intermediate synodal instances.

“The second level is that of Ecclesiastical Provinces and Ecclesiastical Regions, Particular Councils and, in a special way, Conferences of Bishops. We need to reflect on how better to bring about, through these bodies, intermediary instances of *collegiality*, perhaps by integrating and updating certain aspects of the ancient ecclesiastical organization. The hope expressed by the Council that such bodies would help increase the spirit of episcopal *collegiality* has not yet been fully realized. We are still on the way, part-way there.”²⁴

The experience in Latin America, due to the service of communion of CELAM, aid in the establishment of different episcopal organizations among particular churches and episcopates in other continents. The Latin American experience contributed to create new ways for regional intermediate synodality.

“The same reasons that led to the birth of national Episcopal Conferences led to the creation of Councils of Episcopal Conferences at the level of macro-regions or continents and, in the case of Eastern rite Catholic Churches, of the Assembly of Hierarchs of Churches *sui juris* and of the Council of Patriarchs of Eastern Catholic Churches. These structures encourage consideration of the inculturation of the Gospel in different contexts, keeping in mind the challenge of globalisation, and play their part in manifesting «the beauty of the varied face of the Church» in its Catholic unit” (SIN 93).

24 FRANCIS, *Discourse at the Comemoration of the 50 Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, October 17, 2015.

In the Catholic Church of Latin rite, there are several synodal structures at regional level: provincial and general Particular Councils, Bishop Conferences and varied regroups of the same, also at continental level. In the Catholic Church of Eastern rite, the Patriarchal and Provincial Synod take place, the Assembly of leaders of the different Eastern Churches *sui iuris* and the Council of Eastern Patriarchal Catholics. Francis defined these ecclesial structures as intermediate instances for Collegiality and Synodality. The International Theological Commission follows the order of Francis: the synodal dynamic starts at local level, followed by regional level to finish at global level (cf. SIN 77, 85, 94). Synodality at the local Church is followed by communion among churches as part of the Church, gathering both eastern and western traditions. In this context we find *synodality among regional Churches*.

“The regional level in the exercise of synodality is the one experienced in groupings of local Churches present in the same region: a Province, as happened above all in the Church of the first centuries, or a country, a continent or part of one. These were “organically united” groupings, where bishops “pooled their abilities and their wills for the common good”, moved “by the communion of fraternal charity and zeal for the universal mission » (LG 23). Shared historical origins, cultural homogeneity, the need to face up to similar challenges in mission gave them a new way of making the People of God present in various cultures and contexts.” (SIN 85).

The exercise of regional synodality reinforces spiritual and institutional bonds among churches and bishops, it favors mutual exchange of gifts and supports the design of common pastoral criteria of medium term. Synodality is a way of walking in communion as local church and as different national, regional and continental church groups. It is carried out, among other ways, in the common path of the diverse local churches sharing the *locus* in a province, or intra-national region, or in a nation, or in an international region in a continent, or an entire continent. Communion among different churches advances its ecclesial and synodal condition of subjects of a new evangelization embedded in a specific geo-cultural region.

The layout of the Church at regional and continental levels needs to develop a systematic theology of the local churches from the catholicity of the People of God and increase cultural diversity in particular churches in catholic and ecumenical unity. The experience, theology and canon law, present *various ecclesial figures* to describe ecclesial groups within a region or continent. Among those figures we find conferences, councils, groups, associations, federations, commissions and secretariats. The People of God is a culturally polycentric Church which will more and more generate original historical figures. We are called to think theological, spiritual and canonical new dynamics for intra and intercontinental exchange. Latin American synodality expressed in its general conferences and communion services continues to generate new synodal structures.

1.4. **The Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly, a new face of the Church**

The cultural physiognomy of the Latin American Caribbean Church has been immediately set up by the cultural characteristic of our peoples, with a majority of faithful, poor and young, and because of its insertion in a multifaceted region, which is, at the same time, one and plural, traditional and modern, western and southern. Our subcontinent has double affiliation: on one hand, it culturally integrates the western world; on the other, is part of the global south, affected by great inequality. As part of the American continent, it is the only region evenly Christian of the poor south, and yet, the subcontinent most impacted by Catholic tradition. The Church of the post-council has nurtured the hope of forging a new cultural synthesis from her own uniqueness, able to integrate Christian values and modern contributions. In 1966, saint Paul VI invited her to “assume her vocation to combine, in a *new and great synthesis*, the old and the modern, the spiritual and timeless, what other gave us and our own uniqueness” (Med Intr 7; PD 4).

A phrase from the document of *The Youth* of the Medellin Conference, keeps all its freshness to express the vocation of our Church. “Hence this Bishop Conference suggests to present more clearly in Latin America, the face of a genuinely poor, missionary and paschal Church, detached from all temporary power and boldly committed in the freedom of every and all men” (Med V, 15). The thinking and style, remind us of Argentine Pironio who was then secretary of CELAM and was secretary of Medellin. He referred to our great ecclesial

community as “the Church of Easter.”²⁵ Since then, this regional Church profiled its original physiognomy –poor, missionary and paschal– and strengthen its historical self-awareness.

As noted, the Latin American Church has a rich conciliar, synodal and collegial experience, both in its modern origins, as in its contemporary history, which has intensified since the creation of the *Latin American Episcopal Council – CELAM*.²⁶ The Portuguese word *caminhada* expresses with eloquence, our regional itinerary. Our Church and its communion organizations –CELAM, SEDAC, CLAR, OSLAM, ODUCAL– were pioneers in experience regional synodality among churches and have inspired the creation of similar institutions in other continents.

The current renewal and restructuring of CELAM is located in this new synodal and collegial dynamic of regional dimension. The exercise of synodality reinforces spiritual and institutional bonds among our churches favoring mutual exchange of gifts and aiding in the development of common criterion. Communion among different churches and episcopates advances its condition of subjects of the new evangelization embedded in a specific geo-socio-cultural region.

New regional synodal figures are presently constituted with their own cultural and pastoral peculiarities. A great sign of this, is the newness of the Church in the Amazon region. The creation and action of the *Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network – REPAM*, established in 2014, prepared the path for the call and development of the regional Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held in 2019, with the slogan: *Amazon: new paths for the Church and for a comprehensive ecology*. Later, Francis issued his exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, in which he presents four desires of regional dimension, the so called social, cultural, ecological and ecclesial “dreams.” Along the same lines, in June of 2020 we constituted an unprecedented institution in the Latin America Catholic Church: the *Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon – CEAMA*, ascribed to CELAM.²⁷

25 Cf. E. PIRONIO, *Escritos pastorales*, Madrid, BAC, 1973, 3-10 y 205-227.

26 Cf. C. M. GALLI, «Synodalität in der Kirche Lateinamerikas», *Theologische Quartalschrift* 196 (2016) 75-99; «A sinodalidade latino-americana e o Papa Francisco», en A. BRIGHENTI; J. PASSOS (orgs.), *Compêndio das Conferências dos bispos da América Latina e Caribe*, São Paulo, Paulinas, 2018, 191-213; «La actualidad del ‘pequeño concilio’ de Medellín y la novedad pascual de la Iglesia latinoamericana», *Teología* 126 (2018) 9-42. Con una mirada histórica amplia cf. A. BIDEGAIN, “Experiencias de sinodalidad en la Iglesia latinoamericana”, en: R. LUCIANI; M. P. SILVEIRA (eds.), *La sinodalidad en la vida de la Iglesia*, Madrid, San Pablo, 2020, 182-212.

27 Cf. C. M. GALLI, “Constitución de la Conferencia Eclesial de la Amazonía. Fundamentos históricos, teológicos, culturales y pastorales”, *Medellín* 179 (2020) 517-542.

We would like to highlight another groundbreaking event in progress: the (first) Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly, organized by CELAM and envisaged for November 2021. The purpose of this original experience is to gather the different representatives of the People of God which make up the churches and episcopates of each country, make grateful memory of the V Conference of Aparecida which calls each and every one of us to become missionary disciples going forth in Synodality and encourage hope, by glimpsing in the horizon, the Guadeloupien jubilee (2031). Our generation, experiencing a glo-cal –global, regional and local culture (FT 142-153)– must imagine and create new dynamics for intra and intercontinental synodal exchange.

Synodality deploys in a missionary pilgrimage of the Church in our history.

“Synodality is lived out in the Church in the service of mission. *Ecclesia peregrinans natura sua missionaria est* (AG 2), she exists in order to evangelise (EN 14). The whole People of God is an agent of the proclamation of the Gospel. Every baptised person is called to be a protagonist of mission since we are all missionary disciples. The Church is called, in synodal synergy, to activate the ministries and charisms present in her life and to listen to the voice of the Spirit, in order to discern the ways of evangelisation” (SIN 53).

The entire Christian community is the community subject of the mission, as stated in the conciliar decree: «the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God» (AG 35). The quoted text also includes an implicit quote from Francis: “we are always missionary disciples” (EG 120).

With the final document of the Synod on young people, we talked about “the missionary synodality of the Church.”²⁸ The prayer for the preparation for the next Assembly recites: “*Before present and future challenges we can rekindle our commitment as missionary disciples so may we have life in Christ, finding in Him, a joy, peace and hope that does not let down.*”

28 Cf. SINODO DEI VESCOVI, *I giovani, la fede e il discernimento vocazionale. Documento finale della XV Assemblea generale ordinaria* (3-28 ottobre 2018), Città del Vaticano, LEV, 2018, 118.

The next Assembly is a providential occasion to express the condition as *synodal subject* which bound the People of God. As baptized, we are *o*, traveling companions of the Lord. We are called to become active subjects in the universal vocation to holiness and mission since we participate of the only priesthood of Christ and are fortified in the charismas of the Spirit. The anointment of the Holy Spirit marks everyone and manifests in *the sense of the faith of the faithful*.

“The people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively (EG 119)”.

The *sensus fidei fidelium* expresses the prophetic condition of the holy People of God promoting the listening attitude in ever synodal discernment. The International Theological Commission in The “*sensus fidei*” document, stated the following:

“The necessary attitude is conveyed by the expression, «*sentire cum Ecclesia*»: to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the people of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their « walking together»”²⁹.



29 Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *The ‘sensus fidei’ in the life of the Church*, Madrid, BAC, 2014, 90.



The heart of the entire synodal Assembly is found in the listening, dialogue and discernment attitudes.

“Exercising discernment is at the heart of synodal processes and events. That is the way it has always been in the synodal life of the Church... It is a matter of the Church, by means of the theological interpretation of the signs of the times under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, travelling the path that is to be followed in service of God’s plan brought to eschatological fulfilment in Christ, which also has to be fulfilled in every *kairós* throughout history. Communal discernment allows us to discover God’s call in a particular historical situation” (SIN 113).

Exchange in a large Assembly enables the common attitude of listening to the voice of God in the various voices of the People of God encultured in the different peoples and their communities.

“Communal discernment implies carefully and courageously listening to “the groans” of the Spirit (cf. *Romans* 8,26) which emerge through the explicit or sometimes silent cry that goes up from the People of God: «to listen to God, so that with Him we may hear the cry of His People; to listen to His People until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.” A disciple of Christ must be like a preacher, who “has to contemplate the Word, but he also has to contemplate his people” (EG154) (SIN 114).

The prayer for the preparation of the ecclesial Assembly during this moment of enquiry, expresses this attitude of open listening excluding no-one: *“That, through listening, dialogue and encounter, and inspired by the prophetic voice of Pope Francis, for the care of the common home, of the cultures and with an effort towards achieving universal fraternity, let us be brave to foster a joint economy and integral education, aiding with love, those who have been discarded and excluded.”*

Social diaconia of Synodality can aid in nurturing justice, peace and care for the common home in our very fragmented America. Francis considers that the world needs this perspective to be able to mature dialogue processes to bridge the gap and walk together. Synodality can provide a service to universal fraternity and social friendship. The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* moves us to universal fraternity and social friendship. The logic of fraternity surpasses the excluding dialectic between friendships and animosity. The approach the other (*alter*) as brother (*frater*) –male or female– is the radical option since fraternity is the fullest expression of otherness and the answer to fratricidal hatred. Our Assembly must invoke God as “Our Father” and present, once again, Jesus’ teaching: “you are my brethren” (Mt 23,9).

1.5. The Ecclesial Assembly, a call for permanent conversion, Eucharistic communion and evangelizing joy

The new Assembly must stand out by a permanent conversion, Eucharistic communion, community discernment, overflow of the Spirit, an evangelizing joy and Marian tenderness.

As Paul VI drafted the profile of an evangelized and evangelizing Church (EN 13-16), the Conference of Aparecida drives a “community of missionary disciples” (ApD 364). Only and evangelized and discipular Church can, in a process of *permanent pastoral conversion*, become an evangelizing and missionary community. In 2017, on his visit to CELAM, Francis expressed:

“We often hear it said that *the Church is in a permanent state of mission*. Setting out with Jesus is the condition for this. Setting out, yes, but with Jesus. The Gospel speaks of Jesus who, having proceeded from the Father, journeys with his disciples through the fields and the towns of Galilee. His journeying is not meaningless. As Jesus walks, he encounters people. When he meets people, he draws near to them. When he draws near to them, he talks to them. When he talks to them, he touches them with his power. When he touches them, he brings them healing and salvation. His aim in *constantly setting out* is to lead the people he meets to the Father. We must never stop reflecting on this and examining our consciences. The Church has to re-appropriate the verbs that the Word of God conjugates as he carries out his divine mission. To go forth to meet without keeping a safe distance; to take rest without being idle; to touch others without fear.”³⁰

During this conversion and evangelizing process, the ecclesial community follows the defining pace of human life: movement and stop, path and meeting, synodality and synod.

30 FRANCISCO, “Meeting with Executive Committee of CELAM”, in: *Discourses and Homilies in Colombia*, September 2017, Bogotá, Archdiocese of Bogota, 2017, 59.

“Pope Francis teaches that «to walk together is *the constitutive way* of the Church; *the figure* that enables us to interpret reality with the eyes and heart of God; *the condition* for following the Lord Jesus and being servants of life in this wounded time. The breath and pace of the Synod show what we are, and the dynamism of communion that animates our decisions; only in this way can we truly renew our pastoral ministry and adapt it to the mission of the Church in today’s world; only in this way can we address the complexity of this time, thankful for the journey accomplished thus far, and determined to continue it with *parrhesia*” (SIN 120).

The moments for encounter in assembly are a stop for communion and discernment. For that, the Church is invited to cultivate a spirituality of synodal and missionary communion which helps to answer, with the original freshness of the Gospel, to the new signs of the times. The new Assembly must act in Synodality at the regional level of the Latin American and Caribbean Church.

The Church is the Assembly of the People of God on the way, summoned by God. Synodal communion has its source and Summit in the liturgical celebration, particularly, in the full, conscious and active participation of the Eucharistic banquet (cf. SC 10, 14). *Eucharistic communion* with the Body and Blood of Christ generates communion: “we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Co 10,17). Local churches are constituted around the Eucharistic table under the one and only Church. Every assembly carries out the communion of the “us” People of God expressing and presenting the Eucharistic banquet.

The nature of every assembly is manifested in the rite of celebration of the Synods–*Ordo ad Synodum*– governing since the Councils of Toledo of the VI century until the ceremonial of the Bishops enacted in 1984. The rite is centered in the celebration of the Eucharist and enthronement of the Gospel.³¹ Each session begins with the epiclesis to the Spirit: *Adsumus, Domine Sancte Spiritus*. The ecclesial assemblies are privileged moments for discernment guided by the Word and the Spirit. During the second millennium, the assemblies have sung the *Veni Creator Spiritus* in the context of the celebration of the *Mysterium fidei*.

31 Cf. G. RUGGERI, *Chiesa sinodale*, Bari – Roma, Laterza, 2017, 41-91.

The Eucharistic assembly is the source of *spiritual communion*. In it we see the specific elements of the Christian life manifested in *synodal affection*. The Eucharist begins with an invocation to the Holy Trinity and ends with its benediction. The Church, summoned by the Father, and with the outpouring of the Spirit, becomes a living sacrament of Christ: “where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18,19). The unity of the Trinity in communion with the three divine persons is manifested in truth and charity. The assembly favors communion through reconciliation with God and our neighbor. The *confessio peccati* celebrates the merciful love of the Father and expresses its purpose in unity: “so if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5,23-24). Synodal events entail acknowledgement of our own weaknesses and reciprocal ask for forgiveness.



At the liturgical assembly we hear the Word of God through the Scriptures, specially the Gospel, in celebration of the Sacraments, specially the Eucharist; embracing our neighbors, specially the poor. The dialogical structure of the Eucharistic liturgy is the paradigm of community discernment: before listening to one another, disciples listen to the divine Word. The Eucharist makes possible the communion of the Body of Christ. From it, men and women participate, who after being dignified by baptism, have drunk from the same Spirit and are members of one Body (1 Co 12,13). Synodal processes activate the convergence of this plurality in unity. Eucharistic communion boosts missionary expedition. He/she who participates of the Body of Christ is called to share, through an overflow of joy and gratitude, the gift of the encounter with Jesus and his brothers. Every synodal event drives the Church to get out of the camp (Heb 13,13) to proclaim the Good News of Jesus, the Son of God (Mk 1,1; 16,15), and walk together towards the eschatological goal of “God be everything in everyone” (1 Co 15,28).

Every institutional form of synodal discernment must be opened to the surprises of the Spirit of God. The gift of the Spirit makes us think in new, open, itinerant and relational ways.³²

“Actually, dialogue offers the opportunity to acquire new perspectives and points of view in order to shed light on the solution of the matter in question. It is a matter of adopting a relational way of viewing the world, which then becomes a form of shared knowledge, vision through the eyes of another and a shared vision of all that exists »” (SIN 111).

To move forward in synodal conversion and missionary communion, we need to nurture the patience of dialogue, speaking frankly and listening carefully. Discernment goes through many conversations and discussions until paths for the overcoming of oppositions and tensions are found, avoiding that differences turn into divisions and oppositions create bias. The music of the Spirit creates the beauty of a harmoniums symphony.

“In the dynamic of a Synod, differences are expressed and polished until you reach, if not consensus, a harmony that holds on to the Sharp notes of its differences. This is what happens in music: with seven different musical notes, with their sharps and flats a harmony is created that allows for the better articulation of the singularities of each note. Therein lies its beauty: the harmony that results can be complex, rich and unexpected. In the Church, the one who brings about that harmony is the Holy Spirit.”³³

32 Cf. C. M. GALLI, “Pensar conjuntamente en teología y en filosofía. Un estilo dialogal, itinerante, integrador”, *Teología* 129 (2019) 9-65; “The Fiftieth Anniversary of the International Theological Commission. Contributions to fundamental theology, Christology and ecclesiology,” *Ecclesiological Studies* 376 (2021) 167-192.

33 FRANCIS, *Let US Dream*, 85.

The new Ecclesial Assembly can become a humble expression of the *overflow of the Spirit of God* and of the eternal newness of Christ who “constantly amazes us by his divine creativity” (EG 11). When addressing the Church in the Amazon region, Pope Francis fosters enculturation of the Church in the many cultural environments. Synodality of the region can help overcome conflicts emerged from conflicting oppositions if integrating horizons broaden “in a higher plane that preserves what is valid and useful in both sides” (QA 104, cf. EG 228). In such exhortation he invited to follow the logic of the *overflow*, as done before at the Synod of 2019.

“In no way does this mean relativizing problems, fleeing from them or letting things stay as they are. Authentic solutions are never found by dampening boldness, shirking concrete demands or assigning blame to others. On the contrary, solutions are found by “overflow”, that is, by transcending the contraposition that limits our vision and recognizing a greater gift that God is offering. From that new gift, accepted with boldness and generosity, from that unexpected gift which awakens a new and greater creativity, there will pour forth as from an overflowing fountain the answers that contraposition did not allow us to see. In its earliest days, the Christian faith spread remarkably in accordance with this way of thinking, which enabled it, from its Jewish roots, to take shape in the Greco-Roman cultures, and in time to acquire distinctive forms. Similarly, in this historical moment, the Amazon region challenges us to transcend limited perspectives and “pragmatic” solutions mired in partial approaches, in order to seek paths of inculturation that are broader and bold” (QA 105).

Francis calls the newness of the gift of the Spirit, “overflowing,” creating an unexpected and creative overcoming of positions and contrapositions presented as irresolvable. He manifest “my concern as Pope has been to encourage such overflows within the Church by reinvigorating the ancient practice of Synodality.”³⁴ Synodality is an open space for the discrete and harmonious action of the Spirit surpassing our limited horizons opening the excess of divine gratuity, to the wisdom of the paschal cross, to the gifts of “abundant life” (Jn 10,10).

Communion, participation and mission are the essence of a synodal Church. The union with the Body of Christ, in likeness of the Trinity and from the Eucharist, encourage us to promote a renewed synodal praxis of fraternal love and joyful proclamation of the Gospel. We are all summoned to live according to the overflowing logic of “communion in the Holy Spirit” (2 Co 13,13), singing with Mary, the endearing mercy of God “from generation to generation” (Lk 1,50) and “to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Co 1,4).

At the end of his pastoral testimony, Paul VI called to preserve *the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing* (EN 80). As an expert in Aparecida, I testify that Bergoglio wanted to quote such paragraph when concluding the Document (ApD 552). In his programmatic exhortation he invited to live an evangelical and evangelizing joy “to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present.” (EG 21). Together with the bright joy of the Gospel, our Assembly must be imbued in the maternal love of Mary.

“There is a Marian “style” to the Church’s work of evangelization. Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness.... This interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others, is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization” (EG 288).

We are walking towards 2031, the centennial of the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe in our peoples. The Virgin Mary accompany us with her motherly love because she is the cause of our joy, star of evangelization, Patroness of America. With our prayer for the Assembly we ask: “*May Our Lady of Guadalupe and the blood of many martyrs who gave origin to our faith, encourage us in the mission entrusted. In Jesus Christ Our Lord.*”

2. CANONICAL NOTES

Fr. Pedro Pablo González and Fr. Alphonse Borrás

Called among the peoples of the earth and sent as seed and sacrament of the Kingdom of God emerging from history, the Church is conceived as the people of Christ's faithful, whose communion is manifested as a peculiar society (cf. c. 204 §2) composed of lay as of clergy (cf. c. 207 §1). From both this groups, through the profession of the evangelical counsels by means of vows or other sacred bonds recognized and sanctioned by the Church, (cf. c. 207 §2). All of them, regardless of their conditions, albeit according to their own condition, are called to carry out the mission God entrusted the Church in the world (cf. c. 204 §1).

Summoning his people, God guides it through Christ, the Good Shepherd, and encourages it with the strength of his holy Spirit. God relies on every faithful, who through baptism, becomes part of the triple prophetic, priestly and real function of Christ and of his ecclesial body to fulfill the evangelizing mission. In line with the *Ad gentes* decree of Vatican II, the Code of Canon Law reminds us, and with reason, that the entire Church is missionary in nature, the task of evangelization is a duty of the People of God, and involving every faithful, aware of their own responsibility, to assume their part in the missionary activity (cf. c. 781; AG 35).

In the evangelizing mission of every faithful, each one according to their own condition, share the apostolicity of the faith, it is to say, their roots in the faith of the apostles, and at the same time, its catholicity, their ability to spread and enculturate, yesterday as today, in a diversity of societies and cultures. Hence our confession of the faith in the "apostolic" and "catholic" Church through local churches, each in "their place" are witnesses of the apostolicity and catholicity of the Gospel. Because of their communion in the same faith through the same Spirit, the "entire body of the faithful cannot err when they believe" (LG 12), when they trust in their God embracing the Gospel as word of life and salvation, manifesting the "supernatural sense of the faith" (ib.).

As shepherds of the People of God, bishops are guarantors of communion of the faithful in the apostolic and catholic faith. They do not create the apostolicity or catholicity of the Church, rather they are guarantors of the same: their ministry consists in promoting, credit and foster incessantly the testimony of the Gospel of the faithful entrusted to their pastoral solicitude. Furthermore, it is the bishops' responsibility to serve the People of God (with the help of the priests, as *pastors*, aided by deacons and other ministers, see cc. 1008 y 1009 § 3; cc. 228 y 230). This is the goal for which the pastors have been empowered in their ordination to lead the People of God and accompany the faithful in their evangelizing mission, which is not limited to leaders and clergy. From children to elder people; men and women; clergy, lay people, consecrated men and women, they are all called to participate in the mission of the Church, according to their condition, but always respecting the values of this peculiar "ecclesial society".

It is in this context of awareness which frames the First Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly; the union of local churches for common dialogue and work (exercise of the mission), not only of leaders but also of every faithful comprising the various local churches. Through their participation, manifesting the variety of charismas and ministries, the faithful gather to seek paths in pursuit of an encultured proclamation of the Gospel, embracing the Kingdom of God emerging from our history, their fullness of life by the grace of the faith.



2.1. The Assemblies in the Code of Canon Law

Assemblies are not new in the canon law, in fact, the Synod of Bishops is defined based on that term (lat. *coetus*). It is described as “the assembly of bishops elected from different regions of the world who occasionally gather to foster the deep bond between the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops, and to aid the Pope in his counseling for the integrity and improvement of the faith and tradition, preservation and strengthening of the ecclesiastic discipline, and to study the matters related to action of the Church in the world” (c. 324). This same meaning of assembly can be applied to the meetings held by the bishops of a specific ecclesiastic region (cf. c. 434), to bishop conferences (cf. c. 447), to diocesan synods (cf. c. 460), to priestly councils (c. 495 § 1) and to Eucharistic celebration (cf. 899 §2). Even when using a different term, that same reality of Assembly is found in synodal institutions such as the diocesan pastoral Council (c. 511) and parish pastoral Council (c. 536). The same term is also used in other meetings similar to a chapter of a religious institution (cf. c. 632). The associative life in the Church, by definition, supposes the same reality of assemblies for which the faithful are part of the dynamic of its association and take part in their peculiar mission (cf. cc. 298-329).

The term Assembly is used in different environments in the Church, but all with some similar characteristics: participation in own right, even with an elected representation by the right itself or by the president or organizer of the assembly, such “representation” reflects the diversity of the community according to the variety of charismas, vocations and ministries; it seeks communion and participation in the mission of the Church, even when it is referred to an specific aspect of a group such as the Bishop Conferences; and are experienced according to the deep nature of the Church, as it is the Eucharistic assembly.

The purpose of an assembly in the Church can be found in the description c.324: communion among the members of the Church, dialogue and analysis of the context of the Church in the world and proposals for action lines for the efficiency of our action in the world.

2.2. **Particularity of the First Ecclesial Assembly**

The different churches in Latina American and Caribbean have a long experience of communion and participation in the five General Conferences which have borne fruit for this region of the world and for the universal Church. In them, the bishops from different bishop conferences composing this region of the world, have held conversations and sought paths for a joint pastoral from their own realities. In addition to the participation of bishops, men and women also participated in the capacity as advisers and speakers, but were not full-fledged members since they were not bishops, regardless of enlightened and valuable their contributions.

The lay out of this first Ecclesial Assembly is different since its conception for it has been marked and summoned under the particularity of “ecclesial”: every baptized called (c. 204, cf. c. 96), while in full communion with the catholic Church (cf. c. 205), will be full-fledged members. Thus, the little girl preparing for her first communion will be as important as the cardinal presiding the Assembly, since even though their preparation is different, the Spirit as children of God and as members of the Church, is the same. The qualification needed to fully participate in this Assembly is being a member of one of the churches imbedded in this part of the world, regardless of in-person or distanced participation, by election or invitation from a Bishop Conference, or to answer to the call for general participation, no matter the sector of the People of God, they belong to, or of any other status of the members of this holy people.

Not so for other invitees: faithful from other Christian denominations, acting in their capacity as brothers and sisters seeking the same goal, people of other faiths or even without a specific faith who participate in the conversation. Since we share the common home, we have the same dignity and are seeking the good for humanity; therefore, everyone will be treated with respect and closely heard in everything they have to say to contribute to search and discernment.

2.3. The importance of this Ecclesial Assembly

The governance of the Church, as previously highlighted and well known to everyone, as the communion of particular churches, lies with the Roman Pontiff (cf. c. 331) and with the bishops in communion with him, making up a college in connection with the universal Church (cf. c. 336) or personally, when we refer to a particular church, in their capacity as diocesan bishops (cf. c. 381 §1). They govern and execute the magisterium in our Church, however, the actions of other members of the Church, in a group or individually, have normative or educational value in the faith and traditions.

In fact, it is the bishop's duty to listen to the priests as collaborators and advisers (cf. c. 384) and to encourage every faithful to take on the work of the Church, according to their status, and must be open to their collaboration (cf. c. 394). The relationship among faithful



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and pastors is such, that the Legislator has established that “all the Christian faithful have the duty and the right to work so that the divine message of salvation more and more reaches all people in every age and in every land” (c. 211), to the point that “according to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church” (c. 212 §3). When speaking of faithful (c. 204 § 1) as pointed out initially, it is about the clergy and the lay (c. 207 § 1), and consecrated life from both groups (c. 207 § 2).

There are already, collaboration bodies between the pastors and the rest of the faithful, the so called, councils, (v.gr. priestly, pastoral, and economic affairs) and other forms which have emerged from within local churches. However, this Ecclesial Assembly has the special characteristic of Synodal participation marked by the equal terms given by common Baptism (cf. c. 208), while addressed, at the same time, from each individual reality.

The members of the *Latin American Episcopal Council – CELAM* already have an extensive experience of communion, dialogue and participation by virtue of the different General Conferences and the fruits borne from them, but today, the summon to the First Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly, they have been encouraged to take a very needed step: invite and encourage every faithful to assume their own responsibility, recognizing and respecting it, in the path of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is not a graceful conferment from the bishops to the rest of the faithful: is a call for justice and fulfillment of their own obligations as members of the Church.

Thus, becoming significant everything to be discussed, concluded and presented for an encultured proclamation of the Gospel and for the future of the Church in this region of the world, and sprouting from the grace of every Christian faithful as members of the People of God, it will be necessary for the pastors, specially the bishops, to address its conclusions and make them their own, since the exercise of pastoral work must be carried out in an adequate service environment.

3. SUGGESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS IN LIGHT OF THE HISTORY OF THE LATIN AMERICAN CATHOLICISM

Dr. Gianni La Bella

The next ecclesial meeting scheduled for November, 2021, promoted by the *Latin American Episcopal Council – CELAM* and authorized by the Holy See, may represent the opportunity for the born of a new continental ecclesiological subject, not currently present in the institutional and organizational overview of this Latin American and Caribbean Church, summarized in the term “Assembly”, designed to relaunch, “*contemplate, deepen and enliven the fruits and challenges*” from the V Conference of Aparecida.

The Latin American Catholicism has been the only continental Church to travel, since the end of the XVI century, an original path of unity, collegiality, and synodality, greatly impacting the culture, traditions, spirituality and ecclesial and pastoral action. At the arrival of the first missionaries to the New World, most of them from mendicant orders, Franciscans, Augustinians, Mercedarians, were in line in the search for a common answer to the numerous problems arising from their evangelizing work.

This common feeling gave way to the summon of the first Meeting in Mexico in 1539, which could be considered as an anticipation of the soon to be Provincial Councils. As we know, there was no participation of bishops at the Council of Trent, which led the Latin American church to find “autonomous” solutions, in a manner of speaking, to face the numerous pastoral and cultural problems and to outline their organizational profiles. The Provincial Councils of Lima in 1552, and Mexico in 1555, gave origin to the first Latin American ecclesial regulation, outlining rights, obligations and duties for ecclesial ministry and sanctions related to transgressions.

These Councils considered the bishops’ pastoral visits to be an essential instrument for the promotion of the missionary ministry. The following Provincial Councils, Lima 1582, and Mexico 1585, deepen even more on the needs of this missionary Church, gifting it with an indigenous canonical *corpus* of unique identity, taking on a series of important matters from which stand out: redaction of specific catechesis, the issue of pagan worship, the issue on indigenous ordinations, the use of languages, and administering of sacraments in native languages.

This does not mean, as intended many times, the conformation of a canon law outside of the roman authority, much less an ecclesial law emerged from the Crown. The canon law, governing the life of the Church in Latin America, in the so called Indian period, is the same in force in the catholic world, but adapted to a specific local reality, providing, in virtue of the legislative technique of the Church, “a particular right.”

This unique historic trajectory enables the Ibero American leaders to have an experience of collegiality and communion, which in fact, will be interrupted by the Regalian involution of the Patronage Institute, sanctioned by the end of the Habsburg dynasty in Spain, and of the Braganza in Portugal. The Concordat in 1753 between Spain and the Holy See, in some sense, inverted the historic positions between the throne and the altar. One of the most devastating consequences of this political-ecclesial change, was the break of all relations between catholic leaders of these countries and the Holy See. Residential bishops were exempt, for almost two centuries, from *Ad Limina* visits, with the official version of the great distance between their sees and that of the Eternal city. All of that affected the Latin American church which, until the end of the XIX century, experienced isolation and secular exclusion.

The effects resulting from the Hispano-American Independence process intensified the “dismantling” status, making Latin American churches redesign and reconceive within the new National States, to the point that many historians define this imposed isolation as an “imposed autocephaly.” An example of this, is the story of the Diocese of Asuncion, in Paraguay, instituted by Paul III on June 1, 1547. Until the opening of the First Latin American Plenary Council in 1899, no bishop from that Church, in over 352 years, had crossed the ocean to visit or meet directly with the successor of Peter. Such secular isolation was interrupted for the first time in 1823, with the known pontifical mission led by monsignor Giovanni Muzi, with the participation of young Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti, the first Pope, in some ways, who personally visited South America.

The Commemoration of the fourth centenary of the discovering of America in 1892, provided Leo XIII, as he would say himself, the opportunity to reflect on the unified vocation of the Latin American continent and the historical origin of events which united the different republics. All this, drove the Holy See to rediscover, promote, safeguard and protect this unit of discipline and direction, as one of the specific elements of this Church. Such considerations, resulted in the Project of a Plenary Council in Rome, held from May 28 to July 9, 1899, marking the first systematic attempt to integrate the Church of the continent, and in some respects, as unanimously recognized by historiography, the beginning of “adult age” of Catholicism in Latin America.

An occasion which enabled Latin American bishops to experience genuine communion and Collegiality, leading them to the approval of tens of decrees, representing somehow the translation of the tridentate Spirit to the New World. In spite of its limitations, the Plenary Council constitutes the most important work for the reform and integration of this Church. This continental work redirects the action of the episcopates to be more in tune with the Apostolic See, leaving behind the logic and temptation of the Churches subjected to the power of national governments, developing a unified and continental ecclesial awareness, based in the creation of CELAM and of the Conference of Rio de Janeiro.

In the II Vatican Ecumenical Council, Latin American bishops rediscovered, through sacramentality of the episcopate and Collegiality, their close hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome, and at the same time, special bonds of fraternity and close communion that bind the bishops of this immense region. In Rome, the Latin American episcopate rediscovers its vocation to “universality,” and at the same time, its own genuine “place”.

In less than fifty years, Latin American Catholicism changes from an inconsiderate marginality to a continent of Christian hope, future of the Catholic mission. The pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI marked the entry of the Church of the New World as part of the main concerns of the Catholic Church. Pope Montini displaced the dynamic center of the Church towards the periphery, opening a new season for ecclesial geopolitics, convinced—in the words of theologian and missionary of that time, Walbert Bühlmann—that “the Third Church is at the door.” A continent and Church for those who expected a vital restoration between faith and modernity, which he called “civilization of love.” A Latin American Catholicism, able to bring together, in the mind of the Pope, a vital synthesis, *nova et vetera*, a lab for post conciliar renaissance. “*Latin America, this is your moment*”, stated Paul VI in his homily at the ordination mass of seventy priests who were destined to South America. “*Faithful heir of faith and civilization, which the ancient –not old– Europe, handed you the day of your independence and which the Church, mother and teacher, protected with a love many times superior than its materializing strength, it is a bright day in your history... The entire world awaits your testimony of energy, wisdom, social renewal, mutual understanding and peace.*”



Definitely, prophetic words which prefigure such historical passage for Catholicism, the election of Pope Francis, which for the first time, we have a son of the South leading the Catholic Church, creative and expressive heir of the uniqueness of this Catholicism rooted in the New World. One of the greatest theologians of the XX century, Bernard Lonergan, wrote that the historical consciousness perceives in present events, not only heritage from the past, but also, and above all, the signs of a future that starts today.

CELAM is at the root of this collegial experience which outlines the profile of the Church in Latin America, a federal body of Bishop Conferences, conceived as a service instrument for communion and collaboration, origin and source of the development of new and full ecclesial self-awareness experienced by the Latin American Catholicism after Vatican II. The creation of CELAM sped up similar processes in other sectors of the South American Catholicism, such as the *Latin American Seminars Organization – OSLAM*, in 1958, the *Latin American Religious Confederation – CLAR*, in 1959, and the *Latin American Catechetical Institute – ICLA*, in 1960.

The Latin American Church, is the only community of local churches experiencing, since the beginning of the XX century, and before the “revolution” of Vatican II, a peculiar and original experience of Collegiality and Synodality, authorized by the Holy See, finding its founding moment in the holding of the First Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, in Rio de Janeiro in 1955, in which the bishops faced the challenges of the continent in unity and requested Rome for the approval of a federal body, unforeseen by the canon law, at the service of communion and coordination of the 22 episcopates of the region. A Conference of Bishop Conferences resulting in a *unicum* in the organization of the Catholic Church, unparalleled in any other local churches of this day.

The Conferences of Medellin in 1968, Puebla in 1978 and Santo Domingo in 1992 set, with different narrative and theological contributions, the continuity of a process which enables Latin American Catholicism to reach the maturity of its charismatic vocation. These Conferences established a *before and after* in the history of the Church of the New World, from which the distinctive features guiding its path emerge: the preferential option for the poor and the assertion of a comprehensive liberation of mankind and peoples. Two options of the Latin American and Caribbean Church, which in the last decades, have shaped its ecclesial style, pastoral praxis, theological thinking and preaching. Thanks to CELAM, the Latin American Church is the only plural community of churches experiencing a peculiar regional, collegiate and creative acceptance of Vatican II, at continental level.

With *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI provides to the church of the continent a theological and doctrinal bridge to combine Medellin with Puebla, to move from the hermeneutic cycle, coded in the “oppression-liberation” scheme, to “liberation-evangelization”. The beneficial product of *commercium*-contamination of exchange between center and periphery, between Latin American and universal Catholicism, and the *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which for Bergoglio represents “the outstanding teaching on evangelization, the greatest pastoral document ever written.” This post-synodal exhortation globalizes the contents and proposals the Latin American Church offers to the world. On the late 70’s, Alberto Methol Ferré, the “brilliant citizen of Rio de Plata who taught us to think,” as cardinal Bergoglio calls him, and Brazilian Jesuit philosopher Henrique Claudio de Lima Vaz, speak of Latin

America as a “source Church,” whose uniqueness lies in her ability to live and embody universality. Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, architect of Medellín, is a key figure in the history of the relationship between the Latin American Church and Rome, after the death of Paul VI he appeared among the most qualified candidates to take his place, among the *exit-poll* before the conclave. But time was not right, there was a need to wait for the election of Pope Bergoglio to sanction the metamorphosis of the Latin American Church from “reflection” to “source.”

The V Conference of Aparecida in 2007, somehow anticipated and imagined the layout of new regional ecclesial organizational models, with the main purpose of supporting the relaunch of the continental missionary movement (ApD 182). The events and phases are well known, hence, there is no need to make a stop, since they are known and present in the collective memory, which after the holding of the Synod on the Amazon, in October of 2019, the *Querida Amazonía*, led to the creation of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon, a post-synodal regional ecclesial body, conceived and designed to answer to the specific apostolic and pastoral needs of a particular territory. Another step towards an unprecedented and authentic creative movement, and expression of an enculturate and intercultural way of measuring the identity and mission of the Church. At the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, fostered by Paul VI, on October 17, 2015, Francis stated: “the path of synodality is expected from God of the Church of the Third Millennium.” An assertion based on Karl Rahner’s document in 1965: “Vatican II manifested the synodal and collegial principle of the Church.”

In this pontificate, the synodal dynamic of pastoral conversion, promoted by the Latin American periphery, contributes decisively to the reformulation of the contents, methods and objectives of the reform of the Church. The reform of the Church needs today, a step forward to promote a renewed synodal praxis able to involve everyone. A deeper path than a mere institutional engineering operation. The document of the International Theological Commission on the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* of September 18, 2018, also contain beautiful and useful guidelines and suggestions.

When opening the work of the 70th Assembly of the Italian Bishop Conference, on May 22, 2017, the Pope expressed: “walking together is the *constitutive path* of the Church; the *amount* which allows for the interpretation of reality in the eyes and heart of God; the *condition* to follow Lord Jesus and become servants of life in these wounded times. *Breathing*, and a synodal pace, reveal our essence and dynamism of communion which encourages our decisions.” Words which outline the *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church of the Third Millennium and represent for the Latin American Church, the path to make the specific charisma of Catholicism, present and working, that of having anticipated an original reading and application of conciliar ecclesiology, contained in the *Lumen Gentium* Constitution, the pioneer manifest on Synodality.



The holding of the First Latin American and Caribbean Ecclesial Assembly may represent the first layout for a path which creatively and innovatively combines, Synodality and Collegiality, opening, per say, the paradigm of an “inverted pyramid,” which enables the entire People of God to exercise the co-responsibility needed to start processes, which take into consideration, the voice and presence of the lay.

There is a need to experience, away from predesigned institutional optimizations and strategies, a specific and contextualized “course of action,” as Pope Francis, would say after quoting Saint Ignatius, able to experience an on-site theology of an innovative, creative and viable Synodality which outlines a palpable progress even with regards to Vatican II.