

**This article first appeared in the December 2022 Edition of *Catholic Family News* (click [HERE](#) to subscribe; current subscribers can access the E-Edition by following the instructions posted [HERE](#)).**

After months of “listening to the People of God” and reviewing reports prepared by dioceses and episcopal conferences around the globe, the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops in Rome has produced a “[Working Document for the Continental Stage](#)” (DCS), the next phase of the three-year Synod on Synodality (Oct. 2021—Oct. 2024).<sup>[1]</sup>

The 49-page text, released on Oct. 27, 2022 via a Vatican press conference, consists of four chapters and centers around a theme drawn from Scripture: “Enlarge the space of your tent” (Isa. 54:2). “This image and narrative,” the document states, “represents a key to an interpretation of the contents within the DCS in the light of the Word, placing them in the arc of God’s promise that becomes a vocation for his People and his Church: ‘*Enlarge the space of your tent!*’” (DCS, 10).

What does it mean to enlarge the tent? The phrase “radical inclusion,” found in a few different places throughout the text, seems to sum up the meaning, for example: “The vision of a Church capable of radical inclusion, shared belonging, and deep hospitality according to the teachings of Jesus is at the heart of the synodal process: ‘*Instead of behaving like gatekeepers trying to exclude others from the table, we need to do more to make sure that people know that everyone can find a place and a home here*’ (remark by a parish group from the USA)” (DCS, 31).

We will see what “radical inclusion” entails when we survey the contents of the document, but first let us focus on a crucial paragraph that appears towards the end of the text — arguably the key to interpreting both the document and the entire Synod on Synodality:

“... walking together as the People of God requires us to recognize the need for continual conversion, individual and communal. On the institutional and pastoral level, this conversion translates into an equally continuous reform of the Church, its structures and style, in the wake of the drive for continuous ‘*aggiornamento*,’ the precious legacy of the Second Vatican Council to which we are called to look as we celebrate its 60th anniversary.” (DCS, 101)

## Understanding “*Aggiornamento*”

Beginning with John XXIII, popes have used the Italian word *aggiornamento* (“bringing up to

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date”) and similar language to describe the fundamental purpose of Vatican II. During his speech at the opening of the Council, for example, Pope John said that “by bringing herself up to date [Italian, *introducendo opportuni emendamenti*][2] where required ... the Church will make men, families, and people really turn their minds to heavenly things.”[3]

Without using the term, John XXIII described the essence of *aggiornamento* throughout his speech, which is characterized by a rather naïve confidence in modern man and an attitude of openness and leniency towards the world, which Scripture tells us is “seated in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). Below are a few examples (emphasis added):

- “In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to **a new order of human relations** which, **by men’s own efforts** and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward the fulfillment of God’s superior and inscrutable designs. And everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the Church.”
- “... the Christian, Catholic, and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity to the **authentic doctrine**, which, however, **should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought**. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.”[4]
- “The Church has always opposed these errors [called ‘the opinions of men’ by Pope John]. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. **Nowadays**, however, **the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity**. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.”
- “Not, certainly, that there is a lack of **fallacious teaching, opinions, and dangerous concepts** to be guarded against and dissipated. But these are so obviously in contrast with the right norm of honesty, and have produced such lethal fruits, that by now it would seem that **men of themselves are inclined to condemn them....**”

The idea was that if the Church “updated” her manner of expression according to “forms of modern thought” and used “the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity,” this would attract the minds and hearts of modern men, who are supposedly “inclined to condemn” the false teachings and “dangerous concepts” which Pope John acknowledged but did not want to censure. (In reality, modern men are just as inclined to error and sin as men of past generations, due to the effects of Original Sin.)

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Professor Romano Amerio, whom Pope John appointed to the Council’s central preparatory commission, wrote a sobering assessment of the Pope’s misplaced optimism 20 years after the close of the Council:

“This optimistic interpretation of events, asserting that *at last* error is about to recognize and correct itself, is difficult enough to accept in theory; but it is also bluntly *refuted by facts*. Events were still maturing at the time the Pope spoke, but in the following decade they came to full fruition. Men did not change their minds regarding their errors, but became entrenched in them instead, and gave them the force of law. The public and universal acceptance of these errors became obvious with the adoption of divorce and abortion. The behavior of Christian peoples was entirely altered thereby and their civil legislation, until recently modeled on canon law [in formerly confessional Catholic nations], was changed into something completely profane no longer having a shade of the sacred about it. On this point, papal foresight indisputably failed.”[\[5\]](#)

### “The Guiding Principle”

John XXIII’s successor, Paul VI, reinforced the significance of *aggiornamento* in his inaugural Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (On the Church) issued shortly before the Council’s third session began:

“The purpose of this exhortation of Ours is not to lend substance to the belief that perfection consists in rigidly adhering to the methods adopted by the Church in the past and refusing to countenance the practical measures commonly thought to be in accord with the character of our time. These measures can be put to the test. We cannot forget Pope John XXIII’s word *aggiornamento* which We have adopted as expressing the aim and object of Our own pontificate. Besides ratifying it and confirming it as the guiding principle of the Ecumenical Council, We want to bring it to the notice of the whole Church. It should prove a stimulus to the Church to increase its ever-growing vitality and its ability to take stock of itself and give careful consideration to the signs of the times, always and everywhere ‘proving all things and holding fast that which is good’ [1 Thess. 5:21] with the enthusiasm of youth.” ([Ecclesiam Suam](#), n. 50)

Notice how Paul VI invoked “John XXIII’s word” — which he “adopted as expressing the aim

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and object” of his pontificate and called “the guiding principle” of the Council — in the context of assuring his brother bishops that “perfection” does not consist “in rigidly adhering to the methods adopted by the Church in the past and refusing to countenance the practical measures commonly thought to be in accord with the character of our time.” (Who frequently condemns “rigidity” in our day?) Like his predecessor, Paul VI considered it necessary to “update” the Church in order to make her relevant and appealing to men of the modern world, apparently forgetting the exhortation of his namesake to “be not conformed to this world: but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and the acceptable and the perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

A prime example of Paul VI’s attitude in this regard is found in his [address](#) during the last general meeting of the Council (Dec. 7, 1965):

“Secular humanism, revealing itself in its horrible anti-clerical reality has, in a certain sense, defied the council. The religion of the God Who became man has met the religion (for such it is) of man who makes himself God. And what happened? Was there a clash, a battle, a condemnation? There could have been, but there was none. ***The old story of the Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the council. A feeling of boundless sympathy has permeated the whole of it. ... But we call upon those who term themselves modern humanists, and who have renounced the transcendent value of the highest realities, to give the council credit at least for one quality and to recognize our own new type of humanism: we, too, in fact, we more than any others, honor mankind*** [Italian, *siamo i cultori dell’uomo*, which can be translated as ‘have the *cult of man*’].” (Emphasis added)

Four years later, in preparation for what he repeatedly called “the new rite of the Mass,” Paul VI spoke in favor of his liturgical “updates” by appealing to the importance of reaching “modern people” where they are, which in his opinion justified the jettisoning of Latin (Nov. 26, 1969):

“It is here that the greatest newness is going to be noticed, the newness of language. **No longer Latin, but the spoken language will be the principal language of the Mass. ... We have reason for regret, reason almost for bewilderment.** What can we put in place of that language of the angels? **We are giving up something of priceless worth. But why?** What is more precious than these loftiest of our Church’s values? **The answer will seem banal,**

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**prosaic. Yet it is a good answer, because it is *human*, because it is apostolic.** Understanding of prayer is worth more than the silken garments in which it is royally dressed. **Participation by the people is worth more — particularly participation by *modern people***, so fond of plain language which is easily understood and converted into everyday speech.”[\[6\]](#) (Emphasis added)

And more recently, Pope Benedict XVI reflected on “the word *aggiornamento*” during an [address](#) in honor of the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II (Oct. 12, 2012):

“Fifty years from the opening of that solemn gathering of the Church some people may ask themselves whether that term was perhaps, from the very beginning, not entirely felicitous. The choice of words is something that can be debated for hours and opinions will always conflict, but ***I am convinced that the intuition that Blessed John XXIII summarized in that word was and remains exact.*** Christianity must not be considered as ‘something of the past’, nor must it be lived with our gaze ever turned back, because Jesus Christ is yesterday, today and forever (cf. Heb 13:8). ... ***The Council was a time of grace in which the Holy Spirit taught us that the Church, in her journey through history, must always speak to the people of today.***” (Emphasis added)

Granted, according to Benedict “this *aggiornamento* does not mean a break with tradition,” nor does it involve “reducing the faith, debasing it to the fashion of the times, measured by what pleases us, by what pleases public opinion,” but this is precisely what it seems to mean to Pope Francis and his allies at the Synod of Bishops in Rome, who clearly see continuity between themselves, the Synod on Synodality, and the Second Vatican Council. This is evident in the General Secretariat’s [message](#) in honor of the 60th anniversary of the Council’s opening (emphasis added):

***“The purpose of the Synod [of Bishops] was and remains to prolong, in the life and mission of the Church, the spirit of the Second Vatican Council,*** as well as to foster in the People of God the living appropriation of its teaching, in the awareness that that Council represented ‘the great grace from which the Church has benefited in the 20th century’ (John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, Jan. 6, 2001, 57). ...

***The synodal process currently underway, dedicated to ‘Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,’ is also within the Council’s wake.*** The concept of ‘Synodality’ is found throughout the Council, even though this term (only recently coined) is not found expressly in the documents of the ecumenical assembly.”

As I have demonstrated in previous articles, the Synod on Synodality is meant to be an extension of the Council, a major push to more fully implement the problematic “ecclesiology of Vatican II” throughout the universal Church (see [here](#) and [here](#), for example). And what is more, it seeks to push the ecclesial envelope even beyond the problematic letter and spirit of Vatican II, as evidenced by the Synod’s latest document, whose contents we will now briefly survey.

## Ecumenism and Environmentalism

We know from the official [Preparatory Document](#) (PD) and [Vademecum](#) (Handbook) that ecumenism is integral to the current Synod, just as it was to the Second Vatican Council. Thus, it is no surprise to find the topic emphasized in the [latest Synod text](#):

“A synodal process is incomplete without meeting brothers and sisters from other confessions, sharing and dialogue [sic] with them, and engaging in common actions. The reports [from various episcopal conferences] express a desire for deeper ecumenical encounter, and the need for formation to support this work.” (DCS, 22)

It is interesting to note that ecumenism has been paired with “social and environmental justice” in the document (emphasis added):

“The People of God express a deep desire to hear the cry of the poor and that of the earth. In particular, the reports invite us to recognize the interconnectedness of social and environmental challenges and to respond to them by collaborating and forming alliances with other Christian confessions, believers of other religions and all people of good will. ***This call for renewed ecumenism and interfaith engagement is particularly strong in regions marked by greater vulnerability to socio-environmental damage and more pronounced inequalities. ...***



A further theme common to many reports is the weakness of deep ecumenical engagement and ***the desire to learn how to breathe new life into the ecumenical journey, starting with concrete, daily collaboration on common concerns for social and environmental justice.*** A more united witness among Christians and between faith communities is expressed as an ardent desire.” (DCS, 45, 47)

All of this harkens back to the Preparatory Document, which, as a reminder, was drafted *without any input whatsoever* from “the People of God”:

“The Encyclicals *Laudato si’* and *Fratelli Tutti* document the depth of the fault lines that run through humanity, and we can refer to these analyses to start listening to the cry of the poor and of the earth and to recognize the seeds of hope and of the future that the Spirit continues to sow even in our time....” (PD, 5)

Isn’t it amazing that “many reports” call for *exactly* what Pope Francis and Team Synodality wanted to discuss from the outset?

## Church Must Become “More Welcoming Space”

Recalling the document’s central theme, “Enlarge the space of your tent” (Isa. 54:2), the text also says the Church must become “a more welcoming space” for all, including those whose “loving relationships” objectively violate divine and natural law:

“The reports clearly show that many communities have already understood synodality as an invitation to listen to those who feel exiled from the Church. ...

Among those who ask for a more meaningful dialogue and a more welcoming space we also find those who, for various reasons, feel a tension between belonging to the Church and their own loving relationships, such as: remarried divorcees, single parents, people living in a polygamous marriage, LGBTQ people, etc.” (DCS, 38, 39)

“Many summaries,” the document states elsewhere, “also give voice to the pain of not being able to access the Sacraments experienced by remarried divorcees and those who have

entered into polygamous marriages. There is no unanimity on how to deal with these situations” (DCS, 94), since calling such people to repentance and amendment of life is apparently out of the question.

## “Rethinking Women’s Participation”

In the document’s third chapter, we find a section devoted to “Rethinking women’s participation” in which “a female diaconate” and even “priestly ordination for women” are casually floated as legitimate topics for discussion (emphasis added):

“The call for a **conversion of the Church’s culture**, for the salvation of the world, is linked in concrete terms to the possibility of **establishing a new culture, with new practices and structures** [i.e., *aggiornamento*]. A critical and urgent area in this regard concerns **the role of women and their vocation**, rooted in our common baptismal dignity, to participate fully in the life of the Church. A growing awareness and sensitivity towards this issue is registered all over the world. ...

After careful listening, many reports ask that the Church continue its discernment in relation to a range of specific questions: **the active role of women in the governing structures of Church bodies, the possibility for women with adequate training to preach in parish settings, and a female diaconate**. Much greater diversity of opinion was expressed on the subject of **priestly ordination for women**, which some reports call for, while others consider a closed issue.” (DCS, 60, 64)

Rather humorously, this section notes that men are generally “a minority” when it comes to “those who attend liturgy [meaning Paul VI’s New Mass] and participate in activities,” yet the focus is squarely on promoting women to leadership roles which are proper to *ordained men* (i.e., teaching, governing, and sanctifying the faithful). Nevertheless, “the Church must find ways to attract men to a more active membership in the Church” (DCS, 61). (Hint: Attend a Traditional Latin Mass to see lots of highly engaged Catholic men, young and old.)

But humor aside, since it is impossible for a woman to validly receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [para. 1577](#)), it is deeply dishonest for Synod officials to pretend that some form of ordained ministry for women is an open question — as they did during the [press conference](#) at which they presented their Working Document.



## Synodality and Liturgy

When Paul VI preemptively defended his “new rite of the Mass” (Nov. 1969), he couched his liturgical *aggiornamento* in terms of “obedience to the Council,” [7] which basically meant obedience to himself, since the acts of a general council only gain authority through papal ratification and he was the Pope who issued the conciliar documents. “The reform which is about to be brought into being is therefore a response to an authoritative mandate from the Church,” he said. “It is an act of obedience.” [8]

In other words, he was just implementing the will of the bishops (when, in reality, he was implementing his own will).

The Synod on Synodality seems to be moving in a similar direction, except that this time around, Francis will claim he is just implementing the will of “the People of God” at large (emphasis added):

“Many reports strongly encourage ***the implementation of a synodal style of liturgical celebration*** that allows for the active participation of all the faithful in welcoming all differences, valuing all ministries, and recognising all charisms. ***The synodal listening of the Churches records many issues to be addressed in this direction:*** from rethinking a liturgy too concentrated on the celebrant, to the modalities of active participation of the laity, to ***the access of women to ministerial roles.***” (DCS, 91)

The above-quoted text appears in a section entitled, “Managing tensions: renewal and reconciliation,” and is followed by a mention of “knots of conflict” related to “the preconciliar rites”. Quoting from the [U.S. National Synthesis](#) (published by the USCCB in mid-September), the Synod’s Working Document says: “The most common issue regarding the liturgy is the celebration of the pre-Conciliar Mass. The limited access to the 1962 Missal was lamented” (DCS, 92). At least there is some recognition of the outcry over [Traditionis Custodes](#).

Immediately after the Traditional Mass is mentioned, however, we read: “The Eucharist, sacrament of unity in love in Christ, cannot become a reason for confrontation, ideology, rift or division.” Translation: The Traditional Mass is causing “division” and therefore it must be eliminated post haste. Or, in more diplomatic terms, all Catholics “who are rooted in the previous form of celebration” must “return in due time to the Roman Rite promulgated by Saints Paul VI and John Paul II” (Pope Francis, [Letter to Bishops attached to Traditionis](#)

[Custodes](#)).

Not surprisingly, “radical inclusion” is championed for all but traditional Catholics.

## Conclusion: Catholics Must Resist This “Permanent Revolution”

As we have seen, the Synod on Synodality appears to have a hefty dose of *aggiornamento* in store for the Church, and the bishops are expected to tow the party line. Looking ahead to the “Continental Assemblies” (scheduled for January-March 2023), the document says: “Each Continental Assembly is called to put in place a discernment process on the DCS that is appropriate to its local context, and draft a Final Document to account for it” (DCS, 107).

Bishops must ensure that “all Assemblies be ecclesial and not merely episcopal, ensuring that their composition adequately represents the variety of the People of God,” especially women and young people, the poor and marginalized, while also including “fraternal delegates from other Christian denominations; representatives of other religions and faith traditions; and some people with no religious affiliation.” (This all corresponds directly to the Synod Handbook, 2.1.) And at the end of the day, bishops “are asked to identify appropriate ways to carry out *their task of validating and approving the Final Document*, ensuring that it is the fruit of an authentically synodal journey, respectful of the process that has taken place and faithful to the diverse voices of the People of God in each continent” (DCS, 108, emphasis added).

“In other words,” to quote Fr. Gerald Murray, “bishops are to function as recording secretaries. They’re not advised to ensure the fidelity of the assembly to Church teaching.” And regarding the Synod in general, he states: “There is plainly an open revolution going on in the Church today, an attempt to convince us that an embrace of heresy and immorality is not sinful, but rather a response to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through people who feel marginalized by a Church that has, up to now, been unfaithful to its mission.”

I can only applaud [Fr. Murray’s sober assessment](#) and echo his call to “pray that the Synod Fathers, and all the bishops, will stand up and defend the Church’s teaching and practice against this Vatican-sponsored exercise in self-destructive behavior. Souls are at stake.”

Likewise, I affirm with Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò that “the intolerable excesses that Jorge Mario Bergoglio has indulged in for almost ten years are simply the coherent application in the ecclesial sphere of the principle of *permanent revolution* theorized in the social sphere by Marx, Engels, and Trotsky. The idea of ‘permanent revolution’ arises from the observation of the ideologues of Bolshevism that the proletariat was not so enthusiastic about communist methods and that, if they wanted to spread class struggle throughout the

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world, it was necessary to force it by means of authority and make it irreversible....”

Applied to the current Synod, His Excellency [observes](#):

“This is why the Synod on Synodality is necessary, that is, the establishment of a sort of ‘permanent Council,’ or rather a ‘permanent *aggiornamento*’ which makes itself the promoter of supposed instances of the base — the ecclesial version of the proletariat — such as the female diaconate and the ‘radical inclusion’ of couples who are divorced and remarried, cohabiting couples, polygamists, and homosexual couples with adopted children who adhere to the LGBTQ movement.”

And he further explains that “these requests, which are all completely inadmissible from a doctrinal and moral point of view that is faithful to the Magisterium, do not constitute a faithful and spontaneous picture of what the Clergy and faithful are demanding from the Supreme Authority of the Church, but rather the fraudulent fiction of Bergoglio propaganda, along the lines of the manipulations that have already been experienced earlier at the Synod on the Family that gave birth to the heretical *monstrum* called *Amoris Laetitia*.”

All faithful Catholics must resist this “permanent revolution,” which is ultimately rooted in the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II.

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*Matt Gaspers discussed the topic of this article last November on the Dr. Taylor Marshall Podcast (Nov. 29, 2022):*

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[\[1\]](#) Originally scheduled to conclude with the meeting of bishops in Oct. 2023, Pope Francis [announced](#) on Oct. 16, 2022 that, “in order to have a more relaxed period of discernment, I have established that this Synodal Assembly will take place in two sessions. The first from 4 to 29 October 2023, and the second in October of 2024. I trust that this decision will promote the understanding of synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church, and help everyone to live it as the journey of brothers and sisters who proclaim the joy of the Gospel.”

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[2] John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* (Oct. 11, 1962), [Italian text](#).

[3] Ibid., [English translation](#). Also quoted by Roberto de Mattei in *The Second Vatican Council: An Unwritten Story* (Fitzwilliam: Loreto Publications, 2012), pp. 173-174.

[4] The reality is that “modern thought” is very often opposed to “authentic doctrine,” which begs the question: How can the Church safely subject the deposit of faith to the language of the modern world? This is precisely why the pre-conciliar popes, as well as the First Vatican Council (Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, ch. 4; D.H. 3020), insisted that the Church’s doctrine must always be held and taught *eodem sensu eademque sententia* (“with the same meaning and the same judgment” the Church has always held).

[5] Romano Amerio (trans. Fr. John P. Parsons), *Iota Unum: A Study of Changes in the Catholic Church in the XXth Century* (Kansas City: Sarto House, 1996), pp. 81-82.

[6] Paul VI, General Audience (Nov. 26, 1969). English translation taken from Peter A. Kwasniewski, *The Once and Future Roman Rite: Returning to the Traditional Latin Liturgy after Seventy Years of Exile* (Gastonia: TAN Books, 2022), p. 389.

[7] Paul VI, General Audience (Nov. 26, 1969). See Kwasniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 388

[8] Paul VI, General Audience (Nov. 19, 1969). See Kwasniewski, *op. cit.*, p. 385.