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KEYNOTE ADDRESS
“Pope Francis: Fresh Perspectives on Synodality”

by

His Eminence
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Thank you, Bishop Fiorenza, for the kind words of welcome to all of us at this Canon Law Society of America Annual Convention.

I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to Father Manuel Viera, President of the Canon Law Society of America, and Father Roger Keeler, Executive Director, for their gracious invitation to speak at this important assembly of canonists from across the country. I particularly appreciate the opportunity to reflect on the topic of Pope Francis and fresh perspectives on synodality.

COLLEGE OF BISHOPS / COLLEGIALITY

To start, it might be helpful to make some very brief observations on the ecclesial reality that we call the College of Bishops. Just as the 12 Apostles constituted a unique and identifiable group with its own nature and function, so, too, today do their successors. One manifestation of the College of Bishops is in their coming together as a council.

The fullest expression of the word “council” is found in a general or ecumenical coming together of the College of Bishops. This manifestation of the College of Bishops, successors to the college of Apostles, enjoys and exercises effective or proper collegiality. The 1998 *Motu Proprio* of Pope John Paul II on the theological and juridical nature of episcopal conferences goes on to point out that the communion of the college of the Apostles, the College of Bishops, has found an outstanding and typical expression in the holding of councils, this includes ecumenical and particular councils, both plenary and provincial.¹ Other gatherings of bishops to

exercise certain pastoral functions are a concrete expression of collegial spirit (*affectus collegialis*) which however “never takes on the collegial nature proper to the action of the Order of Bishops as such...”ⁱⁱ

Episcopal conferences, for example, meet so that “by sharing their wisdom and experience and exchanging views, they may jointly formulate a program for the common good of the Church” (*Motu Proprio* citing the Second Vatican Council Degree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus dominus*, 37 and the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 23).

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is not an intermediary ecclesial structure that directs or orders the dioceses in the United States. Rather, the bishops come together to find ways to identify and agree on a common exercise of their own proper pastoral ministry.

My observations however will be primarily about another ecclesial structure identified as the Synod of Bishops. It is not a council of all of the bishops. Rather, it is a gathering of a number of bishops who are intended to be reflective of the episcopate around the world. The assembled bishops of the synod do not exercise an authority as if they were the College of Bishops. However, they do reflect an effort at pastoral solidarity usually directed at specific pastoral issues or aspects of the Church structure, mission and ministry. The synod does not govern but it does offer counsel and advice.

The scope of my reflections today will be restricted to a look at synodality through the lens of Pope Francis’ teaching. Since the beginning of his pontificate, in fact, Pope Francis has focused on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, particularly in *Lumen Gentium*,² on the role of the bishops in communion with Peter in the overall responsibility for the life and mission of the Church. Our Holy Father engages the Synod as it has been structured since the days of Pope Paul VI as the instrument to bring to fuller maturation the level of collegiality called synodality. Having as reference points the experience of the last two Synods and the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, therefore, this presentation intends to reflect on the value and achievements of the emphasis on synodality.

Even though our purpose is to investigate synodality as a means of expression of the collegial nature of the episcopate our starting point must include a brief consideration on the theological nature of collegiality, as this is significant in the understanding of synodality. We must begin, therefore, by considering several facts - several realities - those sacred offices in the Church, which are themselves structures. The Church Universal is made up of many and varied local Churches. Granted, the one Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church is more than just a federation of individual Churches.

It is, nonetheless, made up of local Churches throughout the world, these local Churches are essentially the same today as they were in the days of Saint Paul - the communities of believers centered in a specific area around one bishop, their bond and symbol of unity in faith and charity.ⁱⁱⁱ

Each local Church is the Universal Church in miniature. Every local Bishop, with his priests preaches the same Gospel, dispenses the same healing grace through the sacraments, and applies to all the believers the saving mysteries of redemption. When the local bishop preaches, his church hears the words of the Church. When the local Church prays it prays as the Body of Christ. The local Church has all those elements that the Universal Church enjoys. It is, therefore,

not just a part of the Church. It participates and manifests fully the Universal Church in its own specific locale. It is the Church - localized.

The Universal Church on the other hand, is more than the federation of local Churches. It too is a reality extending over all the face of the world giving that super-local dimension to the notion of the Universal Church. Peter presides over the Universal Church. The local Bishop, successor of the Apostles, presides over the local Church. Both are communities - one on a local level centered in the Bishop, the other on a translocal level centered in Peter uniting all the local Churches in one Church. The members of the local Church by that title are members of the Church Universal.

Each local Church bears a relation to every local Church in the Universal Church. For every Bishop is called to the succession of the Body of Apostles known as the College of Bishops. Each local Bishop, therefore, has a relationship not only to his local Church but also to the Church Universal. Each bishop by that title bears some responsibility for the whole Church.

The rediscovery of this ecclesiological landscape, which found its clearer expression in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council, was reflected in the 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law.

It has been many times noted that in the understanding of the 1917 Code of Canon Law the local Church was posited as something of a satellite office of the Universal Church. The Pope governs the Universal Church while the bishops were his subordinates or delegates. In the 1983 Code, the emphasis shifts: the Universal Church “subsists” in the whole Church and also in each particular Church.

The Universal Church exists ‘in and from’ the particular churches, as canon 368 states: “Particular churches, in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists, are first of all dioceses, to which, unless it is otherwise evident, are likened a territorial prelature and territorial abbacy, an apostolic vicariate and an apostolic prefecture, and an apostolic administration erected in a stable manner.”

Bishops are not agents of the Pope or servants of the Curia; the Curia is at the service of the Pope as head of the College of Bishops. And while the Pope is the head of the College, he does not govern apart from the bishops but with them. In the classic formula, the Church is governed by the bishops *cum et sub Petro* — “with and under Peter.” The governance of the universal Catholic Church includes both the authority of the College of Bishops and the special authority of the Pope.

Consequently, there are two loci of supreme authority in the Catholic Church. First, there is the supreme authority of the Pope:

Can. 331 The bishop of the Roman Church, in whom continues the office given by the Lord uniquely to Peter, the first of the Apostles, and to be transmitted to his successors, is the head of the college of bishops, the Vicar of Christ, and the pastor of the universal Church on earth. By virtue of his office he possesses supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church, which he is always able to exercise freely.

The College of Bishops, however, is also the ‘bearer of full and supreme power over the universal Church.’ As *Lumen Gentium* explains, this is only true when the College acts with the

Pope as its head; and indeed cannot act in any way without the Pope. Hence, canon 336 states: “The college of bishops, whose head is the Supreme Pontiff and whose members are bishops by virtue of sacramental consecration and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college and in which the apostolic body continues, together with its head and never without this head, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church.”

The Pope also acts in communion with the College of Bishops, of which – as the Bishop of Rome – he is also a member. This is expressed in canon 330: “Just as by the Lord’s decision Saint Peter and the other Apostles constitute one college, so in a like manner the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, are united among themselves.”

In the Acts of the Apostles, we find an example of apostolic leadership gathering to resolve a serious issue. Clearly the coming together or walking together – the root meaning of the word synod – was a somewhat regular experience of Christian leaders – bishops – in the early centuries.

However, in 325, we find the first effort at an ecumenical or general council of bishops. This meeting was held in Nicaea. When the Second Vatican Council convened in Rome, from October 1962 to December 1965, it marked the 21st Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church. Seven of these councils are shared with the Orthodox Church. By contrast, the Orthodox have neither summoned nor sanctioned an ecumenical council since the seventh one in 787.

Other gatherings of bishops in the Catholic Church have been a regular part of the life of the Church. In our country, for example, we had for a number of years the experience of plenary councils held in Baltimore. In fact, it is one of these, the third plenary council, that gave rise to the well-known and much used Baltimore Catechism.

SYNODS / SYNODALITY

However, the ecclesiastical structure that we now call the Synod of Bishops has its own identifiable origin and a specific purpose.

The Pope calls such a meeting, and national conferences of bishops around the world elect those bishops who will attend from their respective countries. A number of additional bishops, experts and observers are also appointed by the Pope.

The idea of having a synod grew out of the experience of Pope Paul VI and the bishops at the time of the Second Vatican Council. Then over 2,500 bishops from all over the world, from October 1962 to December 1965, came to Rome to reflect on how well the Church was carrying out her mission to be the continuing presence of Christ and his Gospel in the world. As the Council drew to a conclusion in 1965, there was the hope that some mechanism might be found to keep alive the collaborative experience of the Council. Thus was born, at the directive of the Pope, what we now call the Synod of Bishops.

Pope Paul VI’s *Motu Proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo*, re-established the Synod of Bishops as an ecclesial institution and gave it what was, in effect, its constitution. The document notes that the aims of the Synod are: to promote a closer union and greater cooperation between the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops of the whole world; to see to it that accurate and direct information is

supplied on matters and situations that bear upon the internal life of the Church and upon the kind of action that should be carrying on in today's world; to facilitate agreement, at least on essential matters of doctrine and on the course of action to be taken in the life of the Church.

Its special and immediate purposes are: to provide mutually useful information; to discuss the specific business for which the Synod is called into session on any given occasion.”

With the establishment of the structure in 1965 of the Synod of Bishops, Pope, now Blessed, Paul VI created an ecclesial institution to permit an aspect of the collegiality experienced during the Second Vatican Council to continue in a new and limited format. Hence, we now speak of synodality as an expression of episcopal collaboration that does not rise to the level of an ecumenical council.

Collegiality refers to the Successor of Peter governing the Church in collaboration with, and with the participation of, the bishops of the local Churches, respecting their joint responsibility for the Universal Church. Synodality is one particular expression of that rightful participation of the local churches in governance, through consultation.

Three kinds of synods exist: “ordinary” assemblies that consider matters of importance to the Universal Church, “extra-ordinary” assemblies that focus on topics requiring timely decisions, and “special” assemblies that focus on particular geographical areas. There have been 27 such synods in all since they were re-established by Paul VI in 1965.

For a detailed presentation of the work of the first nine synods, both Ordinary and Extraordinary, it is helpful to consult the volumes prepared by their chronicler, Father Giovanni Caprile. Following his death, the reporting on synods was taken up by the Synod Office in individual studies of the next three synods, edited by Archbishop Nikola Eterovic. The three volume enchriridion of the Synods of Bishops covers the same material from the 1965 through the 2007 synods.

Saint John Paul II is perhaps the pope that more than any other has underlined the connection between the Synods of Bishops and episcopal collegiality. In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, he referred to the Synod of Bishops as “a permanent organ of collegiality.”^{iv} In his view, “the Synod constitutes a realization and an illustration of the collegial nature of the order of bishops, of which the Second Vatican Council has, so to speak, come to a renewed awareness.”^v

In the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) he elaborated on this very aspect. “The Synod of Bishops is an extremely beneficial instrument for fostering ecclesial communion... the more the communion of the bishops among themselves is strengthened, the more the communion of the Church as a whole is enriched.”^{vi} “It is my conviction”, the pope continued, “that a Synodal Assembly cannot be reduced to a consultation on practical matters. Its true *raison d'être* is the fact that the Church can move forward only by strengthening communion among her members, beginning with her Pastors.”^{vii}

The first Synod was convoked by Pope Paul VI in 1967. The goals he set for this first General Assembly were: “the preservation and the strengthening of the Catholic faith, its integrity, its force, its development, its doctrinal and historical coherence.” One result of the meeting was a recommendation by the bishops to set up an international commission of theologians to assist the

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Synod also called for a revision of the 1917 Code of Canon Law in an attempt to make it more pastoral and more contemporary in tone and emphasis.

It is with the following Synod, however, convoked in 1969, that the bishops began a more focused reflection on the nature of collegiality and made suggestions on the way it could be put into practice through the work of the Synod. The topic proposed for the 1969 General Assembly was, “The Cooperation between the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences”. This meeting effectively opened the door to wider participation by the bishops with the Pope and each other in the pastoral care of the Universal Church.

The bishops submitted a number of recommendations to the Pope. Among these, three were meant to increase the functionality of the Synodal assembly. The first was that the Synod meet at regular intervals, every two years. The second made provisions for the General Secretariat to operate between synodal sessions and organize these meetings. The third was that the bishops be permitted to suggest topics for the future assemblies.

In order to put into practice these recommendations an advisory council for the General Secretariat was created. Its purpose was to formulate the agenda for the following assembly and to facilitate communication with episcopal conferences. The operation of the advisory council made possible a consultation of the bishops of the world to suggest topics for future assemblies.

The 1971 Synod was the last to attempt to produce documents on the topics discussed during the month-long meeting. While the 1971 Synod did create two reflections, there immediately arose the question of their Magisterial authority.

With the next Synod in 1974, Pope Paul VI instructed its Fathers to put together propositions that they could present to him and that he would use to produce a post-synodal apostolic exhortation invoking his proper papal authority.

The apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, was published December 8, 1975. Thus, in what became a long series of post-synodal apostolic exhortations of four successive Supreme Pontiffs, the Church received confirmation of the perennial teaching of the Church and application of it to the circumstances of our day. Clearly the wisdom of Blessed Paul VI is recognized, as it is in his Successors, with the decision not to rely on the personal reflections of individual Synodal Fathers to speak for the mind of the Synod or the mind of members of the Synod but rather to exercise the authority of the Successor of Peter in what are clearly specified as apostolic exhortations.

Following the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, we have a long series of such exhortations from Saint John Paul II through Pope Benedict XVI on to Pope Francis. Each of these documents reflects the authority of the Pope who chooses to promulgate the reflections of the synod refined by himself.

While there may remain today a question of the theological note to attach to a post-synodal apostolic exhortation and a question of the level of Magisterial authority such a document represents there is no serious question regarding the fact that the post-synodal apostolic exhortations are Magisterial pronouncements and exercises of the ordinary papal Magisterium. Moreover, it is important to note that since the apostolic exhortation is issued by the Pope and

under his authority but also reflects the mind of the Synod of bishops, this cooperation strengthens its magisterial authority. As Pope John Paul II noted, in fact, the opinion of the Synod Fathers, “if morally unanimous, has a qualitative ecclesial weight which surpasses the merely formal aspect of the consultative vote.”^{viii}

The very structure of the synod was to highlight that the overall responsibility for the Church also rests with the College of Bishops, always with and never without Peter.^{ix} A corollary to this is the recognition that the Roman Curia is an instrument at the service of implementing the decisions made by the Holy Father in communion with the bishops around the world. It was already Pope Paul VI, followed by Pope John Paul II, and later by Pope Benedict XVI that set in motion what most recently we see in the Pontificate of Pope Francis, a renewal of emphasis on the role of the bishops as successors to the Apostles and Shepherds of the Church.

Nowhere is this emphasis more seen, even if only subtly presented, than in the 2014 Consistory in which both the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops were both elevated to the College of Cardinals with the Synod Office taking precedence.

What Pope Francis is renewing is what the Second Vatican Council began and this includes emphasis on the pastoral mission of the Church, one that is less focused on the exercise of power and the concentration of it in the hands of a few and more directed to the evangelizing discipleship reflected in personal witness. Here the words of Blessed Paul VI ring true, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”^x

Pope Francis, elected as the 266th Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Christ, and Head of the Church Universal, now stands on all of the foundation work of his predecessors and begins to pick up, once again, the threads of the energizing focus of the Second Vatican Council.

The Synod of Bishops “has been one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council,” Pope Francis has said. “Thanks to God that, in these almost fifty years, we have been able to feel the benefits of this institution that, in a permanent way, is at the service of the Church’s mission and communion as an expression of collegiality.”^{xi}

REENGAGING VATICAN COUNCIL II

The starting point for an overview of where we are today and the tasks of synodality in the Church are the Second Vatican Council and its extraordinary impact on the life of the Church. Over 50 years ago in 1962 when Pope, now Saint, John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council he highlighted that it had, as its goal and purpose, to support “the Church’s apostolic and pastoral mission by making the truth of the Gospel shine forth to lead all people to seek and receive Christ’s love which surpasses all knowledge (cf. Eph. 3:19).”^{xii}

However, much happened between the close of the Council in 1965 and the election of Pope Francis in 2013. It is only in understanding those intervening five decades that we can, I believe, appreciate the guidance the Holy Spirit continues to give the Church and the place of Pope Francis in God’s Providential plan.

Immediately following the Council in the late 60s and a greater part of the 70s, there emerged both pathways of renewal and development totally consistent with the direction of the Council and, on the other hand, ways that diverged dramatically from what the Council said and the received tradition of the Church. This was particularly evident in the areas of liturgy and catechesis where the “spirit” of the Council was invoked to override the actual words in the texts of the Council and the tradition of the Church which provided both the context and the continuity for understanding the Council and its future impetus.

What emerged was a new hermeneutic often invoked to support liturgical aberration and catechetical misrepresentation. The “hermeneutic of discontinuity” was also used to justify new theological directions that disengaged from the received tradition and were barely recognizable as part of the Catholic heritage.

It was Pope Benedict XVI who began explicitly to point out the failings and unacceptability of the hermeneutic of discontinuity which he contrasted with the true hermeneutic of renewal or reform.

POPE FRANCIS: FRESH PERSPECTIVES

In March 2013, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Cardinals of the Church choose Jorge Mario Bergoglio, to fill the Chair of Peter. He took the name Francis.

It seems to me that in God’s Providential Plan and in light of all that has transpired over the past 50 years, we now are able to reconnect, again, in an authentic manner, with the renewing energy of the Council.

Ecclesiologically what Pope Francis has done is to refocus, once again, on the ministry of the College of Bishops as was the case in the Second Vatican Council in the document, *Lumen Gentium*.

Pope Francis sees the bishops of the Church having one specific role, the Curia another and all at the service of the Gospel. He also recognizes the work of the laity who have the responsibility for the sanctification and transformation of the temporal order and the witnessing of Jesus and his Gospel to a world so in need of the hope of the Gospel.

We can see the Pope’s perspective on synodality with the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*. It follows on the Synods of Bishops that met, one in October of 2014 and the other in 2015, to discuss the challenges to marriage and family today, and reflects the consensus of those meetings and many voices. In the work of the synod, in the preparation of its documents, and the final exhortation we can see Pope Francis’ appreciation and engagement of synodality.

The Holy Father has highlighted, once again, the role of bishops in collaboration with him in the overall responsibilities for leadership, teaching and pastoral ministry of the Church. In February of 2014, the Holy Father, at a consistory of the cardinals, asked us to begin to reflect on the challenges to marriage today. He then called for a Synod in 2014 that addressed the difficulties that marriage faces. It reminded us of the heavily secular culture we live in, of the materialism that is a part of the mentality of many people, the individualism that dominates our culture, particularly in the Western world and in the United States.

It was clear that the overwhelming majority of bishops shared the Holy Father's vision that there has to be a way to present the Church's teaching new in ardor, method and expression rather than simply come together to repeat and restate what is already known. As was quoted later, one bishop indicated that if the purpose of the 2014 Synod was simply to repeat, doctrinally and pastorally, the Church's teaching it could have ended by the second day and there would have been no need at all for the 2015 Synod.

The open discussion within the synod is clearly a hallmark of Pope Francis' view of synodality. At no time was there disagreement on the Church's doctrine. But there was lively engagement on how that teaching is received, understood, appropriated and lived in our modern culture, and how in the circumstances of our time do we effectively and pastorally respond.

In the 2015 Synod, the focus continued with emphasis on the substance of the Church's teaching on marriage and family and its relevance today. The Synod reaffirmed that there is a difference among the teaching on the indissolubility of marriage, the pastoral response to those in broken marriages, and the faithful's own conscientious judgment concerning their relationship to the Sacraments. These realities are greatly related but they are not the same thing.

Pope Francis' decision to allow free discussion, respect for divergence of opinion, transparency in the process and the publication of the results of the voting by the bishops at each stage of both synods created a refreshing openness that resulted in a new appreciation of a synod.

I have been present in some capacity for eleven synods and as a bishop member for seven. The last two, the 2014 and the 2015 gatherings were, in my opinion, the most open, engaging and reflective of episcopal collaboration and consultation.

As the 2014 Synod was completing its work, the Holy Father enlarged the writing committee responsible for the preparation of its report, the *Relatio Synodi*. His charge to it was to present what was the consensus of the Synod Fathers. The *Relatio Synodi* was then made public and became the working paper for the next synod (2015) with the invitation for world-wide consultation engaging all of the conferences of bishops. Next followed the 2015 synod on "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World", which had as its initial working paper the *Relatio* of the 2014 synod.

Examples of Pope Francis' new perspective include his innovative use of the synod structure by calling for two back-to-back assemblies. In this way, he engaged a very large number of bishops in the one process since the membership of both synods was elected by conferences of bishops and during the interval each conference of bishops was asked to be actively engaged in responding the first synod, 2014, and preparing the material for the second synod, 2015.

I would add that his invitation to openness among the bishops in these discussions is a part of his innovation or perspective. We can recall his advice at the beginning of the synod 2014-2015 process to the bishops to speak with openness and clarity, to listen with humility and to be open to the Holy Spirit.

At the end of all of the discussions and all of the reflections carried out over two full years, there emerges now this 2016 apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* that I would call a "consensus exhortation."

This apostolic exhortation is confirming for us the validity of the Second Vatican Council's call for collegial reflection, that is, the bishops coming together and working together, always with and never without Peter.^{xiii}

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis draws deeply and richly on the teaching of his predecessors and from the heart of the Catholic theological tradition. This engagement is evident in the reaffirmation of the doctrine of the Church in regard to marriage and the moral life—a point which the Holy Father makes repeatedly.^{xiv} The teaching on marriage and human love of Blessed Paul VI, Saint John Paul II, and Benedict XVI is featured prominently in the document. Particularly notable is the rich use of John Paul II's catechesis on the body and on human love.

In urging concrete steps to support married couples and families, and bring hope and healing to those in difficult situations, Pope Francis follows in the longstanding tradition of the Church Magisterium. The continuity is made clear by the astounding amount of citations from previous pontificates and the tradition of the Church in general.

For example, there are 41 citations from the teachings of Saint John Paul II, 25 citations to the Second Vatican Council, 14 citations to Saint Thomas Aquinas, 13 citations to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 8 citations to the magisterium of Benedict XVI, 6 citations to Blessed Paul VI, and more. While we can refer to *Amoris Laetitia* as a consensus document, we might also name it the continuity exhortation.

Now Pope Francis picks up the threads of the energizing focus of the Council while standing on the foundational work of his predecessors. But this is more than mere repetition of certain points of doctrine.

There is a sense in which one can see in this exhortation a renewed call to recognize our Catholic identity, our connectedness to the Church and how our ministry is validated precisely in our participation in and adherence to the articulated Magisterium of the Church. This articulation includes that of all of the popes, not just the ones some might deem more Catholic than others.

AMORIS LAETITIA / POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

In *Amoris Laetitia* specifically, we find long-held, theologically sound teaching that displays the reality of practical, pastoral guidance that is offered to someone who, like all of us, is struggling to live up to the fullness of the norm, but within the circumstances and situations in which they find themselves.

In many ways the document's teaching is a further response to the Second Vatican Council's call for a renewal of Catholic moral teaching and practice and the response to this call by the subsequent papal magisterium.

The assertion of the primacy of love does not in any way diminish the role of law. What the exhortation is calling us to is a recognition that the starting point or principle from which our pastoral actions flow must be the revelation of God's love and mercy. Church law certainly has great importance but it is not the only point of reference in pastoral ministry.

The document clearly sounds important notes of its own, and significantly contributes to and applies these hallmarks of post-conciliar renewal. The focus on the person and his or her dignity is carried forward in the Holy Father's critique of what he calls "a culture of the ephemeral"^{xv} — a culture which views and treats others as sources of affective or sexual pleasure to be discarded when this pleasure runs dry. This pursuit of a shallow happiness falls short of the joy of which the Exhortation speaks. As was true for the Council, the dignity of the human person is fully disclosed in Christ but in this case especially in Christ's embrace of families with their struggles, in children and other vulnerable persons, and in sinners.

One can say that *Amoris Laetitia* is itself the fruit of very intensive LISTENING on the part of Pope Francis. The two synods on family called by the Holy Father were themselves preceded by consultation of local churches throughout the world on the lived situation of families, their challenges, and their experience.

Pope Francis understands the process of listening to the faithful and to his brother bishops to be a key part of his own teaching and pastoral ministry. It is part of the "synodality" or "journeying together" which he sees as essential to the Church at every level. The fruit of this listening is reflected in the generous citation and engagement of the reports of the two synods in this Exhortation.

Another activity on which the document focuses is ACCOMPANYING, the pastoral accompaniment of all who seek to find a way closer to God. In many ways this is an extension of listening and of the synodality to which it gives rise. The journeying together of all of the members of the Church implies this accompaniment. But it also calls for a change in pastoral style and intensity.

Pope Francis calls pastors to do more than teach the Church's doctrine—though they clearly must do that. Pastors must "take on the 'smell of the sheep'" whom they serve so that "the sheep are willing to hear their voice."^{xvi} This requires a more careful and intensive formation of all who minister – all who invite people to renew their faith.

The Church's pastoral ministry is intended to help the faithful to grow in the art of DISCERNING. A key part of discernment is the formation of conscience. The Holy Father insists that the Church's pastors must "make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them."^{xvii}

Part of this formation requires presenting the teaching of the Church in its fullness and without compromise^{xviii} though in language which is welcoming rather than defensive or one-sided.^{xix} But it is families themselves who must be invited to understand how to apply and begin to live out this teaching in the particularity of their situations. Those in seriously challenging situations, such as the divorced and civilly remarried, should be invited to deeper inclusion in the life of the Church. But the Holy Father is clear that he is in no way changing the Church's doctrine nor making general changes to its sacramental practice or Canon Law.^{xx} He is inviting such families and the pastors who accompany them to discern what it means for them to walk the path of conversion.

Even in the midst of their challenges and imperfections, families are called to respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings.

Admittedly, this individual process of discernment may not be easy. A person may know full well Church teaching, Pope Francis notes, yet have great difficulty in either understanding its inherent positive value, or in being able to fully embrace it right away because of circumstances.^{xxi} Yet, the underlying moral principle which should inform both that personal discernment and the priest's ministry is that a person whose situation in life is objectively contrary to moral teaching can still love and grow in the faith, he or she can still take steps in the right direction and benefit from God's mercy and grace while receiving the assistance of the Church.^{xxii}

The exhortation does not create some sort of internal forum process where, for example, a marriage can be annulled or where the objective moral order can be changed. The teachings of the Church on marriage and family, and conscience and moral decision-making, remain unchanged. The role of the priest in listening and offering affirmation or challenge to persons as they work through their own understanding of their situation, is not the same as absolving from the law or annulling a marriage.

Instead, pastoral dialogue, accompaniment and integration involve the development of conscience and also the expression of a level of support or confirmation for the judgment that the individual is making about the state of his soul or her soul. That judgment is the act of the individual and is the basis for their accountability before God.

Amoris Laetitia is not a list of answers to each individual human issue. Rather, it is a call to compassionate accompaniment in helping all to experience Christ's love and mercy. To the extent that our ministry does this, it is also an EVANGELIZING action. As we recall the challenge to go out, to encounter, and to accompany, we also recognize that this is at its heart an act of the evangelizing disciple.

In the action of going out, encountering, sharing and accompanying, we also recognize that in the journey we, ourselves, are also drawing closer to the Lord. In all of our action of evangelizing, teaching, catechizing, counseling, admonishing, instructing, we also remember both God's liberating truth and saving mercy. None of us can claim yet to be perfect as is our heavenly Father. But we can grow closer to the Lord who will by his grace heal us so that we can have the life he wants for us.

CONCLUSION / SUMMARY

In concluding and in summary, I think it is fair to say that Pope Francis sees in the synod what Pope Paul VI intended and what his other successors also attempted to engage – an institutional way to invite some ongoing expression of collegiality. Thus, the synod would address ecclesial, especially pastoral, issues from a perspective wider and richer than that of the Roman Curia.

Pope Francis' appreciation of collegiality or synodality are seen in the emphasis he places on the Synod of Bishops and its work product, as well as his invitation to residential bishops, while remaining responsible for their local Church, to work directly with Curial offices to bring the pastoral dimension to what otherwise could become solely an ecclesiastical bureaucracy.

Pope Francis' invitation to residential bishops to participate actively in the work of the Roman Pontiff in the oversight of the whole Church is seen most clearly in the establishment of the council of nine, composed of seven residential and two curial cardinals. Meeting four or five times a year, they engage personally with the Pope on the project of the reform of the Curia. This phenomenon, along with the growing presence of residential bishops in the actual working of significant Roman congregations and other dicasteries, are evidence of the Pope's fresh perspective on synodality.

Perhaps the most significant focus in the Pope's perspective is the recognition of something timeless that you, the members of the Canon Law Society, understand and cherish and to what you have dedicated so much of your faith filled ministry, that ecclesial structures count, that they are meant to serve the mission of Christ and they are ways in which we remain open to God's Spirit and God's Providential Plan.

This is what you, the members of the Canon Law Society, try to do and work so hard to accomplish.

For all that you are engaged in for the service of the Church, by her structures that serve her ministry and the faithful who benefit from your work, I simply add my voice of, "Thank you."

October 6, 2016

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- ⁱ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, «*Motu Proprio*» *Apostolos Suos* on the Theological and Juridical Nature of Episcopal Conference (21 May 1998), 1.
 - ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 12.
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Cfr. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 832-835.
 - ^{iv} Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), 5.1.
 - ^v *Ibid.*, Address at the Conclusion of the Eight Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 27, 1990, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 45 (1990), 7.
 - ^{vi} *Ibid.*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), 15.
 - ^{vii} *Ibid.*, 17
 - ^{viii} *Ibid.*, Address to the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. April 30, 1983, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 21 (1983), 9.
 - ^{ix} Cfr. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), 22
 - ^x Pope Paul VI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), 41.
 - ^{xi} Pope Francis, Address to the 2014 Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod on the Family (June 2013).
 - ^{xii} Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum*, (1992).
 - ^{xiii} Cfr. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), 22
 - ^{xiv} Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), 307.
 - ^{xv} *Ibid.*, 39
 - ^{xvi} *Ibid.*, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 24.
 - ^{xvii} *Ibid.*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), 37.
 - ^{xviii} *Ibid.*, 307
 - ^{xix} *Ibid.*, 36, 38.
 - ^{xx} *Ibid.*, 300.
 - ^{xxi} *Ibid.*, 301.
 - ^{xxii} *Ibid.*, 305.
