**Pope Francis' struggle to bring forth a synodal Church**

**Synodality for Francis is not just a form of Church government but a way of being Church**

**François se bat pour une Eglise synodale**

**Pour lui ce n’est pas une forme de gouvernement mais une façon d’être en Eglise.**

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The most visible [critique](http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/synod-reflections-from-down-under-interview-with-archbishop-anthony-fisher) of the just concluded Synod of Bishops’ assembly on young people has focused on sections in the final document that call for a strengthening of synodality at all levels of the Church.

It is absolutely surprising how very little so many bishops know about synodality, a method Pope Francis has sought to develop throughout his pontificate and a concept La critique la plus forte du synode qui vient de se terminer porte sur l’appel à plus de synodalité dans l’Eglise.

Il est très surprenant de constater que si peu d’évêques savent de quoi il s’agit.

Catholic theologians have been discussing for at least a couple of decades.

In order to understand how the pope’s ecclesiology is currently being received, we should look back at the concept of episcopal collegiality as it was introduced at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

It is well known that this was a “new” concept for the Council Fathers, who debated and finally approved by principle most notably in the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which was promulgated in November 1964.

Less known is that Catholic theologians had done substantial work in collegiality during the preparation phase of Vatican II. One notable [example](https://www.amazon.fr/LEpiscopat-l%C3%89glise-universelle-Bernard-Dominique-M/dp/B0014WTIXS.) was the 1961 book edited by Yves Congar and Bernard-Dominique Dupuy, *The Episcopate and the Universal Church*.

Pour comprendre comment l’ecclésiologie de François est reçue il faut revenir au concept de collégialité épiscopale tel que défini à Vatican II.

C’était un nouveau concept pour les Pères conciliaires qui en débatèrent et l’approuvèrent dans Lumen Gentium, mais il avait été travaillé en profondeur durant les phases préparatoires du Concile (Y. Congar et B. D. Dupuy par exemple).

During the actual sessions of Vatican II other theologians and historians published even more books and scholarly articles on the topic.

These were fundamental in convincing the bishops council at both ends of the spectrum that episcopal collegiality was not, in fact, some novelty, but part of the Church’s deeper tradition.

Giuseppe Alberigo argued that it was rooted in fidelity to the principle of *ressourcement* in his [book](https://books.google.com/books/about/Lo_sviluppo_della_dottrina_sui_poteri_ne.html?id=3debPgAACAAJ) on the history of the doctrine of power in the universal Church. Though the text was published in Italian in 1964, it was already available to Council Fathers a year earlier during the second session of Vatican II.

**Uneven reception of Francis’ efforts towards synodality**

**L’inégale réception des efforts de François pouir la synodalité**

A similar exchange between theology and magisterium is currently underway regarding *ecclesial synodality*.

But it is happening to a much lesser extent and in a Church that is more ideologically and geographically fragmented. This is a result of the growing gap between theologians and Church leaders, especially because of a weakness within English-speaking theology.

A search for the word “synodality” in titles offered by the most popular [online booksellers](https://www.amazon.com/Synod-Synodality-International-Colloquium-Christianity/dp/3825874370/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1541236121&sr=1-1&keywords=synodality+melloni) produces a mere handful in English. And only a couple of these deal with synodality in the Catholic Church.

Les échanges entre les théologiens et le magistère au sujet de la synodalité n’atteignent pas l’intensité de ceux qui se développèrent autour de la collégialité. Une des raisons en est la fragmentation de L’Eglise ; un fossé se développe entre théologiens et responsables ecclésiaux.

But the situation is very different in other languages — such as French, German, and Italian — where theological reflection on synodality in the Catholic Church has been going since before Francis even became pope.

Le fait est très présent dans le monde de langue anglaise, moins avec le français, l’allemand et l’italien où la synodalité a été beaucoup travaillée.

Since these works are older and more abundant, synodality is not so problematic and less “novel” for theologians and Church leaders.

This uneven reception of Pope Francis’ contribution to synodality is remarkable considering it is one of the key ecclesiological insights of his pontificate, already elaborated in several substantial documents.

They include the [pope’s speech](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html) in October 2015 to mark the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops; the publication in March 2018 of the International Theological Commission’s [text on synodality](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html) in the life and mission of the Church; and the [publication](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html) in September 2018 of the apostolic constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, which further defines and makes changes to the Synod of Bishops.

Additionally, there is also the new instruction, published past October, that lays down the procedures to be followed at the Synod assemblies and delineate the responsibilities of the Synod’s general secretariat.

Even more importantly, there is the experience of preparing and celebrating the two assemblies on marriage and the family in 2014 and 2015 – in my opinion, the most important moment for understanding this pontificate from an ecclesiological and institutional point of view.

La médiocre réception de la synodalité est d’autant surprenante que François en a fait une clé de son pontificat (discours d’octobre 2015, publication de mars 2018, publication Episcopalis Communio de septembre 2018). On notera que la préparation et le déroulement du synode sur la famille en sont un révélateur très important.

But the [lack of reflection](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/what-is-synodality-experts-explain-60147%20) on synodality in some areas of global Catholicism is contributing to confusion and misunderstanding of the current shift from a Church governed by episcopal collegiality to a Church in a process of reform towards synodality.

Cette faiblesse ne contribute pas à la réforme de l’Eglise.

**Subjugating the Roman Curia to worldwide ecclesial synodality**

**Convaincre la Curie de la synodalité**

While ecclesial synodality is based on episcopal collegiality, the terms are not synonymous.

First, episcopal collegiality gives voice to the bishops alone, while synodality seeks to give voice to the entire People of God – meaning other components of the Church (especially women) but also the peripheries of our world and of the Church.

Si la collégialité donne la voix aux évêques la synodalité la donne à tout le peuple de Dieu.

Second, episcopal collegiality – as it was formulated by Vatican II – left a lot of discretion to the Bishop of Rome to choose whether and when he would act collegially. But Francis talks about synodality as a fundamental dimension of being Church that cannot find expression only in events celebrated at the Vatican.

La collégialité est entre les mains du pape, la synodalité est une dimension fondamentale du « être » en Eglise.

Third, the teaching and actions of the popes in the post-Vatican II period framed collegiality in a way that protected the power of the Roman Curia, both theologically and in practice.

But in the last five-and-a-half years Francis has begun to change that.

La collégialité protège le pouvoir (théologique et managérial) de la Curie.

He is expected to articulate the precedence the Synod of Bishops (and synodality) has over the Church’s central bureaucracy when he issues the forthcoming apostolic constitution on the reform of the Curia.

Synodality for Francis is not just a form of Church government, but a way of being Church. It requires not only changing institutions, but also changing an entire mindset. There is a whole agenda that is still being drafted and will require a long time to be [addressed](https://www.amazon.com/Missionary-Reform-Church-Civilt%C3%A0-Cattolica/dp/0809153483).

François veut changer les institutions et l’état d’esprit.

Naturally, there are problems that will need to be resolved.

First of all, it is not clear how much ecclesial synodality an institution like the Synod of Bishops (conceived in 1965 as an instrument of episcopal collegiality and dependent on papal primacy) will be able to bear.

Secondly, a truly synodal Church cannot assume that all participants at synodal events in Rome are fluent in Italian. Italian should not become the new Latin.

Thirdly, synodality needs synodal experience at the universal level, but it must also happen at the national and local level.

Bien entendu des points sont à clarifier :

adapter la synodalité au fonctionnement d’un synode

résoudre le problème du langage synodal (italien…)

étendre la synodalité aux niveaux locaux

In this sense, Francis is opening the way towards synodality while, at the same time, he is trying to heal the wounds that the policies and practices of his previous two predecessors inflicted on episcopal collegiality.

François en ouvrant le chemin vers la synodalité veut aussi guérir les blessures que les pratiques de ses deux prédécesseurs ont créées.

In the early post-Vatican II period there was a wave of local synods and council that came to a stop at the end of Paul VI’s pontificate.

The decadence of the conciliar and synodal life of the Church after Vatican Council II is similar to what happened in the period after the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

The only difference is that it happened much more quickly, given that local conciliar and synodal activity in the Tridentine period remained quite vital until the mid-to-late 18th century.

In one sense, the Second Vatican Council was just a brief pause in more than two centuries of anti-synodal sentiment typical of Ultramontanism. And this is what Francis is up against.

La décadence de la vie conciliaire et synodale de l’après Vatican II est similaire à celle qui a suivi Trente.

**The pope’s delicate balancing act**

**Le pape agit sur le fil du rasoir**

The Jesuit pope’s ecclesiology of synodality casts a light on his deep insight into the Church of today.

His push for a different way of governing and being Church shows his intention and attempt to hold together opposing currents — maintaining an institutional structure in a Catholic culture that tends more and more to become not just post-clerical, but also post-ecclesial and post-Church; listening to the *sensus fidelium* of the whole People of God while preserving the role of discernment for those in leadership positions; and promoting the episcopal collegiality of Vatican II with ecclesial synodality in an age when the Barque of Peter is also rocked by populism and demagoguery.

François cherche à tenir ensemble la structure institutionnelle et l’écoute du peuple de Dieu et à promouvoir ensemble collégialité épiscopale et synodalité en des temps où la barque de Pierre est secouée par le populisme et la démagogie.

But even more importantly, synodality is a necessary response to the pre-global paradigm of ecclesial governance.

The Catholic Church is today much bigger and much more diverse than in the 1960s.

It has become more and more urgent to find a way to deal with conciliarity in a global Church where it is hard to imagine — if for nothing more than logistical reasons — the calling of a another ecumenical council limited only to bishops like that of Vatican II.

L’Eglise n’est plus celle de 1960. Il y a urgence car il est difficile d’imaginer un autre concile œcuménique limité aux seuls évêques.

The idea that conciliarity based on episcopal collegiality is showing its limits is one of the strongest taboos in the official teaching of the Catholic Church today. It is no surprise that it is a Jesuit who has found the courage to address it.

Que la collégialité épiscopale et conciliaire montre ses limites est un des plus grands tabous dans l’Eglise. Ce n’est pas une surprise que ce soit un jésuite qui ait été choisi pour se le « coltiner ».