

SYNODALITY & THEOLOGIES OF THE CHURCH

TIMOTHY GABRIELLI,
PH.D.

UNIVERSITY OF
DAYTON

SOME
QUESTIONS THAT
EMERGED IN
ARCHDIOCESE
OF CINCINNATI
SYNODAL
PLANNING

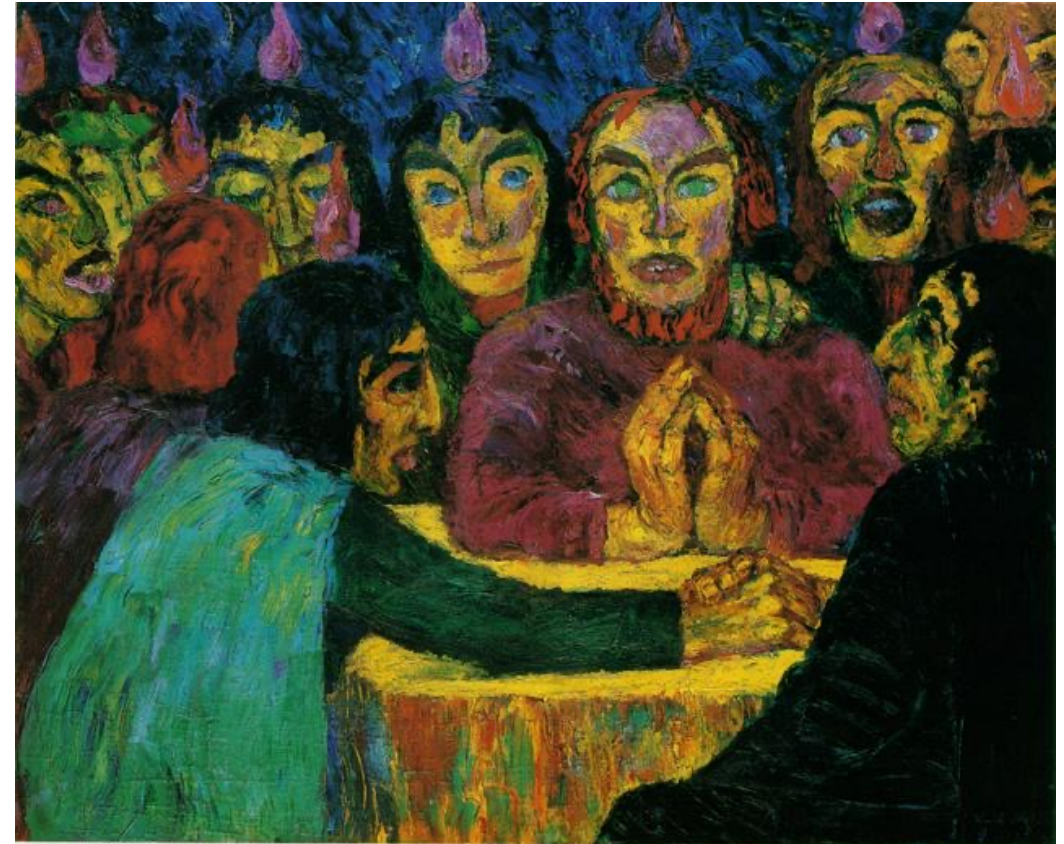
- How is the Church different from a business or corporation?
- How can we recognize the Holy Spirit at work in our deliberations?

TWO ASPECTS (AMONG MANY!) OF A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

- Church as Mystery
- Church as Field Hospital

THE CHURCH IS A MYSTERY: THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- “Mystery” – a reality that cannot be fully comprehended by our minds, rather than a problem that has yet to be solved.
- The Church is a Mystery because it is caught up in God’s (mysterious) action of saving the world (e.g. Romans 16; 1 Cor 2:7–10).
- The Church is not merely a club, a group, a business, or any other purely human community precisely because the Holy Spirit animates the Church! (Acts 2: Pentecost)



Emil Nolde, “Pentecost (1909)

THE CHURCH AS MYSTERY: SYNODALITY



- **The Holy Spirit, then, speaks in a synodal gathering.**
- **Identifying the Holy Spirit is easier said than done!**
 - **Guidrails: Scripture and Tradition**
 - **Discerning the will of God**
 - **Not left to one person**
 - **Always within the context of our life and times**
 - **Patience, careful listening, & prayer**

DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS

- **Am I merely driving a point home, as a partisan for a position?** In my participation, do I have sufficient distance from my own contributions so that I may be open to hearing something different and inspiring?
- **Are we merely finding the most expedient solution to a problem?** [To be clear: expediency isn't an enemy of the Spirit, only mere expediency.]
- **Are we merely settling on the most cost-effective solution?** [To be clear: cost-effectiveness isn't an enemy of the Spirit, only mere cost-effectiveness.]
- **Are we merely following the loudest or most powerful voices?** [To be clear: the Spirit may be speaking through those voices, but also through others.]

THE CHURCH AS MYSTERY: EUCCHARIST

- “Mystery” =
“Sacrament”
- Eucharist makes us the
Body of Christ



SYNODALITY & PRAYER

“Spirituality and prayer must permeate all dimensions of synodal preparation and experiences. Every encounter, every development, and every component of this Synod journey should include intentional and meaningful prayer and silence.”

~ USCCB, “Infusing a Synodal Spirit: Prayerfully Trusting the Holy Spirit,” 2022

SECOND
VATICAN
COUNCIL

*DOGMATIC
CONSTITUTION ON
THE CHURCH:
LUMEN GENTIUM*

MYSTERY →
PEOPLE OF GOD

THE CHURCH AS A FIELD HOSPITAL

“The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. ...And you have to start from the ground up.”

~ Pope Francis, 2013 Interview



THE CHURCH AS A FIELD HOSPITAL



- A Church less concerned with defending its own “interests” than with attending to the woundedness of people.
- A Church that exists to spread the Gospel (evangelize)
 - Pope Francis spoke about “taking the risk of novelty, in order to be more faithful to the Gospel.”
 - Thus, new emphases or structures may be necessary to witness to the Gospel in our moment. Those emphases or structures need to remain in tune with Scripture and Tradition.

CHURCH: EVANGELIZING COMMUNITY

“An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time. Faithful to the Lord’s gift, it also bears fruit.”

~ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*
(2013), no. 24



Pope Francis at World Youth Day in Poland, 2016. Marcin Kadziolka. Shutterstock.

CHURCH AS FIELD HOSPITAL & SYNODALITY

- Particular offices (e.g. pastors, bishops) have a ministerial responsibility to take the final decision in certain matters, but that final decision should connect to a broader synodal conversation in which we seek the Spirit's voice through the voices and gifts of the faithful.
- In a field hospital, the need is for all hands to work. Specialization, training, and ministerial role are not disregarded (no one should perform surgery who isn't a surgeon!), but the web of responsibility extends to all.
- Listening, discernment, and dialogue is part of the larger decision-making process.

DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS

- Do our decisions prioritize those who are weakest among us?
- Do our decisions prioritize how we might best spread the Gospel, i.e. tend to the physical and spiritual wounds, in our communities (ecclesial, local, universal)?
- Do our decisions reflect a patient consideration for the effects upon and needs of all of those concerned?