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THE PNEUMATOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY OF VATICAN II: THE SPIRIT, *SENSUS FIDELIUM,* AND SYNODALITY

Kenjie I. Cortez

Abstract. The paper articulates and advances a pneumatological hermeneutic to Vatican II's renewed ecclesiology. Recognizing both the legacy and the limits of the Council's *ecclesiology in the Spirit*, the paper explores two key ecclesiological insights that Vatican II has decisively retrieved: namely, the *sensus fidelium* and synodality. While the former is explicitly treated in the conciliar texts and the latter is an implicit dimension of the Council, the paper argues that both are crucial in the reception of Vatican II's pneumatological ecclesiology.

Keywords. Holy Spirit; Vatican II; *sensus fidei*; *sensus fidelium*; synodality; Pope Francis

Some Preliminaries

While the Second Vatican Council[1] was primarily preoccupied with ecclesiological concerns, Richard Gaillardetz points out that "one cannot find in the [conciliar] documents a single systematic and comprehensive

[1] Hereafter, it shall be referred to as Vatican II.

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treatise on the Church."[2] This important lacuna has led some quarters within the post-conciliar Church to openly criticize, if not completely reject the Council.[3] Nonetheless, Sally Vance-Trembath asserts that the problem "does not lie in the [conciliar] texts."[4] While there are varying reasons for the so-called stalemate in the implementation of Vatican II, she makes a pensive point that "the conflicting interpretations of the legacy of Vatican II are the result of the failure to establish theologically that the Council did update the life and structure of the Church as well

[2] Richard Gaillardetz, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, eds., Catherine Clifford and Massimo Faggioli (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 167. Similarly, Ormond Rush maintains, "While all the council's sixteen documents address ecclesiological themes in some way, they do not present a systematic treatise on the Church. Oftentimes, some ecclesiological treatments contain statements that deftly juxtapose the juridical 'Bellarminian' ecclesiology with perspectives from the ecclesiologies of more recent decades." See "Roman Catholic Ecclesiology from the Council of Trent to Vatican II and Beyond," *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, ed., Paul Avis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 282.

[3] In one of the six heuristic tools he employs to assess the reception of Vatican II, Gavin D' Costa notes that a particular interpretation of Vatican II – which he refers to as "conservative narrative" – uses the internal consistencies of the conciliar documents and the various underdeveloped themes, including ecclesiology, deny doctrinal legitimacy of the Council. See Gavin D' Costa "The Second Vatican Council," *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, eds., Lewis Ayres and Medi Ann Volpe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 793-794. In addition, historical theologian Massimo Faggioli argues that "in truth, we can see that, in the fifty-year history of the debate on Vatican II, the real challenge to the legitimacy of the council came not from the ranks of the theologians who made it possible, but from the small fringe within the broader 'council minority.' This fringe contested not the effects of the council's reception but the very existence of Vatican II as a legitimate council in the tradition of the Church." See Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2012), 20-21.

[4] Sally M. Vance-Trembath, *The Pneumatology of Vatican II with Particular Reference to Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes* (University of Notre Dame, 2003), available at https://curate.nd.edu/show/xk81jh36p9m, 17 (accessed 05 March 2024).

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as our theological understanding of it."[5] As such, she forefronts the possibility of looking at the "primary pneumatology" of the Council – both implicit and explicit in the conciliar documents – to identify its "primary ecclesiology."[6] Thus, she contends that if one intends to use Vatican II's pneumatology as an interpretive key, one has to pay attention not only to the pneumatological insights expressed in the texts but also to the "competing understandings of the Holy Spirit" during the Council– both of which influenced Vatican II's ecclesiology.[7] This approach can be seen in parallel to or an application of Gaillardertz's claim that "when considered diachronically, as the council texts were develop over the course of the council, and synchronically, as we consider their many intertextual connections, it is possible to draw from the council's work a deeply coherent theological vision of the Church."[8] This paper follows this way of proceeding. Since Vatican II, as Hermann Pottmeyer describes, is like "a building site"[9] – an ecclesiological project that is being completed as it is being received,

[5] Vance-Trembath, *The Pneumatology of Vatican II,* 25.

[6] She further argues that "once the underlying dominant pneumatology has been determined, it will serve as a principle of interpretation for the documents themselves and thus contribute to a deeper understanding and reception of the Council. See Vance-Trembath, *The Pneumatology of Vatican II,* 2.

[7] Vance-Trembath, *The Pneumatology of Vatican II*, 1.

[8] Gaillardetz, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," 167.

[9] Hermann Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I & II*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York City: Crossroad, 1998), 110. In addition, Pottmeyer writes, "Despite all the theological expertise that is gathered at a council and accompanies its work, a conciliar text is not controlled by a unified systematic intention. Vatican II does indeed achieve the already mentioned insight and new assessment of relative values in not a few doctrinal areas; these, however, are only beginnings. But even juxtaposition is progress, because by being complemented the older thesis is relativized as one-sided and bearings are given for further development in understanding of the faith. The needed synthesis is a task that the Council sets for the Church and for theologians; it is a task of reception, which is far from being a merely passive process." See "A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican II: Twenty Years of Interpretation of the Council," *The Reception of Vatican II*, eds., Guiseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre

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an articulation of Vatican II's treatment of the Spirit in relation to its vision of the Church can give birth to a "hermeneutic that does justice to the Council."[10]

The Spirit

The Holy Spirit in the Church: A Century before Vatican II

Veli-Matti Karkkainen notes that Vatican II was decisively instrumental in "the new Catholic pneumatological renaissance."[11] Although before the Council, there were already remarkable developments in pneumatology in general and the Holy Spirit in relation to the Church in particular, Jos Moons argues that Vatican II "rediscovered the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church."[12] According to him, in the late nineteenth up to the early twentieth century, there was a relatively virtual silence on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.[13] As Elizabeth Groppe also observes, "The ecclesiology of this period paid minimal attention to pneumatology."[14] Thus, the Holy

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Joshua, and Joseph Komonchak (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 38.

[10] Pottmeyer, "A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican II," 43.

[11] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 74. For a good introduction to Catholic pneumatology, see Thomas Joseph White, "The Holy Spirit," *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, eds., Lewis Ayres and Medi Ann Volpe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 183-197. Also, Monika Hellwig, "In Spirit and In Truth: A Catholic Perspective on the Holy Spirit," *Quarterly Review* 8:2 (1988): 36–48.

[12] Jos Moons, "The Holy Spirit in Pre-Conciliar Ecclesiology: The Beginnings of a Rediscovery?," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 74: 3 (July 2013): 240.

[13] Moons, "The Holy Spirit in Pre-Conciliar Ecclesiology," 240-241.

[14] Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, "The Contribution of Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit," *Theological Studies* 62:3 (September 2001): 452.

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Spirit was primarily understood as the guarantor of the Magisterium's teaching authority. As illustrated in Leo XIII's *Satis Cognitum*:

> And, since it was necessary that His divine mission should be perpetuated to the end of time, He took to Himself Disciples, trained by himself, and made them partakers of His own authority. And, when He had invoked upon them from Heaven the *Spirit of Truth*, He bade them go through the whole world and faithfully preach to all nations, what He had taught and what He had commanded, so that by the profession of His doctrine, and the observance of His laws, the human race might attain to holiness on earth and never-ending happiness in Heaven.[15]

In addition, although theologians like John Henry Newman (1801-1890) advanced the notions of the Spirit's indwelling in the Church or the Church as the visible "temple of the Holy Spirit," such pneumatological ecclesiologies were marked largely by a desire to defend papal primacy and papal infallibility.[16] Such an attitude toward the Holy Spirit paved the way for the identification of the Church as "the keeper of the eternal truths that modernity disregards."[17] Consequently, this also contributed to the swift rise of Ultramontanism.[18] As the Jesuit historian John O'Malley explains:

> The papacy's search for a response to the enemy [liberalism] helped generate one of the most important yet little commented-upon changes in Catholicism in the modern era: the popes became teachers. Or, better put, they became teachers in a newly professed and more expanded

[15] Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter on the Unity of the Church (Satis Cognitum)*, 29 June 1896, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_29061896_satis-cognitum.html, no. 3.

[16] Ormond Rush, "Roman Catholic Ecclesiology," 269. See also John Henry Newman, "The Papal Supremacy," *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1960), 158-174.

[17] Moons, "The Holy Spirit in Pre-Conciliar Ecclesiology," 241.

[18] See John O'Malley, "The Limitations and Hermeneutical Implications of Vatican I's Prophetic Mode," *Theological Studies* 83: 1 (March 2022): 48–53. Also, "The Millennium and the Papalization of Catholicism," *Catholic History for Today's Church: How Our Past Illuminates Our Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 7-13.

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> way. Their principal vehicle for doing so was the papal encyclical. They used that medium to propose, expound, and elaborate theological and doctrinal positions in a manner unprecedented. By definition an encyclical is a circular letter, and as such it was used by popes and others from ancient times. But in the nineteenth century its significance changed to such an extent that it emerged as virtually a new genre.[19]

Furthermore, Pius XII's 1943 Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis Christi* – which explicitly identified the mystical body of Christ with the Catholic Church – described the Holy Spirit in two ways: "the Holy Spirit is part of the final phase of the founding of the Church" and the One who sustains the Church and its unity.[20]

> Such human societies, and in the first place civil Society, are by no means to be despised or belittled; but the Church in its entirety is not found within this natural order, any more than the whole man is encompassed within the organism of our mortal body. Although the juridical principles, on which the Church rests and is established, derive from the divine constitution given to it by Christ and contribute to the attainting of its supernatural end, nevertheless that which lifts the Society of Christians far above the whole natural order is the Spirit of our Redeemer who penetrates and fills every part of the Church's being and is active within it until the end of time as the source of every grace and every gift and every miraculous power.[21]

Ormond Rush contends that while Pius's encyclical underscored "the spiritual dimensions of the church as Christ's mystical body, nevertheless, [he] continued to emphasize that the church is a perfect

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[19] O'Malley, "The Limitations and Hermeneutical Implications of Vatican I's Prophetic Mode."

[20] Moons, "The Holy Spirit in Pre-Conciliar Ecclesiology," 244. For a more comprehensive study of the Pneumatology of Mystici Corporis, see Moons, *The Holy Spirit, the Church, and Pneumatological Renewal: Mystici Corporis, Lumen Gentium and Beyond* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), 42-70.

[21] Pius XII, *Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ (Mystici Corporis Christi)* 29 June 1943 Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html, no. 63.

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society."[22] As a consequence, the Pope "conceived the role of the Holy Spirit mainly in hierarchical terms."[23] In other words, the Holy Spirit and the hierarchy are both gifts from Christ to complement each other. As Pius XII asserts, "There can, then, be no real opposition or conflict between the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit and the juridical commission of Ruler and Teacher received from Christ, since they mutually complement and perfect each other."[24] Synthesizing the overarching pneumatology of *Mystici Corporis*, Moons writes:

> As Christ is the main theological foundation of the church and the hierarchy, the Spirit's role matters considerably less. The Spirit's role is only highlighted in certain instances e.g., as a pneumatological-Pentecostal elaboration of Christ's grace (MC 54-56) or in defending the church's unicity, as it has a divine principle of unity (MC 60-61). Moreover, even in those instances, the Spirit's role is conceived in the context of Christ, whose body the church is. Finally, there is neither need nor space to develop the Spirit's concrete contribution to the church, because in the actual functioning of the church the hierarchy holds centre stage. As a consequence, the Spirit – much like Christ – is 'banished' to abstract roles, such as being the general principle of the church, or as acting in a general manner and dynamizing in a general manner, or to clarificatory argumentative function. Does this explain the remarkable fact that the hierarchy is not the privileged addressee of the Spirit? For while it remains true that Pius XII seeks to uphold the church's hierarchical dimension and that the Spirit is part of the way he does so, at other moments – and indeed more frequently – he relates the Spirit to the faithful in general or the church.[25]

Moons argues that the pneumatological developments in pre-Vatican II ecclesiology can be seen as "a modest beginning of a

[22] Rush, "Roman Catholic Ecclesiology," 267. In addition, Moons argues that as the apologetical vis-à-vis ultramontane ecclesiology remained influential up to the eve of *Mystici Corporis Christi*, "The Church was understood as a *societas,* and the stress was on her visible, hierarchical organization." See "The Holy Spirit in Pre-Conciliar Ecclesiology," 242.

[23] Moons, "The Holy Spirit in Pre-Conciliar Ecclesiology," 244.

[24] Pius XII, *Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ (Mystici Corporis Christi),* no. 65.

[25] Moons, *The Holy Spirit, the Church, and Pneumatological Renewal,* 72-73.

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rediscovery of the Holy Spirit's role in the Church."[26] Given the concerns and needs of the Church before the Council, the pre-conciliar Church's understanding of "the Holy Spirit was generally limited to guaranteeing the efficacy of the sacraments and reliability of church teaching."[27] Hence, "in the century prior to Vatican II, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was confined either personal, private piety or to juridical power bestowed with clerical office."[28] As Monika Hellwig concludes:

> The association of the Holy Spirit with sacramental efficacy and with the rulings of hierarchic church authority has emerged from continuous reflection upon historical experience. Although Catholic piety and theology at no time denied the prophetic experience of the Holy Spirit, it must be admitted that until the Second Vatican Council, there was a certain tendency to attempt to domesticate the power of the Spirit, and to see that power as operating almost exclusively through official ecclesiastical channels.[29]

The Holy Spirit in the Conciliar Texts

According to Gaillardetz, "We can locate the beginning of the council's recovery of pneumatology with Pope John XIII who, from the preparatory period all the way to his address at the close of the first session of the council, would express the hope on numerous occasions that the council might become a 'new Pentecost.'"[30] Despite this, Jesuit Jacques Dupuis contends that "the Church of Vatican II must in all humility admit its partial failure to do justice to the function

[26] Moons, *The Holy Spirit, the Church, and Pneumatological Renewal*, 248.

[27] See Richard Gaillardetz and Catherine Clifford *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2012), 57.

[28] See Vance-Trembath, "The Pneumatology of Vatican II," 106.

[29] Hellwig, "In Spirit and In Truth," 37.

[30] Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2015), 61.

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of the Spirit."[31] As such, John Randall Sachs asserts that Vatican II's texts do not present "a systematically developed pneumatology."[32] Nonetheless, one can argue that this is due mainly to the reality that the conciliar texts prove Vatican II to be "a transitional Council."[33] While the texts represent both a stylistic and substantive shift in the overall consciousness of the Church, the texts carry with them various issues that gave birth to Vatican II. Despite the seeming "ambivalence"[34] in the conciliar texts, one cannot deny the Council's

[31] Jacques Dupuis, "Western Christocentrism and Eastern Pneumatology," *Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Theological Approaches* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1977), 25.

[32] See John Randall Sachs, "'Do Not Stifle the Spirit!': Karl Rahner, the Legacy of Vatican II, and Its Urgency for Theology Today," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 51 (February 1, 2013), available at https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/4114, 17. Similarly, Yves Congar observes, "It would be tedious to go through every document and every conciliar discussion in search of references to the Holy Spirit. There are at least 258 of them in the conciliar texts! An enumeration of them would not, however, be sufficient as a basis for a pneumatology." See *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. I, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 167.

[33] Pottmeyer argues that "Vatican II can best be described as *a transitional council*.… For this reason, Vatican II is a challenge to its interpreters. The rules customarily applied in interpreting dogmatic texts, especially those of the modern period, do not work here. The texts, even those that are doctrinal in character, lack the conceptual precision, the unambiguous definition of positions, the technical form, and the unity of literary genre to which Trent and Vatican I had accustomed us. Passages using the language of the Bible as no previous council had used it alternate with historical expositions, analyses of the contemporary situation, and, not least, citations of previous councils (half of them from Trent and Vatican I) and references to papal teaching (half of them to Pius XII). No wonder, then, that the interpretations given during the first twenty years after the council present a bewildering picture and display a great deal of insecurity." See "A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican II," 27.

[34] Systematic theologian Richard McBrien explains the "ambivalence" in conciliar texts as: "The drama of Vatican II consisted mainly in the historic struggle between the forces of change and the forces of conservatism, between proponents of essentialist thinking and the practitioners of historicist thought. But the underlying issues were not always resolved. And these unresolved conflicts

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robust pneumatological understanding of the Church.[35] Right at the beginning of the *Lumen Gentium (LG)*, Sachs argues that one "find[s] a pneumatological perspective that widens the Christological focus of traditional ecclesiology and provides a new context for the Church's self-understanding."[36] As Gaillardetz similarly notes, "[E]ven as the council insisted on the centrality of Christ, it avoided as well as reductive ecclesial christomonism by also recalling the mission of the Holy Spirit."[37] This allows for the possibility of seeing the Spirit at work even "beyond the official structures and ordained ministries of the Church."[38] Employing the theology of Karl Rahner as an interpretive key, Sachs states that the Council's pneumatology has redefined its notion of being a Church.[39] In conclusion, Sachs maintains that the Church's reception of Vatican II demands a renewed pneumatology. Hence, this means a "theology [that] is never about the Spirit [but]… something done in the Spirit and by the Spirit."[40]

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are the basis of the council's theological ambivalence." See *Church: The Continuing Quest* (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1970), 25-26.

[35] Rush argues that "throughout the four years of conciliar debate, there was a growing pneumatological awareness among the bishops. That growth in awareness within the church has not stopped developing since the Council. See *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 71-72.

[36] Sachs, "'Do Not Stifle the Spirit!'," 17.

[37] Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II*, 83.

[38] Sachs, "'Do Not Stifle the Spirit!'," 15.

[39] Sachs notes six important achievements in the Council's pneumatological ecclesiology – namely – the universal transcendental revelation in the Spirit; the Spirit's categorical mediation in the history of religions; the universality of Spirit and the normativity of Christ; the Spirit in ecumenism; the Spirit and interreligious dialogue, and the charismatic character of the Church. See Sachs, "'Do Not Stifle the Spirit!'," 19-33.

[40] Here, Sachs follows Rahner's idea of openness to the Spirit which entails a need for "a new imagination, a keener awareness of the Spirit whose 'inspiration is not merely confined to the official pronouncements and directives of the

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In response to Sachs, theologian Catherine LaCugna asserts the need to distinguish further the "vast difference between *talking about the Spirit* and *doing theology in the Spirit*."[41] While she agrees with Sachs that a renewed appreciation of the Holy Spirit is key to the renewal of the Church, LaCugna claims that there remains a dangerous tendency "to proceed as if one knows already what a church animated by the Spirit should be like."[42] Thus, she criticizes Sachs' needless distinction of the official Church – with its structures and ministries – as opposed to the entirety of the Church. For LaCugna, such a way of proceeding often further neglects Vatican II's basic insight that "the Christian community as a whole has ultimate responsibility to say who will act on its [Spirit] behalf."[43] Hence, LaCugna claims that doing theology in the Spirit allows all believers – with distinct gifts – to live and work together for the building up of the Church.

> The Spirit never exists as an individual but only as a person in communion…. The Spirit is always the bridge person: … the One who admits us into the life of the incomprehensible, ineffable God; who overcomes boundaries, differences and divisions among all persons, divine or human; *who unites all believers without vitiating differences or excluding diversity;* who brings us into communion with God, with other persons and with all the goods and creatures of the earth. We do not worship the Spirit alone, but always 'together with Father and Son.' To speak otherwise of the Spirit does not highlight what is distinctive about the person and mission of the Spirit, but in the end depersonalizes the Spirit by making the Spirit stand out as a solitary figure, rather than as a unique divine person who would not even exist apart from the relationship to the other persons."[44]

Church, or the holders of official positions' in it." See Sachs, "'Do Not Stifle the Spirit!'," 37.

[41] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Response to John R. Sachs," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 51 (February 1, 2013), available at https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/4115, 39.

[42] LaCugna, "Response to John R. Sachs," 40.

[43] LaCugna, "Response to John R. Sachs," 40.

[44] Italics are mine. LaCugna, "Response to John R. Sachs," 43.

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Following Sachs and LaCugna, one can say that vestiges of a theology in the Spirit are present in the conciliar texts. In particular, Gaillardetz and Catherine Clifford articulate in three interrelated points how Vatican II presents a pneumatological theology of the Church. First, they assert that the conciliar texts reflect a strong recovery of the biblical notion of "*koinonia*."[45] Thus, they observed that "the term *koinonia* expressed the fundamental connection between participation in the life of God and participation in Church."[46] As Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) also points out:

> The definition of the Spirit as 'communion'… opens up pneumatology in the direction of ecclesiology, or we might say, vice versa, that it opens a connection from ecclesiology back into theo-logy: becoming a Christian means becoming 'communion' and, thus, entering into the mode of existence of the Holy Spirit. That can, however, in turn take place only through the Holy Spirit, who is the power of communication, its element of mediation, of enabling, and who is as such himself a Person.[47]

Since the Spirit has made the Church both a sign and an instrument of communion (*LG* no. 1), this communion possesses a two-fold dimension. Through baptism, all the faithful are not merely a people in communion with one another; rather, they constitute the people of God (*LG* no. 9). As Gaillardetz and Clifford insist, "to be baptized is to be baptized in Christ. [But] baptism [also] establishes our Christian identity by initiating us into the life of the church."[48] Thus, this horizontal-vertical notion of communion is intrinsically linked and expressed in the Council's eucharistic ecclesiology.

> This eucharistic ecclesiology is developed in the writings of St. Augustine, who explains the each time we receive the Eucharist, the reality that we receive through the sacramental signs of bread and wine is at one and the same time the Body and Blood of Christ *and*

[45] See 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 2 Cor. 13:13; 1 Jn. 1:2-3 and Acts 2:42.

[46] Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council,* 60.

[47] Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion,* trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco, USA: Ignatius Press, 2005), 20.

[48] Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council,* 60.

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> the unity of the church…. Augustine carries forward the Pauline line of thought that holds together the eucharistic Body and the ecclesial Body. They are two indivisible aspects of one and the same reality. We become more deeply incorporated into Christ through the eucharistic memorial. For the central meaning of the Eucharist is love, the love of Christ poured out for us in the paschal mystery, the same love in which we share each time we set aside our own self-interest and reach out in concern for others. This is why Augustine contended that the Eucharist was a pedagogy in Christian living where we learn that love of God and love of neighbor are not separate realties. The experience of God's love widens our capacity to love others.[49]

Second, Gaillardetz and Clifford note that Vatican II's ecclesiology in the Spirit is defined by a renewed theology of charisms. As Dominican Yves Congar writes: "One of the most important ways in which the holy Spirit has been restored to the pneumatological ecclesiology of the Council was in the sphere of charisms." [50]

> Since the Protestant Reformation, Christianity had suffered through an ongoing polemic between Protestant and Catholic scholars over whether the early church was founded primarily on stable church offices (the hierarchical structure of the church) or on charisms given to all believers. From the Catholic side, any reference to a decisive role for the Holy Spirit risked sounding too 'Protestant.'"[51]

Vatican II insists that the Holy Spirit – who dwells in the Church and in the hearts of individual believers – bequeaths both hierarchical and charismatic gifts.[52] By asserting that the Spirit is the source of all gifts in the Church, the Council offers a middle ground where the official Church ministers and the lay faithful can work together for the

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[49] Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 67-68.

[50] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. I, 170.

[51] Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 57-58.

[52] Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, 21 November 1964, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, no. 4.

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building up of the Church. As Gaillardetz claims, "In *LG* 4 the council contended, however, that both church office and individual charism find a common source in the work of the Holy Spirit."[53] This important achievement in the conciliar teaching received further emphasis in the Council's *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*:

> For the exercise of this apostolate, the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the people of God through ministry and the sacraments gives the faithful special gifts also, 'allotting them to everyone according as He wills' in order that individuals, administering grace to others just as they have received it, may also be 'good stewards of the manifold grace of God', to build up the whole body in charity. From the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit who 'breathes where He wills'. This should be done by the laity in communion with their brothers [and sisters] in Christ, especially with their pastors who must make a judgment about the true nature and proper use of these gifts not to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things and hold for what is good.[54]

To a greater extent, the Council's theology in the Spirit – as Congar asserts – "describe[s] the impact, in the context of a vision of the Church, of the fact that the Spirit distributes his gifts as he wills and in

[53] Gaillardetz, *By What Authority: Foundations for Understanding Authority in the Church* (Collegeville: Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 2018), 181.

[54] Vatican II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem),* 18 November 1965, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html#, no. 3. In the same token, the Council's *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* underscores the responsibility of the ordained to nurture the gifts of the faithful. "While trying the spirits to see if they be of God, priests should uncover with a sense of faith, acknowledge with joy and foster with diligence the various humble and exalted charisms of the laity." See *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Presbyterorum Ordinis),* 7 December 1965, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html, no. 9.

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this way builds up the Church."[55] Thus, its stance on charisms highlights "the shared dignity and consequent equality of all the baptized in the church."[56] As the bishops assert: "It is not only through the sacraments and ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but… He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank."[57] Accordingly, priority is given neither to charism nor office but to the baptismal dignity that both the lay and the ordained share. For Gaillardertz, this common identity in the Spirit and co-responsibility in the Church can be seen as part of Vatican II's "noncompetitive theology of the Church."[58] Here it merits citing him at length:

> [T]he council's noncompetitive ecclesiology concerns the relationship between the ministry of the ordained and the exercise of charisms received by all believers at baptism. The years immediately before Vatican II had seen a great burst of activity on the part of the laity that often found its form in what came to be known as Catholic Action. In 1927, Pope Pius XI characterized this initiative as 'the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy.' In spite of the real contributions of the many Catholic Action initiatives, we see the same problematic way of imagining the ministry and other forms of ecclesial life. To the clergy alone belonged the prerogative of actively furthering the work of the church. The laity could only do so as a kind of auxiliary to the clergy.
>
> The solution came, once again, by way of the council's recovery of the pneumatological conditioning of the church and its appropriation of the biblical understanding of charism…. In [the] council teaching, charism and office are not opposed to one another since both have the Spirit as their origin. The council was effectively acknowledging that the Holy Spirit was constituting, with Christ, both institutional and charismatic

[55] Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Vol. I, 156.

[56] Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2019), 260.

[57] Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium),* no. 12.

[58] He argues that "[although] the term noncompetitive is not found in the council documents… the term aptly describes the way the council overcame the hierocratic church's tendency to pit key ecclesial elements in competitive, oppositional relationships." See Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II*, 91.

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> elements in the church. In this way it affirmed both that church office could not function properly unless it was informed by the Holy Spirit and that charisms could not survive unless they submitted to an ordering which sought the good of the whole church.[59]

Finally, Gaillardetz and Clifford claim that Vatican II's ecclesiology in the Spirit has revitalized the notion of charisms within the realm of consecrated religious life. Despite the belabored debates during the Council over the nature and purpose of religious life, they maintain that the bishops were conscious of the need for a renewed understanding of professed religious life.[60] The Council acknowledges that "[religious] institutes have their own particular characteristics and work."[61] Hence, Vatican II summons members of various religious communities to explore and rediscover both the visions of their founder/s and the unique charisms of their communities (*Perfectae Caritatis* 2). In doing so, "the council continued to affirm contemplative communities while also celebrating the important contributions of religious engaged in apostolic work."[62] In the words of Joachim Schmeidl, "For the council, 'renewal' [in religious life] is not a uniform process but must reflect

[59] Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II*, 102-103.

[60] They point out: "On the one hand, many bishops [during the Council] advocated a primarily monastic vision of professed religious who dedicated their lives to prayerful contemplation in enclosures far removed from worldly concerns. Those who emphasized this perspective saw the apostolic work of noncontemplative or semicontemplative communities as an anomaly at best and a threat to the very integrity of religious life at worst. On the other hand, others had come to accept the dramatic emergence of apostolic religious communities from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries as a great gift to the church." See Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council,* 63.

[61] Vatican II, *Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (Perfectae Caritatis),* 28 October 1965, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html, no. 2.

[62] Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council,* 63-64.

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'catholic diversity.'"[63] This diversity in religious orders is brought about and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit who calls all faithful to participate in the divine life the Father offers in Christ (*LG* 40).

Both the Council's teachings on communion and charism, as important features of its pneumatological ecclesiology, articulate the Holy Spirit's *involvement* in the life and mission of the Church.[64] Nonetheless, the Council left it to the post-conciliar Church to clarify the concrete meaning and practical implications of such *involvement*. On the one hand, Amado Picardal concludes that "the understanding of communion in Vatican II is indeed broad. It refers to the various levels of communion…. How these levels of communion may be interpreted and concretely realized is one of the questions that have to be answered during the post-conciliar period."[65] On the other hand, Moons claims: "One senses both satisfaction with the fact that the Council spoke about charismas and dissatisfaction with the quality of that speech…. The issue is more fundamental than the number of references to charisma and consistent practical elaboration. The documents give mixed signals on where to 'locate' charismas ecclesiologically, suggesting thereby that the Council's conception of charismas is not very clear."[66]

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[63] Joachim Schmeidl, "Church Governance and Forms of Christian Vocation," *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, eds., Catherine Clifford and Massimo Faggioli (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 227.

[64] Moons observes that LG alone, the bishops make one hundred eight-four "Spirit propositions." Thus, he classified such propositions as whether the Spirit is actively, passively, or somewhat involved in the Council's vision of the Church. See *The Holy Spirit, the Church, and Pneumatological Renewal,* 107-125.

[65] Amado Picardal, *A Vision of a Church Renewed: Living the Ecclesiology of Vatican II & PCP II* (Quezon City, Claretian Communications Foundations, Inc., 2022), 36.

[66] Moons, "'The Holy Spirit Leads the Church through Charismas' (*LG* 12): The Conciliar Doctrine on Charismas and Its Significance for the Laity's Active Involvement in the Church," *The Letter and the Spirit: On the Forgotten Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Annemarie Mayer, BETL (Peeters Publishing, 2018), 239-241. Similarly, Jesuit John Haughey states, "there is a considerable uncertainty

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In conclusion, Nereo Silanes points out, "The pneumatology of Vatican II constitutes a point of arrival as much as a point of departure."[67] Thus, the achievements and limitations of its pneumatological ecclesiology open up to what Rush calls "reception pneumatology," which he describes as the "dreadful burden and the God-given responsibility of being active, creative and imaginative receivers."[68] Whatever is taught or proposed by the Council, demands both a thoughtful appreciation and a thorough appropriation. Given the need to elucidate further the implications of the Council's pneumatological ecclesiology, the following sections explore two key theological insights that Vatican II retrieved – namely – the *sensus fidelium* and synodality.

The *Sensus Fidelium*

According to the International Theological Commission (ITC), "From the beginning of Christianity, all the faithful played an active role in the development of Christian belief."[69] For Rush, "The origins of the *sensus fidelium* lie in the origins of the church."[70] As such, Wolfgang Beinert describes *sensus fidelium* as "a basic means of understanding the faith and as such exercises a truth-finding and truth-attesting

about exactly where… charismas fit ecclesially. See Haughey, "Charisms: An Ecclesiological Exploration," *Retrieving Charisms for the Twenty-First Century* edited by Doris Donnelly (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 3.

[67] Quoted in Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II,* 79.

[68] Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II,* 79.

[69] International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church, 2014*, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html, no. 72. For a comprehensive survey of the historical development of *sensus fidelium* prior to Vatican II, see Daniel Finucane, *Sensus Fidelium: The Use of a Concept in the Post-Vatican II Era* (Bethesda, Maryland: International Scholars Publications, 1996), 17-208.

[70] Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 1.

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function that has as its special characteristic that it takes into account the faithful's experience in the world."[71] Moreover, "the *sensus fidelium* is an ecclesiological reality, because it assures epistemological continuity in the church's reception of revelation throughout history."[72]

Nonetheless, Bradford Hinze and Peter Phan point out that "before the [Vatican II] council it was commonly assumed that it was the bishops in union with the pope that articulated authentic church doctrine and it was expected the faithful would adhere to it."[73] While Daniel Finucane asserts that the notion of agreement of the whole Church as a measure to ascertain the truth of the faith was already invoked in the time of Tertullian, he notes in the later centuries preceding Vatican II, "the hierarchy moved decidedly toward centralization, following a pattern emphasized since the Council of Trent."[74] Assessing the overall ecclesiological climate leading up to the Council, Gaillardetz writes, "For almost four centuries Catholicism had rallied around the authority of church office (e.g., pope and bishops) while classical Protestantism stressed the indispensability of charisms given to each of the faithful."[75]

According to Rush, one decisive moment during the Council that led to the recovery of the notion of *sensus fidelium* was the bishops'

[71] Wolfgang Beinert, "Sensus Fidelium," *Handbook of Catholic Theology* eds., Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schussler Fiorenza (New York: Crossword, 1995), 656.

[72] Rush, *The Eyes of Faith,* 2. In addition, Gaillardetz and Clifford make it clear that "each believer, by virtue of baptism, has a supernatural instinct or sense of the faith (sensus fidei) that allows each to recognize God's word and to respond to it. The individual exercise of this instinct is not, of course, infallible. Nevertheless, this spiritual instinct makes an important contribution to building up the faith of the church." See Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council,* 42.

[73] Bradford Hinze and Peter Phan "Introduction," *Learning from All the Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the Sensus Fidei* eds., Bradford Hinze and Peter Phan (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), ii.

[74] Finucane, *Sensus Fidelium,* 4-15, in 7.

[75] Gaillardetz, *By What Authority,* 181.

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deliberate rejection of the preparatory document on the Church – *De Ecclesia*.[76] In particular, the bishop of Bruges, Emiel De Smedt, criticized "the draft's three decisive shortcomings: (1) the tone of the document was *triumphalist*; (2) it presupposed a *clericalist* view of the Church; and (3) its account of the Church was excessively *juridicist*."[77] As a result, by departing from this ecclesiology, the bishops veered away from the so-called pyramidal vision of the Church – one which "at the top, the pope, bishops, and priests who preside, teach, sanctify, and govern, possessed of authority and power; at the base, the Christian people, passive receipts who seem to occupy a clearly inferior and secondary place."[78] Moreover, the motion to come up with a revised document paved the way for other significant developments in the Council's understanding of the Church, such as the emphasis on the People of God and the restructuring of the document's sections. In turn, Edmond Dobbin claims that "Vatican II's definition of the church as 'The People of God' has initiated a corrective to this virtual marginalization of the 'faithful.' The Council prefers the term *sensus fidei* (sense of faith) but explicitly includes the faithful in this *sensus*."[79] In conclusion, Rush writes:

> This change in chapter order arguably constitutes one of the most significant shifts in the history of Vatican II. When compared with the dominant self-understanding characterizing the church across the whole of the second millennium, the change constitutes nothing less

[76] Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II,* 260. Gaillardetz also points out that despite the "fresh theological currents surfacing in the first half of the twentieth century… Catholic ecclesiology during this period was marked by the dominance of the manual tradition." As a result, even the preparatory document on the Church, by and large, was shaped by such a theological framework. See Gaillardetz, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," 168.

[77] Gaillardetz, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," 168.

[78] See Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), 311.

[79] Edmund Dobbin, "*Sensus Fidelium* as a Source for Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* (1988), available at https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/3492, 113.

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> than a reconfiguration of the Catholic imagination regarding the nature of the church…. Consequently, in the intratextual and intertextual interpretation of *Lumen Gentium* and of the documents derived from it, overall hermeneutical priority is to be given to the fundamental revisioning of the church conveyed by this radical structural change.[80]

According to John Burkhard, Vatican II's teaching on the *sensus fidelium* is most extensively presented in *LG* 12.[81] Here, the Council treats the idea of *sensus fidelium* alongside the notion of *sensus fidei* that individual believers received at baptism.[82] In *LG* 12, one reads:

> The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole people's supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. *That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth.* It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.[83]

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[80] Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II,* 262.

[81] John Burkhard, "The *Sensus Fidelium*: Old Questions, New Challenges," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 70 (August 19, 2015), available at https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/8751, 36.

[82] Andrew Benjamin Salzmann underscores that "while this *sensus fidei* is, therefore, a communal prerogative, this communal dimension of the sensus fidei is rooted in the gift of the Holy Spirit to each member of the Body." See "The *Sensus Fidelium* in Augustine," *Learning from All the Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the Sensus Fidei* eds. Bradford Hinze and Peter Phan (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 16.

[83] Italics are mine. Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, 21 November 1964, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, no. 12.

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Moons notes that there are at least five interrelated points affirmed in this paragraph. Specifically, he claims that in *LG* 12, the Holy Spirit's role is underscored as the One who both anoints the faithful and arouses and sustains their *sensus fidei*.[84] Nevertheless, Moons contends that there are significant ambiguities in the paragraph's treatment of *sensus fidei* in relation to the Holy Spirit.[85] Consequently, the lack of clarity on the place of *sensus fidei* in *LG* has led theologians to pay less attention to its pneumatological character.

> Although most theologians share the conviction that the Holy Spirit is the source of the *sensus fidei*, few have drawn the conclusion that pneumatology should be a foundational aspect of any reflection on the matter. Pneumatology appears only marginally in Burkhard's overview articles, as it does in Daniel Finucane's survey of the use of the concept of *sensus fidei* in the post-conciliar period. To state that '[a] theology of the *sensus fidelium* must begin by attending to the role of the Holy Spirit in divine revelation,' as Ormond Rush did in his 2009 monograph *The Eyes of Faith*, is thus an exception, not the rule."[86]

Moons concludes that a more nuanced understanding of *LG* 12's articulation of the *sensus fidei* in light of the Council's pneumatological ecclesiology should be less interested in discussions on authority and obedience in the Church and more "on discerning what the Spirit is saying to the Church in our time."[87] While it is crucial to underscore that it is the Holy Spirit who guarantees the "infallibility in believing," the Spirit remains to be "the principle of reception" – the One allows every baptized (lay and clergy alike) through their "lived sense of the

[84] Moons, "'Aroused and Sustained by the Holy Spirit?: A Plea for a Pneumatological Reconsideration of *Sensus Fidei* on the Basis of Lumen Gentium 12,'" *Gregorianum* 99: 2 (2018): 273.

[85] For example, Moons points out that while the *sensus fidei* of all the baptized and charisms given to individuals share some "ecclesiological and pneumatological similarities," treating these two in a single section is hard to justify. See "'Aroused and Sustained by the Holy Spirit?,'" 276.

[86] Moons, "'Aroused and Sustained by the Holy Spirit?,'" 273.

[87] Moons, "'Aroused and Sustained by the Holy Spirit?,'" 291.

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faith" to participate in the Church's *active* reception of revelation.[88] As Gaillardetz and Clifford note:

> The sense of faith given to each believer in baptism may be understood in two ways. First, it can refer to a capacity of individual believers to understand God's revelation addressed to them in love. In this regard we might think of the sense of faith as a kind of spiritual instinct or sixth sense. It is in this capacity that allows a believer, almost intuitively, to discern what is of God and what is not. But the sense of faith might also be thought of, not only as a capacity, but also as an actual perception or imaginative grasp of divine revelation.
>
> The best analogy may come from our appreciation of art. When we encounter a piece of art like a beautiful sculpture or a moving musical composition, it has an effect on us; we apprehend the art from our own particular perspective. Our own life story, our storehouse of life experiences, inclines us to understand the work of art in a particular way. The work of the artist is completed in our viewing or hearing of the work. We bring something of ourselves to the work of art. The *sensus fidei* functions similarly.[89]

Arguably, *LG* 12's treatment of the *sensus fidelium* as an expression of Vatican II's ecclesiology in the Spirit is reinforced in *Dei Verbum* (*DV*). Although the Constitution does not explicitly employ the phrases *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium*, its profound pneumatological notion of revelation highlights the believers' active reception in faith. As the ITC underscores:

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[88] See Rush, *The Eyes of Faith,* 15. Also, "*Sensus Fidei*: Faith 'Making Sense' of Revelation," *Theological Studies* 62:2 (June 2001): 231. In *LG* 9, the Council teaches, "Moving forward through trial and tribulation, the Church is strengthened by the power of God's grace, which was promised to her by the Lord, so that in the weakness of the flesh she may not waver from perfect fidelity, but remain a bride worthy of her Lord, and moved by the Holy Spirit may never cease to renew herself, until through the Cross she arrives at the light which knows no setting."

[89] Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council,* 43. In the same token, Rush writes, "*Sensus fidei*… is such an imaginative capacity which, within their daily reception of God's self-communication, Christians, in some relatively adequate way (at least adequate in terms of salvation), 'make sense of' their lives and 'make sense of' the God reaching out to them in their lives through Christ in the Spirit." See Rush, *The Eyes of Faith,* 66.

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> *Dei Verbum* says that the apostolic Tradition 'makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit'. 'There is growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on.'… Although this passage does not name the *sensus fidei*, the contemplation, study, and experience of believers to which it refers are all clearly associated with the *sensus fidei*…. When this text is read in light of the description of the *sensus fidei* in *Lumen Gentium* 12 as a supernational appreciation of the faith, aroused by the Holy Spirit, by which people guided by their pastors adhere unfailingly to the faith, it is readily seen to express the same idea. When referring to 'the remarkable harmony' that should exist between the bishops and the faithful in the practice and profession of the faith handed on by the apostles, *Dei Verbum* actually uses the very expression found in the definitions of both Marian dogmas, *'singularis fait Antistitum et fidelium conspiratio."*[90]

In a reflection he offered during the last assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Rush likewise noted:

> In *Dei Verbum*…divine revelation is presented as an ongoing encounter in the present, and not just something that happened in the past. The event of God's self-revealing (always in Christ, through the Holy Spirit) and God's offer of relationship, continues to be a living reality here and now. That doesn't mean there can be some new revelation of who God is. But, the same God, in the same Jesus Christ, though the enlightenment and empowerment of the same Holy Spirit, is forever engaging with, and dialoguing with, human beings in the ever-new here and now of history that relentlessly moves humanity into new perceptions, new questions and new insights, in diverse cultures and places, as the world-church courses through time into an unknown future until the eschaton.[91]

As Vatican II shifts from a static to a dynamic and from a proportionalist to a personalist understanding of revelation (*DV* 2), the Council highlights the creative role of the individual's *sensus fidei* and the Church's *sensus fidelium* in giving expression to the Father's

[90] International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, 46.

[91] Rush, "Synod: Fr Ormond Rush's Theological Reflection on Synthesis Report," 23 October 2023, Vatican News, available at https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-10/synod-fr-ormon-rush-theological-input-on-synthesis-report-a.html.

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offer of love through Christ in the Spirit.[92] Unequivocally, the Council departs from the so-called "illuminationist theology of revelation," which posits a trickle-down movement – "a framework in which God communicates a divine message through doctrines that are taught by the magisterium and passively received by the Christian faithful."[93] In the words of Ratzinger:

> The Council's intention in this matter was a simple one…. The fathers were merely concerned with overcoming neo-scholastic intellectualism, for which revelation chiefly meant a store of mysterious supernatural teachings, which automatically reduces faith very much to an acceptance of these supernatural insights. As opposed to this, the Council desired to express again the character of revelation as a totality, in which word and event make up one whole, a true dialogue which touches man (sic) in his totality, not only challenging his reason, but, as dialogue, addressing him as a partner, indeed giving him his true nature for the first time.[94]

[92] Ratzinger echoes this personalist or relational approach to revelation in his first encyclical letter as Benedict XVI. He writes, "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. See Benedict XVI, *On Christian Love (Deus Caritas Est)*, 25 December 2005, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html, no. 1.

[93] Gaillardetz, "Building on Vatican II: Setting the Agenda for the Church of the 21st Century," *Theoforum* 44:1 (2013): 69. One may also recall Pius X's 1906 encyclical letter where he asserted that "the Church is essentially an *unequal society*, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors. See *Encyclical Letter on the French Law of Separation (Vehementer Nos)*, 11 February 1906, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html, no. 8.

[94] Ratzinger, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Origin and Background," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, (vol. III) ed., Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 172.

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Rush concludes that "Vatican II retrieves this long-held belief regarding the reality of the *sensus fidei* in the faithful, but recontextualizes the teaching by treating it within its discussion of the whole People of God's participation in the 'prophetic office' of the church."[95] Since the Council has applied the so-called *tria munera* schema not only to the ordained but primarily to all Christ's faithful (*LG* no. 10), its treatment of the prophetic office in the Church is directed to all baptized – as individuals and a community. Anointed by the Spirit at baptism, all Christ's faithful bear a responsibility for the Church's faith and teaching.[96] The entire people of God (as *fidelis and fideles*) "share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Church."[97] In the final analysis, Gaillardetz maintains, "[The] pneumatological ecclesiology of the council further underscored the active participation of all the faithful through the exercise of their supernatural instinct for the faith (*sensus fidei)*."[98]

Synodality

Richard Lennan claims that part of the challenges in the Church's reception of Vatican II is the reality that most Catholics remain "unskilled in discerning and negotiating possibilities for change. More specifically, there was no lived memory of how the dynamics of the

[95] Rush, *The Eyes of Faith,* 4. In his more recent work on Vatican II, Rush writes: "The vision of Vatican II brings into the foreground of its ecclesial self-understanding the individual baptized believer and his or her singular importance in the mission of the church, without downplaying the communal and social dimension of the church." See *The Vision of Vatican II,* 274. See also Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum, Rediscovering Vatican II* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2006), 45.

[96] Rush, *The Eyes of Faith,* 175-214.

[97] Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, no. 32.

[98] Gaillardetz, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," 173-174.

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sensus fidei [sensus fidelium] might operate as the Council had advocated."[99] It is in this context that Rush suspects Pope Francis invites the Church "into a new phase in the reception of Vatican II."[100]

According to Hinze, "Synodality is a central unfinished agenda of Vatican II."[101] Commenting on the recently concluded assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2023), Faggioli argues that it is clear by now "that synodality is *not* an experiment…. It is a moment of *ressourcement* in the tradition of the Church – a reconnection with an important and very real part of its past."[102] In addition, Francis' intuition on synodality in 2015 is notably comparable to John XXIII's intuition when he called for Vatican II in 1959.[103] Not to mention the fact that Vatican II "spoke

[99] Richard Lennan, "*Roman Catholic Ecclesiology,*" The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church eds., Gerard Mannion and Lewis Mudge (New York: Routledge, 2008), 243.

[100] Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II,* 543. Similarly, Faggioli observes that although "Francis has quoted Vatican II less than his predecessors," he "inaugurated a new phase in the reception of Vatican II, partly due to the disappearance of traditionalist issues from his agenda, which affected his handling of liturgical and other matters." See Faggioli, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving Toward Global Catholicity* (New York: Orbis, 2020), 28. See also Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council,* 115-136.

[101] Hinze, "Transforming Priestly Identity and Ministry," *Priestly Ministry and the People of God: Hopes and Horizons* eds., Richard Gaillardetz, Thomas Groome and Richard Lennan (New York: Orbis, 2022), 64.

[102] Faggioli, "The Synodal Journey Continues: But Course Corrections are Needed," *Commonweal*, 08 November 2023, available at https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/synodality-faggioli-francis-vatican-ii-global-catholicism.

[103] Following Jesuit theologian Christoph Theobald, Faggioli notes striking similarities between Vatican II and the ongoing Synod on Synodality. See "The Synod: An Early Assessment of the 2023 Assembly in Rome," Recorded 02 November 2023, Youtube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQ1Gn3QNCY4.

of itself both as a council and a synod," the Council was celebrated in a synodal way.[104] As Moons succinctly narrates:

> Prior to the Council, in a worldwide consultation, bishops, religious orders and congregations, and Catholic universities were asked for themes that the Council should deal with. Unfortunately, their input did not play a major role in the preparation of the first drafts; thus, the first opportunity for synodality was (largely) missed. This changed when some 2,000 bishops gathered in St Peter's for the First Session of the Council. They turned out to have ideas of their own (that were often inspired by their theological advisors). Embracing John XXIII's proposal for a more positive attitude towards modernity and for another, pastoral style, they criticized the approach that characterized the prepared drafts. As a result, almost all drafts were rejected.
>
> What was at stake went beyond theological content or style; it was about participation. The Council fathers wanted to have a say in the conciliar process, the Council's texts and its direction.[105]

In its 2018 document, the ITC notes: "Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term or as a concept in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that synodality is at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging."[106] However, Rush points out that synodality – as far as Vatican II's texts are concerned – is largely and primarily understood in the context of papal primacy and episcopal collegiality.

> The Vatican II documents never once use the word 'synodality,' nor the adjective, 'synodal.' The noun 'synod' is found 136 times. In many of those instances, the council is referring to itself as a 'sacred synod,' seeing 'council' and 'synod' as synonyms that are just Greek (s*ynodos*) and Latin (*concilium*) transliterations. So, by implication, 'synodality'

[104] Moons, "A Comprehensive Introduction to Synodality: Reconfiguring Ecclesiology and Ecclesial Practice," *Annals of Theology (The Learned Society of Catholic University of Lublin)* 69: 2 (2022), 75.

[105] Moons, "A Comprehensive Introduction to Synodality," 75-76.

[106] International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2018, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html, no. 6.

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> here means simply 'conciliarity': all bishops meeting with the bishop of Rome to govern and teach the church…. In other words, strictly speaking, for Vatican II – when one looks at the explicit statements of the final texts – synodality is much more an element of its intention to balance papal primacy with episcopal collegiality (by calling for more dialogical and collaborative structures between the pope and the episcopal college) than it is a promotion of an 'upward' direction in the teaching, sanctifying and governing aspects of the Catholic Church.[107]

Arguably, establishing the Synod of Bishops in 1965 proved to be an important reception of the Council's teaching synodality vis-à-vis collegiality. In *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, Paul VI expressed the conciliar fathers' desire "to establish even closer ties with the bishops in order to strengthen [the Pope's] union with them 'whom the Holy Spirit has placed… to rule the Church of God."[108] Thus, O'Malley observes, "'The synods since Vatican II have functioned precisely according to the model Pope Paul VI set down, with even their advisory function often seemingly inoperative.'"[109] It is within this context that Pope Francis calls for a more intensive and extensive application of the conciliar notion of synodality. In his 2015 Address, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the synod of bishops, Francis spoke of his vision of "a synod Church." Thus, the Holy Father describes such a vision as "the faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit… to know what [the Spirit] 'says to the Churches.'"[110] Given such remarks,

[107] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church," *Theological Studies* 78:2 (June 2017): 304.

[108] Paul VI, *Apostolica Sollicitudo: Establishing the Synod of Bishops for The Universal Church*, 15 September 1965 Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19650915_apostolica-sollicitudo.html.

[109] O'Malley, "Family Gathering: Rediscovering the Role of the Synod of Bishops," *America* 213:2 (July 20, 2015): 21.

[110] Francis, *Address on the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015 Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

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Rush argues that "Francis is foregrounding conciliar motifs such participation, the Holy Spirit, *sensus fidelium*, and dialogue and bringing the conciliar vision to a new synthesis, one that is faithful to all the principles that the council expounded."[111]

According to Rush, the idea of synodality as a new synthesis of Vatican II can be understood and justified in two ways. First, Francis likens a synodal Church to "an inverted pyramid."[112]Amanda Osheim points out that before Vatican II, the pyramidal vision of the Church "effectively divided the church – not only notionally, but also frequently in practice – into the teaching church (*ecclesia docens*) and the learning church (*ecclesia discens*)."[113] As such, this pyramidal notion of the Church lies at the heart of the debates and discussions during the drafting of *LG*. In the end, by treating theme of the people of God before hierarchy, *LG* articulates "a reconfiguration of the Catholic imagination regarding the nature of the church."[114] In the words of O'Malley, "The symbolism of the change was potent: the first reality of the church is horizontal and consists of all the baptized, without distinction of rank. Only then comes the vertical reality, hierarchy."[115] Consequently, this radical development also paved the way for the bishops "to attribute to all the *fideles* participation in the so-called three offices of Christ, something formerly attributed to the hierarchy alone."[116] In the final analysis, Osheim notes that Francis' analogy of an inverted pyramid redefines authority in the Church as being dependent on reception – its ability to listen to the Spirit and learn from all its members. As Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* (*EG)*:

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[111] Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II,* 543-544.

[112] Francis, *Address on the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*.

[113] Amanda Osheim, "Stepping toward a Synodal Church," *Theological Studies* 80:2 (June 2019): 371.

[114] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 307.

[115] O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II,* 178.

[116] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 309.

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> In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. 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 wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression.[117]

Second, synodality – as Francis' reception of Vatican II's ecclesiology – puts forward key dimensions of the Council's *communio* ecclesiology. As Rush argues:

> Vatican II speaks of the church *ad intra* as a communion in basically three ways: the hierarchical *communio* within the college of bishops (*communio hierarchica*); the c*ommunio* between local churches constituting the catholic church (*communio ecclesiarum*; and the *communio* among all the faithful (*communio fidelium*).
>
> One of the great achievements of Vatican II is its teaching on episcopal collegiality. The doctrine attempts to complete the unfinished work of Vatican I, with its teaching on the jurisdictional 'primacy' of the pope.

[117] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, Vatican Archive, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, no. 119. In his address on the Opening of the Synod on Synodality, Francis expressed: "May this Synod be a true season of the Spirit! For we need the Spirit, the ever-new breath of God, who sets us free from every form of self-absorption, revives what is moribund, loosens shackles and spreads joy. The Holy Spirit guides us where God wants us to be, not where our own ideas and personal tastes would lead us. Father Congar once said: 'There is no need to create *another Church*, but to create *a different Church* (True and False Reform in the Church). For a 'different Church', a Church open to the newness that God wants to suggest, let us with greater fervour and frequency invoke the Holy Spirit and humbly listen to him, journeying together as he, the source of communion and mission, desires: with docility and courage." See *Address on the Beginning of the Synodal Journey*, 09 October 2021, Holy See Press Office., (accessed 05 March 2024).

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> Vatican II goes on to affirm that bishops, in succession with the 'college' of the apostles, likewise constitute a college. This college relates in a *communio hierarchica* with and under the bishop of Rome. This new notion of *communio hierarchica* enabled the council to avoid to some extent the traditional, juridical distinction between *ordo* and i*urisdictio* in the original *De Ecclesia*, and to reformulate it in the language of *communio*.[118]

Francis' notion of synodality draws from and develops Vatican II's *communio* ecclesiology. On the one hand, without diminishing the Council's teaching on the pope as "the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of bishops and of the whole company of the faith"[119] (*sub Petro*), he has made strides in accentuating that he is the pope primarily because he is the bishop of the local Church of Rome (*cum Petro*). As journalist Cindy Wooden observes: "From the moment he was introduced to the world after his election, Pope Francis has emphasized his identity as 'the bishop of Rome.'"[120] Thus, Francis strongly pointed out in *EG*: "It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralization.'"[121] On the other hand, Francis' view of synodality rearticulates the Council's notion of *communio* as he "is, at least implicitly, retrieving Vatican II's ultimate ordering of the church as a *communio fidelium*, a *communio ecclesiarum*, and finally a *communio hierarchica*."[122] As the ITC also maintains:

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[118] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 313.

[119] Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium),* no. 23.

[120] Cindy Wooden, "Did Pope Francis Really Drop the 'Vicar of Christ' Title?," *Catholic Herald*, April 3, 2020, available at https://catholicherald.co.uk/did-pope-francis-really-drop-the-vicar-of-christ-title/.

[121] Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii Gaudium*, no.16. See also no. 32. Commenting on these paragraphs, Gaillardetz writes, "If, in fact, Pope Francis is serious about papal decentralization, then this turn to ecclesial subsidiarity may represent this most profound effort at *ressourcement*." See Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council,* 128.

[122] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 320.

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> Synodality as an essential dimension of the Church is expressed on the level of the universal Church in the dynamic circularity of the *consensus fidelium*, episcopal collegiality and the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. On this basis, the Church is asked from time to time to respond – in fidelity to the *depositum fidei* and in creative openness to the voice of the Spirit – to particular circumstances and challenges; she is called to set in motion a process of listening to all the subjects who together form the People of God in order to agree in discerning the truth and on the missionary path to take.[123]

Francis' hope for a synodal Church is fundamentally rooted in Vatican II's renewed vision of the Church. Specifically, the Council's ecclesiology in the Spirit laid the groundwork for what Rafael Luciani calls "the *synodalization* of the whole Church."[124] On the one hand, the emphasis of the synodal process on *LG* 12 underscores the reality that the Spirit anoints every baptized to share in the prophetic role of the whole People of God. This renders the *sensus fidelium* – as Moons describes it – "a source of truth and revelation [as] it is one of the ways in which the Spirit speaks to the Church nowadays."[125] On the other hand, synodality, as a reception of the *communio* ecclesiology, makes it more apparent – as Gaillardetz notes – that "it is the Holy Spirit that acts as the divine agent of that communion (see *LG* 13, 25, 49; UR 2; AG 19)."[126]

Some Concluding Thoughts

By all means, the reception of Vatican II's vision of a renewed Church remains to be an ongoing task. Thus, having a potent interpretive key to flesh out what such a vision might mean for the Church today is both urgent and necessary. In this paper, I aimed to

[123] International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 94.

[124] Rafael Luciani, *Synodality: A New Way of Proceeding in the Church* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2022), 31.

[125] Moons, "A Comprehensive Introduction to Synodality," 80-81.

[126] Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council,* 94.

show how Vatican II's pneumatological ecclesiology – while, to an extent, inchoate and incomplete – signifies a significant shift both in the Church's self-understanding itself and of the Spirit present and at work in it. Consequently, any careful understanding of and genuine appeal to the *sensus fidelium* must grounded in the Council's acknowledgment of Spirit's gift of a supernatural instinct to all baptized (*sensus fidei*). Beyond the question of authority in the Church, a pneumatological reading of Vatican II's treatment of the former summons the entire people of God to ecclesial discernment – continuously and *progressively* receiving God's revelation in light of the signs of the times. Lastly, Francis' invitation to synodality – with its possibilities and limitations – is yet another decisive attempt to implement Vatican II's ecclesiology in the Spirit. Recognizing the Spirit as the protagonist of the synodal process, the Church strives to be more open to the richness and freshness that the Spirit brings.

About the Author. **Kenjie I. Cortez** is pursuing a Licentiate in Sacred Theology (S.T.L.) at Loyola School of Theology, and a Ph.D. in (Systematic) Theology at Ateneo de Manila University, where he also serves as a lecturer in the Department of Theology. His research interests include Roman Catholic ecclesiology, Vatican II, and post-Vatican II Catholicism.