

MEDELLÍN AS SYNODAL EVENT: THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF A COLLEGIAL ECCLESIALITY

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SUMMARY — The creation of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) represented a unique reception of the Second Vatican Council, positioning the Latin American Church as a Source Church for today's process of reforms. This Council not only created a collegial way of interacting at a continental level but also inaugurated a way of being and working and a mode of interaction that gave birth to a way of proceeding that would characterize the Latin American Church's own identity. The Latin American General Conferences, hosted by CELAM, such as Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), Santo Domingo (1992), and Aparecida (2007), cannot be reduced to mere texts. In the specific case of Medellín (1968), the way in which this Conference proceeded, more environmental than thematized, gave rise to a spirit of prophetic convergence among bishops, priests, religious, and lay-people that took shape in the method of work, the relationships among the participants, the organization of the daily liturgy, the disposition for listening and having open discussions, and the way of redacting the final documents. All this inaugurated a unique ecclesiality inspired by a collegial practice and completed by a Synodal Spirit that advanced the ecclesial model of People of God of the Second Vatican Council. This Spirit of Synodality, inaugurated by the Latin American Church and supported by Pope Paul VI, is renewed and advanced today by Pope Francis as a new way of being Church.

RÉSUMÉ — La création du conseil épiscopal latino-américain (CELAM) a constitué une réception unique du Concile Vatican II, positionnant l'Église latino-américaine en une Église source pour le processus des réformes actuelles. Ce Conseil, non seulement a créé une manière collégiale d'interagir au niveau continental, mais aussi, a inauguré une manière d'être, de travailler et un mode d'interaction qui a donné naissance à une manière de procéder qui caractérisera l'identité propre de l'Église latino-américaine. Les conférences générales latino-américaines, organisées par le CELAM, telles que Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), Santo Domingo (1992) et Aparecida (2007), ne peuvent être réduites à de simples textes. Dans le cas spécifique de Medellín (1968),

la manière plus environnementale que thématique avec laquelle cette conférence a procédé, a suscité un esprit de convergence prophétique parmi les évêques, les prêtres, les religieux et les laïcs. Ceci a pris forme dans la méthode de travail, dans les relations entre les participants, dans l'organisation de la liturgie quotidienne, dans la disposition à l'écoute, aux discussions ouvertes et dans la manière de rédiger les documents finaux. Tout ceci inaugurait une ecclésialité unique inspirée par une pratique collégiale et complétée par un esprit synodal qui a fait avancer le modèle ecclésial du peuple de Dieu du Concile Vatican II. Cet esprit de synodalité, inauguré par l'Église latino-américaine et soutenu par le pape Paul VI, est aujourd'hui renouvelé et proposé par le pape François comme une nouvelle façon d'être Église.

Introduction

On 23 November 1965, just days before the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI convened the Latin American bishops to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM = Consejo Episcopal Latino Americano). The pope encouraged the bishops to draw up a continental pastoral plan¹ that would express CELAM's prompt reception of the Council and articulate a proper identity for the church in Latin America.² A little over two years later, on 20 January 1968, Paul VI announced the convening of the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops and, on 24 August 1968, he inaugurated the event with a speech delivered at the cathedral of Bogotá. The working sessions of the Conference took place at the seminary in Medellín between 26 August 26 and 6 September 1968.³

Taking as its theme "The Church's Role in the Transformation of Latin America in Light of the Council," the Medellín Conference produced sixteen documents⁴ that revealed a new awareness that "the social situation demands an efficacious presence of the Church that goes beyond the promotion of

¹ See PAUL VI, "Address on the Tenth Anniversary of CELAM," 23 November 1965, at www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches.

² M. MCGRATH, "Algunas reflexiones sobre el impacto y la influencia permanente de Medellín y Puebla en la Iglesia de América Latina," in *Revista Medellín*, 58-59 (1989), 152-179.

³ See Cf. R. LUCIANI, "Medellín Fifty Years Later: From Development to Liberation," in *Theological Studies*, 79 (2018), 566-589.

⁴ The sixteen Medellín documents that followed the introduction were titled Justicia, Paz, Familia y demografía, Educación, Juventud, Pastoral popular, Pastoral de élites, Catequesis, Liturgia, Movimientos de Laicos, Sacerdotes, Religiosos, Formación del clero, Pobreza de la Iglesia, Pastoral de conjunto, and Medios de comunicación social.

personal holiness by preaching and the sacraments.”⁵ What was needed was a faithful following of “Jesus Christ who lives in our impoverished brothers and sisters or who dies in them.”⁶ This awareness was made evident in the manner in which the documents were structured, as Marcos McGrath notes: “The division into three areas—human flourishing, evangelization and growth in the faith, and the visible Church and her structures—alters the order that was more frequently used in the Church both before and after Medellín. Evangelization and growth in the faith come after human flourishing.”⁷

Medellín meant passing from a reflecting church to an adult church, which had now become a “source” church.⁸ Such a church, discerning the tenor of the epoch, holds that human beings “are defined principally by the responsibility they have before history toward their brothers and sisters” (*Gaudium et spes* 55). Cardinal Juan Landazuri Ricketts expressed this option with great prophetic clarity in his closing remarks at the Conference.

There is something remarkable in the presentations we have made during these days, and I want to stress it. It is this: we are facing our problems. There is a type of servitude that is not communion. There is a type of psychological and sociological dependency that does not correspond to the intimate nature of the Body of the Lord... In [maturely facing up to our problems] we discover the true dimensions of our episcopacy, since each one of us is the leader of a particular, concrete local church, and as a body we are the force behind an irreversible historical moment on our Latin American continent.⁹

This taking a bold stance in the world represented a qualitative leap, going beyond the ecclesial model of the First General Conference of Latin American Bishops (Río, 1955), where the perspective was intra-ecclesial and self-referential, and the major problem at that time was considered to be the shortage of clergy.¹⁰ Medellín also represented a qualitative methodological leap with

⁵ J. MEJÍA, “El pequeño Concilio de Medellín,” in *Criterio*, 41 (1968), 688.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 689.

⁷ MCGRATH, “Algunas reflexiones,” 165-166.

⁸ See H.C. DE LIMA VAZ, “Igreja-reflexo vs. Igreja-fonte,” in *Cadernos Brasileiros*, 46 (1968), 17-22.

⁹ J. LANDAZURI RICKETTS, “Discurso de clausura de la II Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano,” in *Signos de renovación. Recopilación de documentos post-conciliares de la Iglesia en América Latina*, Lima, Comisión Episcopal de Acción Social, 1969, 250.

¹⁰ Pius XII proposed this topic as one for the conference’s discernment: “the most serious danger, for which no solution has yet been found, is the lack of clergy.” Pius XII, apostolic letter *Ad Ecclesiam Christi*, 29 June 1955, at www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/la/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-xi_apl_19550629_ad-ecclesiam-christi.html.

respect to the Council: it took concrete steps in “proposing lines of pastoral action aimed at transforming, in the direction of the Kingdom of God and the liberation of the poor, those real situations caught between sinful structures and the hope-filled cry of the poor.”¹¹ Medellín consequently encouraged social discourse that promoted adult maturity, and it urged the bishops to dedicate themselves to bringing about the changes required in society. The bishops pointed out that “it is not enough just to reflect and to talk and to see things more clearly. It is now time for work” (“Introducción,” 3).

The grounds for this approach were not sociological, much less ideological, but christological. It was a matter of “knowing how to listen to the world because the Lord Jesus is in the world, in human beings, and in human events, despite all our human failings, and he is the source and the consummation of all that exists and all that happens.”¹² These words of Cardinal Landazuri Ricketts resonate with the conciliar spirit, which summons the bishops to open their ears to “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anguish of the people of our time, especially the poor and the suffering” (*Gaudium et spes*, 1). The bishops assembled in Medellín responded by saying, “We hear the cry that arises from your suffering” (“Pobreza,” 2). This way of proceeding was from below and from within, because “to know God it is necessary to know human beings” (“Introducción,” 1), those persons who are caught up in “the web of significant events that is history” (“Movimientos de laicos,” 9).

In contrast to the Council, Medellín did not relate to history in a generic way but took seriously the historical complexities that configure daily life and social systems, and it did this in relation to the church’s pastoral action. Medellín’s commitment to evangelization cannot be separated from its efforts to achieve “greater personalization and fraternal cohesion” in society (“Introducción,” 4). It accepted with great earnestness the spirit of the Council, according to which it is impossible to hear the voice of God without hearing also “the manifold voices of our time” (*Gaudium et spes*, 44) and finding in them “the presence of God, who desires to save the whole human being” (“Introducción,” 5).

Essential to such an approach is the recognition that there is only one history in which God communicates himself, and that he does so through a logic of both correspondences (effecting in the church the same changes

¹¹ J.O. BEOZZO, “Medellín: Inspiração e raízes,” in *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*, 58 (1998), 828.

¹² J. LANDAZURI RICKETTS, “Discurso inaugural en Bogotá (26 de agosto de 1968),” in *La Iglesia en la actual transformación de América Latina a la luz del Concilio*, Bogotá, Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 1968, 48.

being asked of society) and consequences (conversion of hearts and structure). In this way, Christian life and the persons and institutions that transmit it will always manifest “the profound unity that exists between the salvific project of God, realized in Christ, and the aspirations of humanity; between the history of salvation and human history; between the church as People of God and civil society; between God’s revelatory action and human experience; between supernatural gifts and charisms and human values” (“Catechesis,” 4). Pastoral ministry, as the church’s mode of operating in the world, was to become the hermeneutical space in which doctrine was received, pondered, and transmitted. Such a vision involved the fusion of two conciliar principles: the reformable nature of the church and the pastoral nature of doctrine. Without these principles, there could be no practical implementation of the more radical qualitative leap made by Medellín, which understood that the model of church as People of God could be realized only by promoting collegial ecclesiality in synodal form.

1 — *Broadening and Completing Collegiality*

When Vatican II began, the Latin American church already had a collegial structure. The creation of CELAM in 1955 had resulted in a distinctive working relationship that encouraged a permanent flow of information among the local churches of Latin America and the Caribbean, which were represented by their respective bishops’ conferences. As we will see, CELAM’s organizational and consultative character, defined in its first statutes as an “organ for contact and collaboration,” allowed for the emergence of an authentically regional approach that broadened and completed a collegial way of proceeding.

1.1 — A Contextual Experience of Collegiality

When Vatican II began, the Latin American church already had a collegial structure. The creation of CELAM in 1955 had resulted in a distinctive working relationship that encouraged a permanent flow of information among the local churches of Latin America and the Caribbean, which were represented by their respective bishops’ conferences. Defined in its first statutes as an “organ for contact and collaboration,” CELAM’s organizational and consultative character allowed for the emergence of an authentically regional approach. In his *Crónica de Medellín*, Hernán Parada points out: “The new concepts and working methods [were] truly genuine Latin American creations; by their sheer originality they inadvertently made people aware of

the influence of Europe (the supposed source of all that was good). In this epoch of Americanist authenticity, the Catholic Church of the continent [was] making its own contribution by means of this organism.”¹³

With the emergence of this collaborative working method in the church, local clergy gained a greater awareness of their own theological and ecclesial contribution to the church’s life. While it is true that the concept of collegiality was thematized during the Second Vatican Council, it was already being practiced among the Latin American bishops, who “effectively affirmed their bonds of union and their shared consciousness.”¹⁴ Cecilio de Lora notes: “Ten years before the Second Vatican Council promulgated the doctrine of episcopal collegiality (*LG 22*), the Latin American Church was practicing it, not with words but with works and in truth: it was something truly prophetic that would later serve as a model for other churches through the universal Church.”¹⁵

The collegial dynamic developed by CELAM can be seen in the way it works. CELAM is based on principles of co-responsibility among the bishops’ conferences and facilitates ongoing communication and collaboration among them (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 29-33). This model stood out during the Council, during which other local churches admired the Latin American bishops for being a differentiated but not disconnected body.

1.2 — The Diffusion of Collegiality

Those participating in the Medellín Conference had already had a “contextual experience”¹⁶ of the doctrine of collegiality. While not yet having been made verbally explicit, the doctrine had nevertheless been lived in the collaborative ways through which the participants had prayed, read the scriptures, related to one another, reflected, and acted as an episcopal body.

The unity between doctrine and pastoral sensibility that had been achieved in Latin America long before the Council allowed for an experience of collegiality that was different from its traditional, juridical form. Since the bishops were truly representing a *portio Populi Dei* and exercising their ministry of pastoral service to the people while situated in this world, their awareness of

¹³ H. PARADA, *Crónica de Medellín*, Bogotá, Indo-American Press Service, 1975, 36.

¹⁴ A. METHOL FERRÉ, “Del Vaticano II a Medellín,” at www.metholferre.com (accessed 21 January 2018).

¹⁵ C. DE LORA, “Del Concilio a Medellín, hoy,” in *Horizonte*, 9, no. 24 (2011), 1234.

¹⁶ In speaking of an already existing contextual experience, we are referring to an inhabiting of the world that is not necessarily explicitly expressed at a conscious level but is nevertheless real and experienced as a “particular form of being.” R. KUSCH, *Geocultura del hombre americano*, Buenos Aires, Colección Estudios Latinoamericanos, 1976, 111.

belonging to a college of bishops could not be understood apart from a real and obligatory relation to the people and their historical circumstances. As noted at Medellín, a particular part of the people is called to constitute “a particular Church, in which the Church of Christ—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—is truly found and truly operates” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 17). This is a *situated* collegiality, which gets lost when collegiality is understood as deriving from episcopal ordination *per se*, and when it is thought that bishops can exist without representing a *portio Populi Dei*, that is, as functionaries who do not exercise ministry and so produce doctrine without pastoral sensibility.

A pastoral approach that is situated in history is one that determines and broadens the exercise of collegiality. It establishes a balance among the *communio fidelium*, the *communio hierarchica*, and the *communio ecclesiarum*, all of which are lived out on the basis of the equality flowing from our baptismal dignity and our common priesthood. As the Medellín documents make clear, episcopal communion does not exist for the self-preservation of the *communio hierarchica*. This is why Landazuri Ricketts insisted that “the deepening of our collegiality allows us to discern the meaning of our pastoral action in a Latin American context; it determines our action.”¹⁷ He also warned: “But there is something more: the presence of the poor should condition and govern our joint pastoral plans.”¹⁸ There is thus a progressive broadening of collegiality that comes from the lived experience of a pastoral approach that makes an unambiguous option for the poor and is based on a People of God ecclesiology.

Jorge Mejía summed up what happened in Medellín when he stated that “there was above all an experience of episcopal collegiality, nourished and completed by the experience of the communion of each and every person, which is the Church.”¹⁹ It is interesting to observe that he insisted that it is this communion of each and every person that bestows a note of completeness to episcopal collegiality. It is thus possible to speak of the contextual practice of co-responsibility on the part of all church members for the common good of the People of God as a consequence of the pastoral nature of collegial activity. The spirit of co-responsibility should be founded on the common baptismal identity of all the faithful, by which all are responsible for ecclesial communion and mission. This identity is to be experienced in the ecclesial community—not individually or privately—and it is to be experienced horizontally by all those who live the life of the People of God. Therefore, this “spirit” should be “institutionalized.” Accordingly, we read

¹⁷ LANDAZURI RICKETTS, “Discurso de clausura,” 250-251.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁹ MEJÍA, “El pequeño Concilio,” 687.

in the Medellín documents: “The lay community, by reason of its common priesthood, enjoys the right and has the duty to collaborate in making an indispensable contribution to pastoral action. It is therefore the duty of the priests to dialogue with them not just occasionally but constantly and in an established manner” (“Sacerdotes,” 16).

The Latin American adoption and exercise of co-responsibility made manifest the unity and communion existing among all the local churches of the continent. At the same time, it affiliated them to the universal church while preserving their proper regional or continental identity. It was a true *communio ecclesiarum*. This will give us some idea of what José Oscar Beozzo meant when he spoke of the exercise of broadened collegiality at Medellín. The novelty of this phenomenon, in his judgment, was visible mainly in the assembly’s working method, which was not repeated in the same way at any other episcopal conference. The participants at Medellín were able to move beyond a narrow vision of collegiality, which would have reduced the conference to being merely a consultative body for the Roman Pontiff.²⁰ They put into practice “a broadened notion of collegiality, one that bestows responsibility for the life and mission of the Church on the totality of the People of God.”²¹

A concrete instance of this way of operating can be found in the redaction of Medellín’s concluding document, “Movimientos de Laicos,” which was not approved in the first vote of the corresponding plenary session. The bishops themselves complained that the commission for the document had not included laypeople, since the lay participants had been assigned to other commissions according to their areas of expertise. The bishops resolved to have the laypeople meet among themselves and draft their own conclusions, and these were unanimously approved at the next plenary session.²² It is therefore clear that, apart from the method explicitly adopted, the conference was permeated by a spirit and practice of shared discernment that was lived out in a spirit of collaboration and communion, with respect for particular competencies, and with the assignment of suitable persons to the appropriate posts.²³

²⁰ See BEOZZO, “Medellín,” 832.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 833.

²² A. MÚNERA, “Crónica de la II Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano,” in *Theologica Xaveriana*, no. 349 (1968), 400–401.

²³ It is interesting to note how this way of interacting subsequently appears in the bishops’ directory for pastoral ministry. See CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Apostolorum successores*, 22 February 2004, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, especially in numbers 58–61.

2 — *The Emergence of a Practice and a Style*

In Medellín, the Latin American Church lived a process of renewal of mentalities and structures through a synodal way of proceeding based on dialogue and collaboration among bishops, priests, religious, and laity. We will show in this section how, throughout the Conference, the emergence of a new ecclesial style was clear, a new way of being Church that would affect *ways of life, instruments of discernment, and structures of government*. The reception of the Council's ecclesiology of the People of God *fidei* is key to understanding the emergence of a Practice and a Style that would give identity and form to a way of being Church in Latin America.

2.1 — **Spiritual and Prophetic Convergence**

CELAM had fostered the contextual practice that moved the bishops toward a shared identity. Before the Medellín Conference, CELAM had held eleven ordinary meetings, one each year. It had twelve departments that provided consulting and formation services to the church on the continent and, in different cities, it had four institutes dedicated to research. Moreover, between 1966 and 1968, it had convened six specialized meetings for planning the doctrinal orientation of the Medellín Conference.

While journeying on this road to Medellín, the bishops experienced true ecclesiality and developed an ecclesial style that involved working together in groups and adopting collegial forms of action. “By using these methods people came together to communicate their experiences and to analyze their concerns; in this way new life was generated, and they began to see the big picture. One has to remember the isolation that had previously prevailed and the lack of opportunities for meeting together.”²⁴ This ecclesial style was unprecedented, because never before had there been sociocultural and ecclesial interaction of such magnitude. It was also different from traditional collegial practice, where every form of exchange in the church was determined primarily by juridical logic and an ontological metaphysics. A decisive step was thus taken from an ecclesiastical style that was monocultural, juridical, and Roman to one that was multicultural, charismatic, and regional. The shift necessitated a search for ways in which to integrate local differences and create a greater unity in fidelity to the conciliar spirit.

The Council had developed the theme of collegiality (*LG 22-23*) but not that of synodality, which was often identified with the collegial activity of

²⁴ J. ÁLVAREZ CALDERÓN, “En ruta hacia Medellín,” in *Páginas*, 58 (1983), 19.

the bishops in conciliar meetings. Understood thus, synodality lost its broader meaning and its application to the different levels in which it could be exercised by the People of God: among bishops (*affectus collegialis*), between bishops and priests (*communio sacramentalis* in the ministerial priesthood), and in relation to laypeople (co-responsibility). A significant difficulty—and one that still persists—was a certain tendency to hinder the broadening of synodality to include consultation with all the faithful and not to limit it to the two traditional, institutional forms, councils and synods.²⁵

The word “synodality” denotes an *affectus*, an experience, a spirit, a form of interaction among persons. A synod is an extraordinary event that gives concrete shape to this form of interaction but does not exhaust it. We should not confuse synodality with synods. We cannot treat synodality simply as a concept derived from collegiality or conciliarity. Although the Medellín documents refer to “the celebration of Synods and the presbyteral and pastoral Councils that were promoted by Vatican II and have already begun in many places” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 3), such practices alone do not explain the meaning of synodality in its most proper sense.

Synodality is a mode of being and acting that affects the *church’s ways of life, its instruments of discernment, and its structures of government*. It is a constitutive dimension of ecclesiality, not just a defined act or a functional method. It presupposes the principle of communion,²⁶ which bestows identity on the church because it does not consider the different ministries only “with regard their sacramental and jurisdictional functions; rather it refers to the whole mystical-sacramental reality of the Church, which at the ontological level is a *communio cum Deo et hominibus*, and at the structural level a *communio ecclesiarum*.”²⁷ Pope Paul VI was clear in this regard when he explained that, in the new post-conciliar understanding of the church, the notion of communion could not be reduced to juridical ties or to graded, hierarchical relations, for the word “communion” alludes to the “Church as a profound type of organic solidarity ... which gives us participation in the divine life and makes us all brothers and sisters in Christ.”²⁸

²⁵ See W. AYMANS, “Sinodalità: forma di governo ordinaria o straordinaria nella Chiesa,” in W. AYMANS, R. BERTOLINO, and G. MANGELS (eds.), *Diritto canonico e comunione ecclesiale. Saggi di diritto canonico in prospettiva teologica*, Turin, Giappichelli Editore, 1993, 40.

²⁶ See G. ROUTHIER, *Le défi de la communion. Une relecture de Vatican II*, Montreal, Médias-paul, 1994.

²⁷ E. CORECCO, “Sinodalità,” in *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia*, G. BARBAGLIO and S. DIANICH (eds.), Rome, Edizione Paoline, 1979, 1484.

²⁸ Paul VI, General Audience, 12 November 1969, at www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/audiences/1969/documents/hf_p-vi_aud_19691112.html.

At Medellín, the living out of ecclesial communion in fraternal and filial solidarity was accompanied by a mode of interacting in which it was neither juridical authority nor majority vote that guaranteed concurrence with respect to judgments made and decisions taken, but rather “a phenomenon of the bishops’ convergence among themselves.”²⁹ This is what Landazuri Ricketts called the “convergence of prophetic circumstances,”³⁰ a convergence that gave rise to positive personal and sociocultural attitudes and actions, such as listening and consulting rather than just cold analysis of historical conditions. The process of listening and consulting gave direction and meaning to the decisions taken by the bishops at Medellín. Those decisions were based on concern for the common good of the people and designed to shape pastoral practice in accord with the historical reality of the poor.

The Council had not produced a clear expression or a juridical articulation of spiritual convergence such as would unite the prophetic charism and the *sensus fidei* of the People of God together with the discernment of the college of bishops and the action of the Roman Pontiff. The immediate post-conciliar hermeneutic used the concept of co-responsibility to refer to the participatory relations that should exist among all members of the church. However, this concept corresponds to a vertical relationship established between laypeople and bishops, one derived from the *communio hierarchica*. It is a concept that can help to structure ecclesial life on the basis of *communio*, but it fails to define the specific mode of the laity’s incorporation into the exercise of power and ministry in the church.

Synodality, on the other hand, touches all the persons and situations that make up life in the local churches and give concreteness to the wider church, including bishops, priests, and laypeople.³¹ What applies here above all is the principle of proportionality, such that “laypeople are in their own way [*suo modo et pro sua parte*] made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ” (*LG* 31,1).³² Proportionality is founded not on vertical or hierarchical relations but on horizontal relations based on the equal dignity bestowed on all by baptism and by virtue of the diversity of charisms and functions that emanate therefrom for the implementation of the

²⁹ “Synodality is a jurisdictional modality by which the unity of the bishops is guaranteed within the *communio ecclesiarum* at the level of authoritative interpretation of the Word”; “the juridically binding force of its collegial judgments and decisions is not the fruit of the formal force of the principle of majority but rather is a phenomenon of the bishops’ convergence among themselves.” CORECCO, “Sinodalità,” 1487.

³⁰ LANDAZURI RICKETTS, “Discurso de clausura,” 248.

³¹ CORECCO, “Sinodalità,” 1490.

³² *Ibid.*, 1491.

church's mission. Medellín calls for the members of communities in the church "to live in accord with the vocation to which they have been called; to carry out the priestly, prophetic, and royal functions that God has entrusted to them," and to make of them "a sign of God's presence in the world (*Ad Gentes* 15)" ("Pastoral de conjunto," 11). The starting point for this development is the *communio fidelium*, which has a relational logic faithful to the conciliar spirit of a "People of God" ecclesiology and stresses the relational dynamics of responsibility and mission rather than juridical and philosophical principles.³³

In its implementation of the spirit of the Council, Medellín effectively articulated the *sensus fidelium* of all the faithful and the *munus docendi* of the hierarchy. This made it possible for those attending to participate in decision-making and to exercise the church's prophetic dimension. What was achieved was a *singularis antistitum et fidelium conspiratio* (*Dei verbum*, 10), that is, a singular synergy among all the members of the assembly through dialogue and discernment, leading to collaborative redaction of the assembly's conclusions. This *conspiratio* shaped the way in which synodality was articulated by the conference—and this apart from determining whether there was any exercise of co-responsibility, any delegation of consultative function, or any clarity as to who had the right to vote. In other words, the synodal spirit manifested at Medellín presupposed a model of church as People of God that gave primacy to the *sensus fidei* and to the *sensus fidelium* (LG 12). Thus, the infallibility *in credendo* of the whole People of God—experienced in a concrete historical reality—was the context within which the pastors' infallibility *in docendo* was exercised.

2.2 — From Co-responsibility to Synodality

The experience at Medellín described up to this point necessarily led to a coming together—which was more practical/contextual than theoretical/juridical, and therefore not lacking in ambiguities at the moment of its formulation—of all the participants in light of hearing the word of God and listening to one another to discern the signs of the Spirit of God in our history. Therefore, rather than seeing what happened in Medellín as an exercise of ecclesial co-responsibility that defined cooperation and demarcated functions on the basis of ontological difference, we need to recognize that the synodal ecclesial style that was being practiced there allowed "the participation of all in a common work according to the diversity and originality of their gifts

³³ See *Lumen gentium* 13.

and services.”³⁴ The emphasis was placed not on helping and collaborating with pastors but on everyone working jointly for the common social and ecclesial good.

Medellín succeeded in implementing a practice of tripartite co-responsibility (episcopal, presbyteral, and lay) in a novel process that was, until then, unique in ecclesial practice, thus anticipating a synodal style in collegial praxis. As a result, the conference stood out as “the singular example of continental reception of Vatican II.”³⁵ We can add that the Medellín Conference, far from representing a paradigm determined by a juridical and hierarchical setting, inaugurated a new way of being church, presenting a programmatic vision defined by a synodal spirit and style and allowing for the exercise of collegiality in a contextual, unthematized manner. This synodal spirit, by encouraging the “experience of the communion of one and all which is the Church,” led to the embrace of “unity amid differences.”³⁶ Fitting here are the words of José Beozzo: “No other continent had an event comparable to Medellín, which was an exemplary case of a continental and collegial reception of Vatican II. It was carried out faithfully but at the same time selectively and creatively with respect to the principal inspirations of the Council.”³⁷

The first person to acknowledge explicitly that something new was transpiring was Cardinal Landazuri Ricketts. In his closing discourse, he stated:

The word “collegiality,” if we fully accede to its theological and pastoral demands, can help us make our arguments more effectively. During these days we have witnessed something audacious, though its import is still unclear: Latin America has begun to have a dynamic of its own. Our collegiality is defined by this fact.... We have received the Spirit the Lord promised us, and in that Spirit our collegiality is a fact and an event. Therefore, what the experience of these days tells us is that this *Second General Conference*, with its new spirit and style, will begin when it concludes. The conference is a starting point that has given us a deeper awareness of what

³⁴ G. ROUTHIER, “Évangile et modèle de sociabilité,” in *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, 51, no. 1 (1995), 69.

³⁵ C. SCHICKENDANTZ, “Único ejemplo de una recepción continental del Vaticano II,” in *Teología*, 108 (2012), 25-53. The author refers to the origin of this expression in L. ESCALANTE, *La estructura jurídica y sinodal del Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (Celam) y de la Reunión de los Obispos de América*, PhD diss., Rome, Pontificia Universidad de la Santa Cruz, 2002, 79.

³⁶ See J. BOTERO RESTREPO, *Celam. Elementos para su historia*, Bogotá, Editorial Copiypes, 1982, 166.

³⁷ J.O. BEOZZO, *A Igreja do Brasil no Concílio Vaticano II: 1959–1965*, São Paulo, Paulinas, 2005, 537.

we are. Collegiality does not require physical proximity. Therefore, our experience of these days gives us a firm hope that we will continue living this unity in plurality.³⁸

Landazuri Ricketts described the exercise of collegiality in terms of an experience that allowed for “unity in plurality.” He was speaking of the spirit that determined and defined the collegial way of proceeding. In his judgment, collegiality was not something graded or hierarchical but rather something that functioned in terms of its own internal and relational dynamic. Since this was so, he could affirm that “it does not require physical proximity” but is rather consummated in relations and attitudes. “Our experience of these days gives us a firm hope that we will continue living this unity in plurality. Prayer, reflection, dialogue, mutual concern—these are the attitudes that have characterized our sessions, and they should remain in our hearts now that we are returning to our local churches.”³⁹

Ten years later, Bernard Franck was perhaps the first person to identify the spirit of Medellín as synodality. Franck pointed out two dimensions of the phenomenon that were evident in the assembly. The first was the communion among the local churches, and the second was the acknowledgment of the relational dynamic resulting from an ecclesial act or event. According to Franck, synodality “designates the liaisons and relations of one particular church to another, apart from national borders or the existing ecclesiastical boundaries.”⁴⁰ Thus, we can say that, at Medellín, CELAM presented a unique instance of the church’s synodal dimension by manifesting its ability to create this mode of interaction among local churches. Going even further, Franck stated:

The essence of synodality, nonetheless, is a spirit instead of a principle. It is one of the privileged manifestations of the Christian spirit that resides essentially in human fraternity, which is derived in turn from acknowledgment of the paternity of God, who creates all human beings and grants them his being (as sons and daughters in the Son by the Holy Spirit). This fraternity, consequence and fruit of a twofold divine grace, is expressed through the communion of our hearts and the humanity of our spirits.⁴¹

Landazuri Ricketts was correct in his assertion that what happened at Medellín did not require physical proximity and “should remain in our hearts.” The focus was on relationships, processes, a fraternal spirit, and a way of proceeding and interacting based on participation, collaboration, and

³⁸ LANDAZURI RICKETTS, “Discurso de clausura,” 249.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

⁴⁰ B. FRANCK, “Les expériences synodales après Vatican II,” in *Communio*, 3, no. 3 (1978), 76.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

co-responsibility at all levels. The goal was to achieve “unity in plurality” among all—not just a few—by means of “reciprocal listening, conversation and communication, sharing and solidarity, and the desire to reach consensus and a common conviction. This requires the will to collaborate and cooperate, to assent and accept, to give and receive. It assumes relationships permeated by respect and charity, humility, and poverty. This is the “synodal spirit.”⁴²

In sum, it is a matter of developing an attitude of mutual listening and fraternal acceptance that is able to unleash a collective process—*de facto* or *de jure*—of discernment and of convergence among persons. Mejía’s testimony moves in this direction.

Here we live and work and pray for fifteen days, until September 7th. The three hundred people ... attending the conference fraternize at table, at liturgical celebrations, and in discussions. Such leveling of cardinals, archbishops, vowed religious, and laymen and laywomen is already real progress and a good sign for the future. No church conference could have done this five years ago. And I confess that nobody seems to be uncomfortable. The liturgy makes a contribution, for that is its proper role and its efficacy. Most priests concelebrate (not all, unfortunately), which means that all of a sudden more than two hundred concelebrants leave the triple sacristy in procession to take their places in the elegant oval of the church, with the altar at one end. A layperson reads the epistle. There is a lot of fine singing. Communion is given under both species. The new canons are used. The kiss of peace is shared among all. We really pray, and we are transformed.⁴³

The description offered by Gilles Routhier focuses on the precise meaning of this type of synodality. “Synodality, which is a constitutive dimension of the Church and belongs to its very nature, appeals to the practices, the institutional figures, and the procedures that allow it to be carried out. Otherwise, it is reduced to a vague sentiment.... [O]n the one hand, we find practices of listening, consultation, and dialogue; on the other, we find an institutional figure capable of practicing synodality. There are three actions or practices that concretely describe what dialogue is: expressing an opinion, listening, and taking advice.”⁴⁴

Medellín made clear that a synodal style completes collegiality and constitutes the church’s being. It asked for the “creation and renewal of Church structures so as to institutionalize dialogue and to channel collaboration among bishops, priests, religious, and laity” (*Mensaje a los pueblos de América Latina*). To that end, the prevailing mentality had to change, so that

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ MEJÍA, “El pequeño Concilio,” 653.

⁴⁴ G. ROUTHIER, “La synodalité dans l’Église locale,” in *Scripta Theologica*, 48 (2016), 695-696.

dialogue, as an essential element of joint pastoral ministry, might become a permanent dynamic in the community. The conference highlighted relational and practical dimensions, and it stressed procedures that would foster the strong bonds that give meaning to the Christian experience, the purpose always being “to reach all sectors of the People of God and create a single ecclesial consciousness in bishops, priests, religious, laypeople, and all movements and associations” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 35). But first, there had to be personal renewal: “Personal renewal implies a process of continuous mental *aggiornamento*, understood from two perspectives: (a) theological-pastoral, based on the Council documents and current theology; and (b) pedagogical, resulting from ongoing dialogue supported by group dynamics and constant review of different forms of pastoral action. The purpose is to create a genuine sense of community, without which a true collaborative ministry is completely impossible” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 35). The assembly went so far as to criticize church structures that it considered out of tune with the Council’s orientation, and it did so in language that reflected the need to give new life to a synodal way of proceeding.

Among the realities we view negatively are the following: (a) the inadequacy of the traditional structures of many parishes in providing a true community experience; (b) a quite generalized impression that diocesan curias are administrative bureaucracies; (c) the distress of many priests at not finding decisive solutions to some priestly crises, and also, by analogy, to the crises of a large number of religious and laypeople; (d) individualistic attitudes in persons and institutions in situations that require good coordination; (e) cases where collaborative ministry or planning has been poorly practiced, the reasons for which may be sheer improvisation, technical incompetence, excessive valuation of “plans,” or an excessively rigid and authoritarian conception of their place in pastoral practice (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 4).

3 — *Ambience and Working Methods*

The novelty of Medellín can be found in its method and ambience, which enable the desire of the participants to reconcile their divergent positions. The key can be found in the Council’s principle of the *conspiratio*. In this section, we will see how the articulation of a method and an ambience enabled a new ecclesial way of proceeding that facilitated a fluent communication among the participants. This was a faithful but creative reception of the “People of God” ecclesiology based in the *communio fidelium* converging spiritually with the *communio hierarchica* and prophetically within the *communio ecclesiarum*.

3.1 — From Listening to Collectively Taking on the Work of the Church

The novelty of extended collegiality was, for Beozzo, “etched in the working methods adopted at Medellín and also partly in the votes that were taken.”⁴⁵ Besides adapting the tone and the method of *Gaudium et spes*, the Medellín Conference took place in an environment of discernment that fostered an attitude of listening and dialogue in small groups and plenary sessions. The initial deliberations that took place led to focusing on sixteen key areas, the study and discussion of which would culminate in the sixteen documents that formed the final text. McGrath recalled that “it [had been] decided not to arrive at the conference with a pre-existing text to which only amendments would be made. The method we followed was very different. The first few days would be dedicated to listening and followed by discussions in small groups and plenary sessions.”⁴⁶

Such flexibility in a church group that was only beginning to assimilate the changes of the Council is amazing. The participants at the assembly were confident in their ability to create something new through the style of work they had set in place. Since they were not starting out with a pre-determined method that was to be applied, it was possible to require the approval of everyone attending the assembly, not just the bishops. This was the case even though the participants were theoretically divided into voting members and simple participants (those without the right to vote).⁴⁷ The work of reflection and redaction was done in the commissions and in small teams; the texts were then discussed by all in the plenaries,⁴⁸ which were attended “not only by the

⁴⁵ BEOZZO, “Medellín,” 833.

⁴⁶ The text that follows adds that “the first two presentations treated of the ‘signs of the times’ and how to interpret them as Christians in Latin America. To that end, the assembly adapted the tone and the method of *Gaudium et Spes* as an example to be followed in the whole session.” MCGRATH, “Algunas reflexiones,” 164.

⁴⁷ Some 247 people had the right to participate in the assembly, although seven of them could not attend. Of those who attended, 130 were voting members and 110 were participants who had voice but no vote. The non-voting group included laypeople, women religious, invited experts, and non-Catholic observers. The topic of voting is further elucidated in MÚNERA, “Crónica de la II Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano,” 397-398.

⁴⁸ “The methodology adopted by the assembly for pacing its work was twofold: group meetings and plenary sessions. For the former, the bishops divided themselves according to [which of] the sixteen topics ... were of greatest concern to them, and working commissions were set up for each topic. Each commission had the task of working on a document to be submitted to the plenary sessions, where all those attending the assembly would debate what had come forth from the group sessions. Ultimately, then, it was the plenary assembly whose job it was to unify the various topics in order to give them its approval and create the final document.” J. JARAMILLO MARTÍNEZ, “Una crónica de Medellín,” in *Cuestiones Teológicas y Filosóficas*, 63 (1998), 14-15.

bishops but by many priests, religious, and laity, thus opening up a new style of collaboration in the Church's work."⁴⁹ This dynamic gave rise to a genuine *conspiratio*, which was possible because of what Routhier called a disposition to listen and learn, the basis of every form of synodal action. A disposition like this is ultimately something that cannot be prescribed, since it depends on the ways in which we relate to one another and treat one another.

Synodal life therefore requires another element, a readiness to listen and to take seriously and with care what is said. It is a matter of attitude. Synodality cannot be reduced to a formal mechanism, as if the establishment of institutional figures and the implementation of procedures and consequent practices were enough to enable us to live. On the contrary, synodality can exist where there are no established formal processes. At this infra-institutional level, it depends to a great extent on the ability of people to listen and their willingness to learn from others. It is based on the assumption that those who have the function of presiding understand well their ministry and this function of presiding over the Church of God. While the Church has been entrusted to its ordained ministers, these are not to be separated from (or empowered over) other members of the *Ecclesia Dei*. Synodality therefore requires certain attitudes and is the product of a certain spirit; it depends a lot on the relational abilities of those who hold official posts and on their ability to position themselves as brothers, friends, collaborators, and cooperators.⁵⁰

According to Landazuri Ricketts, this attitude should concede primacy to listening to the Spirit of God, who guides, renews, harmonizes, and produces its own dynamic, as Jesus did in the synagogue of Nazareth (Lk 4:16-20): "The Spirit of God, who with admirable providence guides the course of time and renews the face of the Earth, is not extraneous. And this Spirit, who constantly strengthens our organic structure and our solidarity, impels us to create a dynamic fitting for the Latin American Church."⁵¹

Readiness to listen and to learn together marked the style of Medellín. The foundational act of the synodal exercise that took place in Medellín was the "ability to hear faithfully the Word of God" ("Formación del clero," 9) by means of the human words and deeds (*Dei verbum*, 2) through which God communicates himself. The word of God is heard in a specific sociocultural context that becomes a theological locus for receiving and enacting the Word and for transmitting it in a new way. Landazuri Ricketts explains this beautifully.

[We should] above all hear the voice of God and his Church and our conscience, so that we can better understand and fulfill our pastoral mission as

⁴⁹ C. TOVAR, "Quince años de Medellín," in *Reflexión*, 55 (1983), 16.

⁵⁰ ROUTHIER, "La synodalité dans l'Église locale," 701.

⁵¹ LANDAZURI RICKETTS, "Discurso de clausura," 248.

bishops. We should also know how to listen to the voice of the world, since we are perhaps too accustomed to a “clerical” vision of the world. Sometimes we feel instinctive resentment, distrust, or fear when dealing with what is incorrectly called the “profane.” But the Word of God became human and dwells among us, thus giving meaning to all dimensions of human reality. Accordingly, whenever we listen to our fellow human beings, we are listening to Christ, and whenever we are concerned for our fellow human beings, we are concerned for Christ. To the extent that we find ourselves among our fellow human beings, drawing close to them and learning from them, we find ourselves with the Lord himself.⁵²

It is in virtue of this act of listening that Medellín reaffirmed the principle of the church’s permanent reformability (*Unitatis redintegratio*, 6), stating that “all revision of church structures, to the extent that they can be reformed, should be done to satisfy the demands of concrete historical situations, but also with an eye to the church’s nature. The revision should be carried out in view the present situation of our continent, and it should be inspired and oriented by the two guiding principles that were greatly stressed in the Council: communion and catholicity (*Lumen Gentium* 13)” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 5). The need to reexamine church and social structures derived not from the church’s reflection on itself but from its reflection on its mission in the Latin American and Caribbean world. Therefore, the reflection was far removed from any self-referential and clericalist perspective, and it recognized that “for an analysis of this type it is necessary to listen more to experts and laypeople” (“Pastoral de las élites,” 4). This way of proceeding adopts a horizontal mode of listening that recognizes not only what is most inherent and sacred in each person, but also what is profane, different, and apparently non-religious. It is an open style of listening that is not based on hierarchical or ontological relations, as was the church’s traditional style. Rather, it requires that laypeople be members of commissions, functioning not as simple advisors to clerics but as autonomous and authoritative contributors who offer their reflections on the subjects pertinent to each commission, according to their expertise.

In this spirit of horizontal listening, the first thing participants in the assembly at Medellín did was open their ears to a series of concrete facts about the Latin American reality that were not well known in traditional ecclesial circles.⁵³ This helped form the strong social sensibility and clear

⁵² LANDAZURI RICKETTS, “Discurso inaugural en Bogotá,” 47.

⁵³ “In order to have at hand the most precise possible knowledge of the continent’s problems, the conference began its labors by hearing an impressive ‘Sociographic Vision of Latin America,’ which was presented by the Brazilian sociologist Alfonso Gregory, Latin American secretary for the Federation of Centers of Socio-religious Studies. After reviewing a

pastoral orientation that would characterize all the group discussions at the conference, as well as the documents that resulted from it. Bishop Samuel Ruiz recalled that Medellín's reception of the Council involved "changing the conception and attitude by which we place the Church outside the world and against it. The Church is the People of God engaged in making history; the Church is in the world."⁵⁴ Accordingly, the foremost disposition proposed by the bishops was listening in order to serve. "We want to show sincere respect for all men and women, and we want to listen to them in order to help them with their problems and their anxieties" ("Pobreza de la Iglesia," 18).

Initial contact with the hard facts of the continent's reality led participants to draw up a new type of work dynamic. The bishops felt a sincere desire to learn more about what they were hearing so that they could better understand and discern matters in light of the Word.

The act of listening takes place while recognizing and honoring the *sensus fidei* of the People of God, for it is the same God who communicates himself through them. The collegial response consists of interpreting what has been heard while paying special attention to the cry of the poor. The bishops at Medellín repeated the words Paul VI addressed to the poor farmers of Colombia: "We hear the cry that rises up from your suffering" ("Pobreza de la Iglesia," 2).

In the synodal practice of collegiality, two dimensions of listening stand out: the discernment and interpretation proper to the episcopal college assembled together, and the *conspiratio* of all members of the People of God. In other words, there is an effort to maintain the conciliar dynamic among the one (the pope), the many (the bishops), and all (the people). Such an effort is possible when there is a desire to reconcile divergent positions by means of a *conspiratio* that achieves forms of ecclesial consensus, which in turn become the convictions requisite for the life of the church. Such a vision incorporates the reception of *Dei verbum* 10 with its assertion that the deposit

considerable amount of data and figures on the demographic, economic, social, and religious situation of Latin America, Father Gregory gave his conclusions, which were to leave a profound mark on the work of the assembly: he stated that both the marginalization of the majority of Latin Americans by the privileged minorities and the marginalization of the continent itself within the global context were steadily increasing, thus creating a situation of permanent violence which would only provoke a reaction of counter-violence." J. CAMPS, "Prólogo," in *Iglesia y liberación humana. Los documentos de Medellín*, Barcelona, Editorial Nova Terra, 1969, 21-22.

⁵⁴ G.S. RUIZ, "La evangelización en América Latina," in CELAM, *La Iglesia en la actual transformación de América Latina a la luz del Concilio*, Bogotá, Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 1968, 167.

of the Word of God has been entrusted to “the whole People of God, united to their pastors,” who together “constitute a singular consensus” (*fidelium conspiratio*) and thus establish an essential and reciprocal relation between *sensus fidei* and magisterium. Only this situated kerygmatic configuration, based on hearing the Word in the history of the people, allows for the translation of the message into the actual forms in which it is received. This is truly an application of the conciliar principle of the pastorality of doctrine, which “requires unceasing labor so that the message of salvation contained in the scriptures, the liturgy, the magisterium, and the testimony is perceived today as the word of life. There is a constant need to express the “Gospel” in ever new ways, in relation to human forms of existence, taking into account ethical and cultural conditions and remaining always faithful to the revealed Word” (“Catechesis,” 15).

In this context, it is important to stress the significance of the daily liturgy⁵⁵ within the synodal setting and a way of proceeding that involves listening, discerning, and community integration. It is impossible to understand the synodality of Medellín without taking into account the community setting and the assembly’s shared vision of each day, based on the liturgy. Two factors are especially noteworthy: the daily readings of the word of God were related to the topics discussed in the group and plenary sessions, and non-Catholic observers were allowed to participate in the Eucharist. According to Boaventura Kloppenburg, what prevailed in the sessions was “a tone of communal devotion and simple solemnity. A remarkable moment was the concelebration on the afternoon of 5 September, when the observers (an Anglican bishop, a Lutheran pastor, a Methodist pastor, and a brother of Taizé) received Holy Communion under both species. It was a deeply moving moment, perhaps the beginning of a new, more effective phase of unity among Christians.”⁵⁶

The infrequent use of biblical citations in the written documents is understandable, since the day-to-day activities were experienced in relation to the communal reading of and reflection on the word of God through the liturgy. Because of the conference’s synodal ambience, we are not left with the published text as something closed and absolute; rather, we understand that the text was the fruit of a fraternal and ecclesial communing that allowed genuine communication to take place among members at every level. In a word, the text must always be understood within the setting of a much larger event.

⁵⁵ For more on the liturgy at the conference, see S. SCATENA, “Sapere ascoltare e sapere essere? La liturgia alla conferenza di Medellín,” in *Cristianesimo nella storia*, 28, no. 1 (2007), 175-216.

⁵⁶ B. KLOPPENBURG, “A segunda Conferência geral do Episcopado Latino-Americano,” in *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*, 28 (1968), 626.

3.2 — Genuine Communication, Upward and Downward

By going deeper into the “People of God” ecclesiology, Medellín began a process of reception in which the *communio fidelium* converged spiritually with the *communio hierarchica* and prophetically within the *communio ecclesiarum*. The permanent reciprocity of all three and the manner in which they were articulated (spiritual and prophetic convergence) succeeded in producing genuine communication and a permanent form of contextual synodality that became manifest not only in the meetings of the assembly but also in the demands for reform or revision of ecclesial structures (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 5). Even if there was no clear awareness of what this implied, what resulted was an ecclesiological inversion, having at its base the small local communities in which the universal church takes concrete form. At the social level, a correlative action was proposed, one that would lead to the weaving of a political and socio-cultural fabric starting from the bases and reaching to the elites. For the conference, authentic ecclesial reform was not to be reduced to simple change of structures or of persons running the structures; rather, it would concentrate on ways of assisting the flow of communication among the structures and among those operating within them, and thus facilitate the synodal way of working.

It is therefore essential that all the ecclesial communities remain open to the dimension of Catholic communion so that none becomes closed in on itself. This is a task particularly incumbent on the hierarchical ministers, especially on the bishops, who, collegially united with their head, the Roman Pontiff, are the principle of the catholicity of the churches. In order for such openness to be effective and not purely juridical, there must be genuine communication, upward and downward, between the base and the summit (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 8).

Synodal forms of ecclesiality or true articulation of collegiality are developed from within-outwards and from below-upwards (from base communities and parishes to hierarchical-charismatic structuring). In the words with which Landazuri Ricketts inaugurated the conference, “During these days of labor, let us be very attentive to the Christian stance—for it is Christ’s—of taking the world as it is, from below. Only in this way will we follow the incarnational road that Jesus has begun.”⁵⁷ In accord with his advice, the assembly’s reflection was always oriented toward “unity in mission and diversity in charisms, services, and functions” (“La iglesia visible,” 7-8; “Sacerdotes,” 7), to allow for differentiated participation of the People of God. The distinction being made was not hierarchical; rather, there was a horizontal and reciprocal differentiation of members by reason of the

⁵⁷ LANDAZURI RICKETTS, “Discurso inaugural en Bogotá,” 1968.

“threefold prophetic, priestly, and kingly function of Christ” incumbent on every baptized person (“La iglesia visible,” 8). This foundation made possible an “organic and articulated” way of proceeding (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 9) that enabled each member to contribute something to the other members according to his or her specific function and place in the church and society. Thus there was, for example, discussion of what was most proper to “the layperson’s commitment to liberation and humanization in the world” (“La iglesia visible,” 9.13).

According to Medellín, “co-responsibility between bishops and priests” (“Sacerdotes,” 15) is understood to be an exercise that takes place under the *forma facti gregis* (the pattern for the flock), thereby committing the collegial body to serve the people by always collaborating as witnesses in the midst of the flock rather than as privileged masters lording it over the flock. This perspective is brilliantly addressed in the following text: “The episcopacy and the presbyterate should always exercise their pastoral ministries in a collegial spirit. Bishops and priests will thus always have to act as members of a body (the episcopal college and the presbyterate, respectively) that ‘exemplifies’ communion: *forma facti gregis*” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 7).

The allusion here to 1 Peter 5:2-3 sets the tone: “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.” Synodality is what gives life to the structures insofar as it allows “fraternal participation in the common dignity of the children of God” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 6), so that “the various ministries not only work for the unity of communion but also are constituted and act in a spirit of solidarity” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 7).

The conciliar spirit of *Lumen gentium* 37 was deepened at Medellín through the support for attitudes conducive to thinking, discerning, and planning as a body. The Council had affirmed the value of this type of genuine, organic communication, which moves from the base upward.

The laity are, by reason of the knowledge, competence, or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church.... Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action.

The Conference saw this model exemplified in the small Christian base communities: they are “the first and fundamental ecclesial nucleus, and they

should, at their own level, take responsibility for enriching and spreading of the faith, as well as for fostering the worship which is its expression.” These communities are the “embryonic cells of ecclesial structuring and evangelizing, and actually a primary force for human flourishing and development” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 10). The reason for promoting base communities is that they allow for the exercise of the fraternal spirit of synodality, something not found nowadays in the structure of parishes based on territory rather than on homogeneous communities. “Christians should be able to experience the communion to which they have been called in their base communities, that is, in local or regional communities that correspond to the reality of homogenous groups and that allow for personal and fraternal relationships among their members” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 10).

The new ecclesial context envisions the parish, within the framework of the synodal spirit, as a “vivifying and unifying pastoral ensemble of base communities” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 13). The parish acts to facilitate the interaction between the communities that belong to it; it is not an end in itself, as a closed space, but is rather a community of communities. In other words, it is analogous to the universal church, which is one institution in the midst of others in society and contributes to local development. Such a view adds clarity to the affirmation above regarding Christians experiencing communion in base communities, which enable the formation of personal and fraternal relationships among members (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 10). Even more important, “the community will be formed to the extent that its members have a sense of belonging, a sense of being ‘we’” (“Pastoral popular,” 13). This “we” will enable true upward and downward communication, properly aligned with the dynamics of belonging and reciprocity that it creates.

The Medellín Conference also foresaw other forms that could replicate its synodal spirit of collective listening and discerning and so generate processes of spiritual and prophetic convergence among all the members of the People of God. Thus, we are told about the need to create presbyteral and pastoral councils. “While the presbyteral council should be the principal channel of dialogue between the bishop and his priests, the pastoral council should be the principal channel of their dialogue with the whole diocese” (“Pastoral de conjunto” 18). In both types of councils there should be, *suo modo et pro sua parte*, the collaboration and representation of the “People of God in the diversity of their conditions and states of life” (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 18). This path not only leads to authentic clericalization and decentralization of the church, it rescues its properly missionary dimension and promotes co-participation in its governance (“Pastoral de conjunto,” 19).

Conclusion

The Medellín Conference signified a reception of the Council that allowed the Latin American church to position itself as a “wellspring” church, a church that had not only created, with the formation of CELAM, a collegial form of continental interaction but had also inaugurated a spirit of being and working and a mode of interaction that gave rise to a synodal way of proceeding as part of its identity. This newly emerging ecclesial form can be understood only when we understand the degree to which the conference participants experienced and interpreted their historical moment in the light of salvation history. Archbishop Eduardo Pironio stated very clearly that the participants experienced Medellín as a *salvific event*. This spirit and understanding is what ultimately made a genuine synodal ambience possible. “This salvific event—in whose preparation and realization CELAM participated so actively—marked a new and decisive stage. It was truly a *historical event*, in which the Spirit of the Lord wrote for us—and for the whole Church—a fundamental chapter of the *history of salvation*.”⁵⁸

Since many persons and communities still know nothing about this event which divided our ecclesial history into a before and an after, it is worthwhile recalling the interchange that took place between those attending the conference and the Christian communities of Medellín. The memory of that meeting is perhaps somewhat faded, but it reminds us that church communities should not be visited by their bishops only to preside at a liturgical event. Rather, bishops should foster a genuine readiness on the part of all the members of the People of God to listen to one another and to learn from one another, and they should do this by engaging in sincere dialogue about the local reality and reflecting on it in light of the word of God. Such was the thought of Julio Jaramillo Martínez.

The bishops celebrated two acts with the Christian community of Medellín. The first was a celebration of the Word. It took place on the night of Friday 30 August in Atanasio Girardot Municipal Stadium. Many persons belonging to the parishes of the archdiocese attended. The second event was on the Sunday immediately following. The prelates attending the conference spread out to the parishes to accompany the communities in their celebration of the Lord’s Day. Different types of meetings with parish leaders were then held, in which were discussed not only the business of the conference but also the religious reality of the local church.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ E. PIRONIO, “Naturaleza, misión y espiritualidad del CELAM,” in *Escritos Pastorales*, Madrid, BAC, 1973, 192.

⁵⁹ JARAMILLO MARTÍNEZ, “Una crónica de Medellín,” 15.

Medellín continues to extend to us its prophetic invitation to enrich and complete the exercise of collegiality in the context of a synodal spirit, a way of proceeding that should define our way of being church.