Church Should Be Focused on "Rooting Out Sources of Corruption," Not "Conducting Opinion Polls"

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"It is without doubt that God wants His Church to focus on rooting out the sources of doctrinal, moral, liturgical, and spiritual corruption that have plagued her for decades, as a means of restoring health to the Church in our day."

Thus says His Excellency Athanasius Schneider, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Mary in Astana, Kazakhstan, in a lengthy new interview with *Catholic Family News* on the subject of synodality.

"To establish as a principle of synodality such things as discussing, chatting, and conducting opinions polls is alien to the Church and definitely resembles the methods of heterodox groups," the Kazakh prelate of German descent stated in reference to the current Synod on Synodality, which began last October and is scheduled to conclude in October 2023. "The method of synodality proposed by Pope Francis that includes debating with people of other faith traditions, people of no religion, and even with people characterized as 'etc.', will ultimately obfuscate the Faith."

In this wide-ranging interview, Bishop Schneider responds to questions involving not just the current synod but also the institution of the Synod of Bishops itself by Pope Paul VI, Pope Francis's concerning understanding of synodality (based on a false ecclesiology), the true nature of the *sensus fidei* ("sense of faith") and its authentic function in the Church, and His Excellency's thoughts on continuing efforts to eradicate the Traditional Mass and other liturgical rites of the Roman Church via *Traditionis Custodes* and the *Responsa ad Dubia*.

Drawing from his expertise in Church history and the Fathers of the Church (His Excellency holds a doctorate in Theology and Patristic Sciences from the Patristic Institute "Augustinianum" in Rome), Bishop Schneider offers many valuable insights into the role of synods (local, regional, and universal) throughout Church history and how the modern concept and practice of 'synodality,' beginning with Paul VI's creation of the Synod of Bishops in 1965, "is indeed a novelty in the entire history of the Church." And furthermore, it "represents a superfluous multiplication of ecclesiastical structures and bureaucracies in the life of the Church." As His Excellency wisely observes, "It is always healthier for the life

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of the Church to have fewer permanent structures, since every structure creates not only bureaucracy but also clerical bureaucrats."

When asked what he would set as the agenda for a future synod if given the opportunity, Bishop Schneider said: "I consider that the agenda of a synod of bishops should focus on the elaboration and presentation of a detailed profession of the truths of faith relating to some of the most common doctrinal, moral, liturgical, and pastoral errors in the life of the Church of our time."

Here follows CFN's exclusive interview of Bishop Athanasius Schneider.

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Catholic Family News **(CFN): Thank you, Your Excellency, for taking the time to conduct this interview. Perhaps we could start by discussing the modern institution known as the Synod of Bishops, which Pope Paul VI established towards the end of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) via his Apostolic Letter *Apostolica Sollicitudo* (Sept. 15, 1965).**

Therein, Paul VI wrote of his "conviction" about "the necessity and importance of making ever greater use of the bishops' assistance in providing for the good of the universal Church." It was Vatican II, he says, which gave him "the idea of permanently establishing a special Council of bishops, with the aim of providing for a continuance after the Council of the great abundance of benefits that We have been so happy to see flow to the Christian people during the time of the Council as a result of Our close collaboration with the bishops."

How does the "aim" of Paul VI's new institution, which appears to be a perpetual continuation of Vatican II, differ from the traditional function of local synods and ecumenical councils throughout Church history?

Bishop Athanasius Schneider (BAS): The Synod of Bishops, instituted by Pope Paul VI in 1965 as a permanent structure or an advisory council of bishops on the universal level of the Church, is indeed a novelty in the entire history of the Church. The underlying theoretical base for this new structure is the doctrine found in the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* (art. 22), according to which there are two permanent supreme subjects or agents in the governing of the universal Church, i.e., the Pope alone and the college of bishops with the Pope. Such a doctrinal affirmation is ambiguous. Although the so-called "Preliminary Note of Explanation" attached to *Lumen Gentium* gave an explanation to avoid an erroneous opinion, there nevertheless remains room for diverging interpretations. The idea that there

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are two holders of the supreme power in the Church does not correspond to the constant teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. The collegial character of the episcopate was manifested throughout history in the practice of assemblies or synods for the aim of defending the integrity of faith, morals, and discipline. Typically, they were held only when there was a real need, on the local, regional and, with the approval of the Pope, on the universal level.

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted Peter as the only supreme personal shepherd of His entire flock, including both clergy and faithful. Peter is also the only rock upon which Christ built His Church (cf. Matt. 16:18). There are not two rocks or two supreme shepherds, i.e., a personal rock and on his side a collegial rock, or a personal supreme subject (shepherd) and on his side a collegial supreme subject (shepherd). Pope Leo XIII expressed the constant doctrine of the Church regarding this matter as follows: "…We must note that the due order of things and their mutual relations are disturbed if there be a twofold magistracy of the same rank set over a people, neither of which is amenable to the other. But the authority of the Roman Pontiff is supreme, universal, independent; that of the bishops limited, and dependent. 'It is not congruous that two superiors with equal authority should be placed over the same flock' (St. Thomas in IV Sent, dist. 17, a. 4, ad q. 4, ad 3)" (Encyclical *Satis Cognitum*, n. 15).

Cardinal Charles Journet (1891-1975) gave the following masterly explanation: "The bishops taken collegially, by virtue of a straight union, participate in the universal jurisdiction, which remains in its own place in the Sovereign Pontiff. They jointly exercise with him the acts of the Supreme Jurisdiction. The supreme and universal jurisdiction resides entirely first in the Sovereign Pontiff; it communicates from there at the Episcopal College, which is united to him: a bit like life, which is first of all in the heart, communicates itself from there to the whole organism. It can be exercised either only by the Sovereign Pontiff, either by him in solidarity with the Episcopal College dispersed in the world (ordinary magisterium) or assembled in a council (solemn magisterium). It is unique, but has two residences, one own in the Sovereign Pontiff, the other participated in the episcopate taken collegially."[1]

It would be more precise theologically to speak of the different modes of the exercise of the one supreme power in the Church, i.e., the personal mode by the Pope alone, which is the ordinary way of governing the Church, and the collegial mode (when the Pope formally associates to the supreme acts of governing and teaching also the college of bishops). The Pope is not strictly bound to associate in a permanent way the college of bishops in the acts of the supreme governance. Even though the episcopate has a collegial character according to the divine constitution of the Church, the Pope must be free to decide the modes, circumstances, and frequency of such collegial acts, which depends on historical

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circumstances and the concrete needs of the time. A teaching which claims there is on the side of the Pope another permanent subject of supreme power as a collegial organ, even though presided over and governed by the Pope, restricts in some way the freedom of the Pope and makes him feel obliged to permanently involve the entire episcopate in the supreme governing of the Church. The term "synod", chosen by Pope Paul VI, also contains some ambiguity, since the expression "*sacra synodus*" ("sacred synod") is also an official designation of an ecumenical or general council.

CFN: Do you think it was necessary or even prudent for Paul VI to institute "a permanent Council of bishops for the universal Church" (*Apostolica Sollicitudo*)?

BAS: The aim, in itself valid, to consult the bishops in questions of governing the universal Church is already fulfilled in a sufficient manner with the structure of the College of Cardinals, since it is composed almost exclusively of bishops. Furthermore, each Roman Dicastery has bishops as members from different countries. The institution of the "Synod of Bishops" as a permanent structure in the quality as a consultative body with the prescription of holding regular assemblies represents a superfluous multiplication of ecclesiastical structures and bureaucracies in the life of the Church. Besides the existence of the Sacred College of Cardinals (almost all bishops), as well as the episcopal members of the Roman Dicasteries, the Pope could also consult other bishops throughout the world and ask for their opinion in written form. It is always healthier for the life of the Church to have fewer permanent structures, since every structure creates not only bureaucracy but also clerical bureaucrats. Structures also demand regular gatherings involving considerable financial expenditure. Instead of the current institution of the "Synod of Bishops" with its prescribed relatively frequent general assemblies (a bureaucratic and financial expenditure), the Pope could convoke on an occasional basis, and thus in a freer and flexible manner, representatives of the episcopate to discuss or decide important ecclesiastical issues.

CFN: Moving on to the current Synod on Synodality (Oct. 2021–Oct. 2023), Pope Francis stated during his opening address for the two-year synodal process:

> **"If we want to speak of a synodal Church, we cannot remain satisfied with appearances alone; we need content, means and structures that can facilitate dialogue and interaction within the People of God, especially between priests and laity. This requires changing certain overly vertical, distorted and partial visions of the Church, the priestly ministry, the role of the laity, ecclesial responsibilities, roles of governance and so forth." (Oct. 9, 2021)**

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He went on to quote Fr. Yves Congar (1904-1995), a Dominican theologian known for Modernist tendencies prior to Vatican II, who "once said: 'There is no need to create another Church, but to create a different Church' (*True and False Reform in the Church*)."

What are we to make of such goals as "changing certain overly vertical, distorted and partial visions of the Church," and even creating "a different Church"? It seems that Pope Francis wants to introduce a new ecclesiology (i.e., a new understanding of the Church and how she functions), does it not?

BAS: Such formulations of Pope Francis and the quotation of Fr. Yves Congar insinuate a substantial change in the understanding of Church and of the life of the Catholic Church. It presupposes that the Catholic Church over the course of 2,000 years had a distorted and partial vision of the Church, and that only with Pope Francis and the "Synodal Way" is the Church able to arrive at a correct theological understanding of herself. The use of the words "overly vertical" by Pope Francis is ambiguous as well as tendentious. Something is vertical or it is not vertical. There cannot be something half-vertical or one-quarter vertical; such figures would be a distortion and a caricature of the natural meaning. When something is not utterly vertical, it loses its stability and becomes distorted. God established His Church as a hierarchical body. When the law of verticality is not observed in a body, i.e., if the command center of the brain is damaged or disregarded, then the body will suffer confusion and detriment. The criticism of the principle of verticality in the body of the Church, which Pope Francis is doing, is undermining the divine constitution of the Church and amounts to yielding to the mundane spirit of competition between the members of a body, something about which St. Paul has warned us. In a body, there are in virtue of its natural constitution substantially different parts: some are more visible and responsible for governing, while others are more hidden and in need of governance (cf. 1 Cor. 12:17-19, 22-27). God gave to His Church a clearly vertical constitution: "And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers…" (1 Cor. 12:28). Regarding those whom God has appointed to positions of authority, Pope Leo XIII taught: "These, then, are the duties of a shepherd: to place himself as leader at the head of his flock, to provide proper food for it, to ward off dangers, to guard against insidious foes, to defend it against violence: in a word, to rule and govern it" (Encyclical *Satis Cognitum*, n. 12).

The mutual collaboration between the hierarchy — the vertical line in the Mystical Body of Christ — and the lay faithful was always taught by the Magisterium of the Church and is not a discovery of the current "Synodal Path". The following quotation from Pope Pius XII can surely not be deemed to be a "distorted vision of the Church":

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> "One must not think, however, that this ordered or 'organic' structure of the Body of the Church contains only hierarchical elements and with them is complete; or, as an opposite opinion holds, that it is composed only of those who enjoy charismatic gifts, though members gifted with miraculous powers will never be lacking in the Church. That those who exercise sacred power in this Body are its chief members must be maintained uncompromisingly. It is through them, by commission of the Divine Redeemer Himself, that Christ's apostolate as Teacher, King, and Priest is to endure. At the same time, when the Fathers of the Church sing the praises of this Mystical Body of Christ, with its ministries, its variety of ranks, its officers, it conditions, its orders, its duties, they are thinking not only of those who have received Holy Orders, but of all those too, who, following the evangelical counsels, pass their lives either actively among men, or hidden in the silence of the cloister, or who aim at combining the active and contemplative life according to their Institute; as also of those who, though living in the world, consecrate themselves wholeheartedly to spiritual or corporal works of mercy, and of those in the state of holy matrimony. Indeed, let this be clearly understood, especially in our days: fathers and mothers of families, those who are godparents through Baptism, and in particular those members of the laity who collaborate with the ecclesiastical hierarchy in spreading the Kingdom of the Divine Redeemer occupy an honorable, if often a lowly, place in the Christian community, and even they, under the impulse of God and with His help, can reach the heights of supreme holiness, which Jesus Christ has promised will never be wanting to the Church" (Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, n. 17).

CFN: The Synod Preparatory Document (Sept. 7, 2021) mentions two foundational texts that are referenced throughout the document: "the *Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, given by Pope Francis on the 17th of October 2015, and the document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, prepared by the International Theological Commission and published in 2018." (PD, n. 3).

One quote, in particular, from Pope Francis' 2015 speech is repeated in both the Preparatory Document and the official *Vademecum* (Handbook) (Sept. 7, 2021): "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium." (PD, nn. 1, 10; *Vademecum*, 1.2).

On what basis can Pope Francis claim that "God expects" the "Church of the third millennium" to pursue "this path of synodality," which, according to the Handbook, includes consulting "Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith," as well as

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"people who have left the practice of the faith, people of other faith traditions, people of no religious belief, etc." (*Vademecum*, 2.1)? Is it not more likely that God wants His Church to focus on rooting out the sources of doctrinal, moral, liturgical, and spiritual corruption that have plagued her for decades, as a means of restoring health to her human element?

BAS: It is without doubt that God wants His Church to focus on rooting out the sources of doctrinal, moral, liturgical, and spiritual corruption that have plagued her for decades, as a means of restoring health to the Church in our day. An authentic synodality always had that precise aim throughout the history of the Church.

To establish as a principle of synodality such things as discussing, chatting, and conducting opinions polls is alien to the Church and definitely resembles the methods of heterodox groups. St. Gregory of Nazianzus considered the method of endless discussions and debates, which the Arians adopted, as a dangerous epidemic in the Church, like the Egyptian plagues (cf. *Orations* 27, 2). As the Saint himself affirmed: "I am resolved to avoid every meeting of bishops, for I have never seen any synod end well, nor assuage rather than aggravate disorders" (Ep. 130 *Ad Procopium*). Very timely, as well, is St. Gregory's description of the behavior of the bishops of his time, who were delighted in giving many colors to the words: "We serve the times and demands of the masses. We leave our boat to the wind which happens to blow at the moment, and like chameleons, we know how to give our word many colors" (*De vita sua* = Carmina 2, 1, 11).

The method of synodality proposed by Pope Francis that includes debating with people of other faith traditions, people of no religion, and even with people characterized as "etc.", will ultimately obfuscate the Faith. The simple chatting and the opinion polls are considered as a kind of theology or culture. Against such a method of synodality St. Gregory of Nazianzen already warned: "In the palmy days of the Church, when all was well, the present elaborate, far-fetched and artificial treatment of Theology had not made its way into the schools of divinity, but playing with pebbles which deceive the eye by the quickness of their changes, or dancing before an audience with varied and effeminate contortions, were looked upon as all one with speaking or hearing of God in a way unusual or frivolous. But since the Sextuses and Pyrrhos, and the antithetic style, like a dire and malignant disease, have infected our churches, and babbling is reputed culture, and, as the book of the Acts (Acts 17:21) says of the Athenians, we spend our time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. O what Jeremiah (Lam. 1:1) will bewail our confusion and blind madness; he alone could utter lamentations befitting our misfortunes" (*Orations* 21, 12).

CFN: Returning to the subject of ecclesiology, the 2018 ITC document *Synodality in the Life of the Church* (SLMC) refers to "the ecclesiology of Vatican II" (nn. 42, 71),

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as well as "[t]he ecclesiology of the People of God" (n. 6), and asserts:

> **"The fruits of the renewal promised by Vatican II in its promotion of ecclesial communion, episcopal collegiality and thinking and acting 'synodally' have been rich and precious. There is, however, still a long way to go in the direction mapped out by the Council. …**
>
> **Hence the new threshold that Pope Francis invites us to cross. In the wake of Vatican II, following in his predecessors' footsteps, he insists that synodality describes the shape of the Church that emerges from the Gospel of Jesus, which is called to become incarnate today in history, in creative fidelity to Tradition." (SLMC, nn. 8-9)**

What is "the ecclesiology of Vatican II" and how does it differ from traditional Catholic ecclesiology? In what ways do you think the current Synod will be used to further implement "the direction mapped out by the Council"?

BAS: Vatican II gives pride of place to the expression "People of God" as the image of the Church. The expression "People of God" has come to stand for the ecclesiology of the Council. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, however, has often claimed that this key term of Vatican II ecclesiology has been misunderstood in a sociological sense, with its pushing for democratic structures in the Church and the vindication of "majority rule" as a result of debates in synodal assemblies. Cardinal Ratzinger stated that "in the New Testament, the concept 'people of God' (with perhaps one or two exceptions) refers only to Israel, that is, to the people of the Old Covenant. It is not a concept that applies directly to the Church."[2]

The expression "the direction mapped out by the Council" contains an abusive interpretation of the Vatican II concept of "the People of God" as a tool to invent a "different Church" from that lived unchangingly through the ages. Cardinal Ratzinger rightly stressed the necessity of being faithful to what was handed over to us, the importance of the so-called "democracy of the dead," i.e., the "democracy of the Saints":

> "In the Church, there is another element in addition to the example given us by the law of the state (which also has significance for the Church), namely, the fact that the Church lives not only synchronically but diachronically as well. This means that it is always all, even the dead, who live and are the whole Church, that it is always all who must be considered in any majority in the Church. In the

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> state, for example, one day we have the Reagan administration, and the next day the Clinton administration, and whoever comes next always throws out what his predecessor did and said; we always begin again from scratch. That's not the way it is in the Church. The Church lives her life precisely from the identity of all the generations, from their identity that overarches time, and her real majority is made up of the saints. Every generation tries to join the ranks of the saints, and each makes its contribution. But it can do that only by accepting this great continuity and entering into it in a living way."[3]

CFN: Do you think it is accurate to claim that Pope Francis is "following in his predecessors' footsteps" by insisting that "synodality describes the shape of the Church that emerges from the Gospel"?

BAS: This claim of Pope Francis is surely not accurate, since his predecessors, including Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, stressed the importance of fidelity and integrity regarding those truths of dogma and morals which were constantly proposed by the Magisterium throughout the ages. One should mention the Apostolic Letter *Solemni Hac Liturgia* of Paul VI, which prefaces his *Credo of the People of God*, in which he states: "The greatest care must be taken, while fulfilling the indispensable duty of research, to do no injury to the teachings of Christian doctrine. For that would be to give rise, as is unfortunately seen in these days, to disturbance and perplexity in many faithful souls" (n. 4).

John Paul II presented in his Encyclicals *Veritatis Splendor* and *Evangelium Vitae* a highly clear moral doctrine. John Paul II taught: "Each of us knows how important is the teaching which represents the central theme of this Encyclical and which is today being restated with the authority of the Successor of Peter. Each of us can see the seriousness of what is involved, not only for individuals but also for the whole of society, with the reaffirmation of the universality and immutability of the moral commandments, particularly those which prohibit always and without exception intrinsically evil acts" (Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 115).

Immediately before his election, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed: "Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be 'tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine', seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires."[4] And again, several years into his pontificate: "The evangelization of culture is all the more important in our times, when a 'dictatorship of relativism' threatens to obscure the unchanging truth about man's nature, his destiny and

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his ultimate good."[5]

Is Pope Francis really and seriously following the footsteps of his immediate predecessors, when he promotes a kind of contempt for the principle of tradition and of keeping what we received from the Saints (e.g., from the founders of the religious orders): "I have said this over and over again: nowadays the temptation to go back, for security, out of fear, in order to preserve the faith or the charism of the founder… is a temptation. The temptation to go back and preserve 'traditions' with rigidity. Let's get this into our head: rigidity is a perversion.…"[6]

CFN: In addition to "the ecclesiology of Vatican II," another theme which appears to undergird "synodality" is that of the *sensus fidei* ("sense of faith" of individuals) and the *sensus fidelium* ("sense of the faithful" as a whole), the latter sometimes called the *sensus fidei fidelium* ("sense of faith of the faithful").

For example, SLMC observes (n. 9): "In conformity with the teaching of *Lumen Gentium,* Pope Francis remarks in particular that synodality 'offers us the most appropriate framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself' [Oct. 17, 2015 speech] and that, based on the doctrine of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, all members of the Church are agents of evangelization."

Similarly, the current Synod's Preparatory Document states (n. 9): "It is in the fruitful bond between the *sensus fidei* of the People of God and the magisterial function of the Pastors that the unanimous consensus of the whole Church in the same faith is realized. Every synodal process, in which the Bishops are called to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church, not by themselves but by listening to the People of God, who 'shares also in Christ's prophetic office' (LG, no. 12), is an evident form of that 'journeying together' which makes the Church grow."

And likewise, the Synod Handbook says (1.3): "The Second Vatican Council reinvigorated the sense that all the baptised, both the hierarchy and the laity, are called to be active participants in the saving mission of the Church (LG, 32-33). … Thus, the teaching authority of the Pope and the bishops is in dialogue with the *sensus fidelium*, the living voice of the People of God (cf. *Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church, 74). The path of synodality seeks to make pastoral decisions that reflect the will of God as closely as possible, grounding them in the living voice of the People of God (ITC, *Syn.*, 68)."

Could you briefly summarize the traditional understanding of the *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium* and how they contribute to preserving the Faith of the Church?

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BAS: The *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium* is also called the "passive infallibility of the Church", i.e., the infallibility of the entire Church in the obedience to the divinely revealed truth. St. Augustine said that when "from the bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals, they give witness to the truth (*De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* 14, 27). Vatican II quoted this passage from St. Augustine in *Lumen Gentium* 12. The best-known formulation of the *sensus fidelium* from the Patristic period is that of St. Vincent of Lérins: "What has been believed everywhere, always, by all" (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*) (*Commonitorium* II, 6).

St. Thomas Aquinas says in his *Summa Theologiae*: "The faithful have a knowledge of the things of the faith, not as if shown or revealed to them (*quasi demonstrative*), but according to the received light of faith (*in quantum per lumen fidei*) they see that they must be believed (*credenda sunt*)" (ST II-II, q. 1, a. 5, ad. 1).

Both before the dogmatic definition of the truth of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception and her bodily Assumption into Heaven, Popes Pius IX and Pius XII, respectively, consulted not only the bishops but also the faith of the faithful regarding these truths. Pope Pius IX spoke of the "the constant meaning of the Church" (*perpetuus Ecclesiae sensus*) and of the "the remarkable agreement of the Catholic bishops and the faithful" (*singularis catholicorum antistitum ac fidelium conspiratio*), i.e., the concordance between the teaching of the Magisterium and the faith of the Christian people. This is the traditional meaning of the expression of the *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium.*

CFN: As mentioned above, the Synod Handbook calls for the inclusion of "Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith," as well as "people who have left the practice of the faith, people of other faith traditions, people of no religious belief, etc." (*Vademecum*, 2.1) in the diocesan phase of consultation. And yet, the 2014 ITC document *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* defines the "Dispositions needed for authentic participation in the *sensus fidei*" as follows:

> **"The first and most fundamental disposition is active participation in the life of the Church. Formal membership of [*sic*] the Church is not enough. Participation in the life of the Church means constant prayer (cf. 1Thess 5:17), active participation in the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, regular reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, discernment and exercise of gifts and charisms received from the Holy Spirit, and active engagement in the Church's mission and in her *diakonia*. It presumes an acceptance of the Church's teaching on matters of faith and morals, a willingness to follow the commands of God, and courage both to correct one's brothers**

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and sisters, and also to accept correction oneself." (*Sensus Fidei*, n. 89)

In light of these criteria, how can non-practicing Catholics (let alone non-Catholics) be included in the synodal process, since they are incapable of participating in the *sensus fidei*?

BAS: The Holy See warned against a distorted meaning of these expressions, for example, in the Instruction *Donum Veritatis* issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith:

> "Dissent sometimes also appeals to a kind of sociological argumentation which holds that the opinion of a large number of Christians would be a direct and adequate expression of the 'supernatural sense of the faith'.
>
> Actually, the opinions of the faithful cannot be purely and simply identified with the 'sensus fidei'. The sense of the faith is a property of theological faith; and, as God's gift which enables one to adhere personally to the Truth, it cannot err. This personal faith is also the faith of the Church since God has given guardianship of the Word to the Church. Consequently, what the believer believes is what the Church believes. The 'sensus fidei' implies then by its nature a profound agreement of spirit and heart with the Church, 'sentire cum Ecclesia'." (*Donum Veritatis*, n. 35).

Pope John Paul II taught in a similar way:

> "The 'supernatural sense of faith' however does not consist solely or necessarily in the consensus of the faithful. Following Christ, the Church seeks the truth, which is not always the same as the majority opinion. The Church values sociological and statistical research, when it proves helpful in understanding the historical context in which pastoral action has to be developed and when it leads to a better understanding of the truth. Such research alone, however, is not to be considered in itself an expression of the sense of faith.
>
> Because it is the task of the apostolic ministry to ensure that the Church remains in the truth of Christ and to lead her ever more deeply into that truth, the Pastors must promote the sense of the faith in all the faithful, examine and authoritatively judge the genuineness of its expressions." (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 5)

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CFN: Then again, the same 2014 ITC document claims, on the basis of Vatican II, that "a certain type of *sensus fidei* can exist in 'the baptised who are honored by the name of Christian, but who do not however profess the Catholic faith in its entirety' [LG, 15]. The Catholic Church therefore needs to be attentive to what the Spirit may be saying to her by means of believers in the churches and ecclesial communities not fully in communion with her." (*Sensus Fidei*, n. 56).

The notion that the Holy Ghost might be speaking to the true Church "by means of believers in the churches and ecclesial communities not fully in communion with her" seems dubious. How would you respond to this notion?

BAS: The expression *sensus fidei* cannot by applied to heterodox Catholics or to non-Catholics, since it contradicts the authentic meaning of the expression and its constant use by the Fathers of the Church and the Magisterium. The great theologian Bishop Melchior Cano (1509-1560) gave the following explanation: "There are two kinds of things, that by the Church are believed. One, which belongs to all equally (the fundamental truths). And in this it is not very hard to know the faith and the sense of all her members. There are other more difficult things regarding the faith, which the rude and the unskilled in the Church cannot know, but only the learned and the wise. If you ask for the ordinary people's opinion here, it will be like that as if one would ask a blind man, he should perceive colors. … But if judgments are to be made in things regarding the faith, neither the scholars nor the simple faithful, but only the shepherds of the Church decide" (*De locis theologicis* IV, c. 6, ad 14).

St. Thomas Aquinas formulated the following principle: "Whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit" (*omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*) (cf. ST I-II, q. 109, a. 1, ad 1). There are issues of the natural law and common sense which non-practicing Catholics and even non-Catholics can perceive and promote together with faithful Catholics, for example, the categorical rejection of abortion, of homosexual activity, of euthanasia, etc. However, heterodox Catholics and non-Catholics cannot claim to possess the *sensus fidei* and thus cannot give valuable advice about supernatural truths of faith, which they either reject or doubt.

Pope Leo XIII taught what the Church always held: "Such is the nature of faith that nothing can be more absurd than to accept some things and reject others" (Encyclical *Satis Cognitum*, n. 9). In the same document, Leo XIII quoted a very instructive teaching: "'There can be nothing more dangerous than those heretics who admit nearly the whole cycle of doctrine, and yet by one word, as with a drop of poison, infect the real and simple faith taught by our Lord and handed down by Apostolic tradition' (Auctor Tract. *de Fide Orthodoxa contra Arianos*)."

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The practice of the Church has always been the same, as is shown by the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, who were known to hold as outside Catholic communion and alien to the Church whoever would recede in the least degree from any point of doctrine proposed by her authoritative Magisterium. St. Hilary of Poitiers said: "Christ teaching from the ship signifies that those who are outside the Church can never grasp the divine teaching; for the ship typifies the Church where the word of life is deposited and preached. Those who are outside are like sterile and worthless sand: they cannot comprehend" (*In Matt*. 13, 1). Rufinus of Aquileia praised St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Basil the Great because "they studied the text of Holy Scripture alone, and took the interpretation of its meaning not from their own inner consciousness, but from the writings and on the authority of the ancients, who in their turn, as it is clear, took their rule for understanding the meaning from the Apostolic succession" (*Hist. Eccl*., lib. II, cap. 9).

Returning to Leo XIII, we read that "he who dissents even in one point from divinely revealed truth absolutely rejects all faith, since he thereby refuses to honor God as the Supreme Truth and the formal motive of faith. … [F]or they, who take from Christian doctrine what they please, lean on their own judgments, not on faith; and not 'bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ' (2 Cor. 10:5), they more truly obey themselves than God. 'You, who believe what you like, believe yourselves rather than the Gospel' (S. Augustinus, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, 17, 3)" (Encyclical *Satis Cognitum*, nn. 9-10).

Remarkable, also, are the following words of St. John Henry Newman: "In the judgment of the early Church, the path of doctrinal truth is narrow; but, in the judgment of the world in all ages, it is so broad as to be no path at all. This I have said above; also, that the maintenance of the faith is considered by the world to be a strife of words, perverse disputings, curious questionings, and unprofitable technicality, though by the Fathers it is considered necessary to salvation. What they call heresy, the man of the world thinks just as true as what they call orthodoxy, and only then wrong when pertinaciously insisted on by its advocates, as the early Fathers insisted on orthodoxy" (*Historical Sketches*, I, chap. 3).

The following words of St. John Henry Newman may sound shocking, but they touch the very core: "The so-called religion of the heart, without orthodoxy of doctrine, is but the warmth of a corpse, real for a time, but sure to fail. How long will that complicated error last under which our Church now labours? How long are human traditions of modern date to obscure, in so many ways, the majestic interpretations of Holy Writ which the Church Catholic has inherited from the age of the Apostles? When shall we be content to enjoy the wisdom and the pureness which Christ has bequeathed to His Church as a perpetual gift, instead of attempting to draw our Creed, each for himself, as he best may, from the deep

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wells of truth?" (*Sermon 12. The Humiliation of the Eternal Son*, March 8, 1835).

CFN: Turning to the realm of liturgy, it is interesting to note that the documents imposing severe restrictions on the Traditional Latin Mass and other traditional sacramental rites of the Roman Church — namely, *Traditionis Custodes* (TC) and its accompanying Letter to Bishops (July 16, 2021), as well as the *Responsa ad Dubia* (Dec. 4, 2021) — were issued during the first phase of the two-year synodal process (TC and accompanying Letter shortly after the new synod programme was announced last May; the Responsa after the official synod opening last October).

Furthermore, both Cardinal Blase Cupich (Archbishop of Chicago) and Archbishop Arthur Roche (CDW Prefect) have indicated that the Traditional Latin Mass is incompatible with the new "ecclesiology of Vatican II" (SLMC, nn. 42, 71):

> **Cardinal Cupich (Nov. 10, 2021): "*… the very nature of the church and her mission is at stake.* The council fathers described the church as a 'pilgrim people,' a term rooted in Scripture, to develop the image of the church previously understood as a perfect society and a world power to be contended with." (Emphasis added)**
>
> **Archbishop Roche (Jan. 21, 2022): During an interview with Catholic News Service, he described the issue of adherence to the Traditional Mass as "not basically a liturgical problem, it is *an ecclesial problem*." And further, "That which was given to us by the council, which classified, concretized *the teaching of the church about itself* and its understanding of the role of the baptized and the importance of the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the church, is not without significance for the future of the church." (Emphasis added)**

In light of these stark admissions, do you think there is a connection between the Synod on Synodality and attempts to eradicate the Roman Church's traditional liturgical rites?

BAS: There is not a direct connection. Yet, one must say that the papal document *Traditionis Custodies* and the document of the Congregation for Divine Worship (*Responsa ad Dubia*) displayed an astonishingly intolerant and discriminatory attitude towards the traditional Roman rite and against priests and faithful who grew up in that rite or who have found their spiritual home in it. Such an attitude with its restrictive measures is blatantly

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inconsistent with the attitude and method of inclusiveness and plurality of theological and pastoral views and practices, which are so much propagated by the documents on the synodal process.

For example, we read in the *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality: "Being inclusive: A participatory and co-responsible Church, capable of appreciating its own rich variety, embraces all those we often forget or ignore. An open mind: Let us avoid ideological labels and make use of all methodologies that have borne fruit" (2.3).

Similarly, in his address for the Opening of the Synod (Oct. 9, 2021), Pope Francis said: "If we do not become this Church of closeness with attitudes of compassion and tender love, we will not be the Lord's Church." He also spoke of "bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God." The next day during his homily, he spoke of the marginalized sons and daughters of the Church and demanded that the Church in our days must show a concrete attitude which makes them feel that they are "part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected, or judged."

And yet, with *Traditionis Custodes* and the *Responsa ad Dubia*, Pope Francis and the Holy See have acted in a manner exactly contrary to all these emotionally charged statements, thereby demonstrating that such statements remain pure rhetoric or an ideological way in which all are welcomed and all is allowed with one exception: the traditional Roman liturgy with its spirituality and pastoral life. This sad reality calls to mind what St. Basil the Great said during the Arian crisis in the fourth century: "The mouths of true believers are dumb, while every blasphemous tongue wags free" (Ep. 92, 2), and further: "The one charge which is now sure to secure severe punishment is the careful keeping of the traditions of the Fathers" (Ep. 243, 2).

CFN: Your Excellency, if you were in charge of setting the agenda for the next meeting of the Synod of Bishops, what would be the theme or focus of the meeting?

BAS: I consider that the agenda of a synod of bishops should focus on the elaboration and presentation of a detailed profession of the truths of faith relating to some of the most common doctrinal, moral, liturgical, and pastoral errors in the life of the Church of our time.

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[1] Cardinal Charles Journet, *Théologie de l´Église* (édition nouvelle augmentée Paris 1987), p. 161.

[2] Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium — An Interview with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), p. 187.

[3] *Ibid*., pp. 188-189.

[4] Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Homily for Mass "Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice" (Apr. 18, 2005).

[5] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily for Mass at Bellahouston Park, Glasgow (Sept. 16, 2010).

[6] Pope Francis, Homily for the 26th World Day for Consecrated Life (Feb. 2, 2022).

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