



# The Contribution of Eugenio Corecco to Understanding the Synodality of the Church

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**Abstract:** The Authors of the article, guided by the challenges of the modern Catholic Church regarding the promotion of the concept of synodality, analyze the invaluable contribution of Eugenio Corecco, a well-educated lawyer and theologian, the bishop of Lugano diocese in the years 1986–95, to the understanding and development of the concept. The article aims to underline the main elements of his thought, based on his experience and works. (1) Such an understanding of synodality mainly resulted from the impact of such personalities as Klaus Mörsdorf and Luigi Giussani on Corecco's intellectual and spiritual development. (2) The critical assessment of the "synodality crisis" perceived by Corecco in the direct post-synodal period, led him to the conclusions on synodality that will be presented here. (3) Indicating and describing the essence of synodality in comparison with the term *communio* which, according to Corecco, is irreplaceable, determines the fundamental influence on the proper interpretation of synodality and is its only method of identification. Synodality understood this way, according to Corecco's intention, eventually affects the main legal concepts connected with synodality in the Church. (4) The updating of Corecco's thought in the perspective of the ongoing Synod of Bishops on Synodality in the Church: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission" complements the realization of the aim assumed by the Authors.

**Keywords:** Eugenio Corecco, the Church, the law, synodality, theology

Eugenio Corecco (1931–95), the bishop of Lugano from 1986 until his premature death, was one of the protagonists of the canonical reflection (Gerosa 1998, 423–37) after the Second Vatican Council. In 1980 he was the vice president, and since 1987, the president of *Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici Promovendo* [An International Association Promoting the Study of Canon Law]. In 1982, he was appointed to the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Canon Law by John Paul II, which proves how respected he was among his peers and by the Pope (Moretti 2020). His speeches on synodality still remain up-to-date in the ongoing debate from the perspective of the synod concerning this topic called by Pope Francis. This article undertakes a deepened reflection on Corecco's thought, with the awareness that his contribution to understanding the synodality in the Church was not a systematic study of the issue and that it was not connected with a cycle of

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regular lectures on the subject, as the author himself admits at a conference devoted to him (see Corecco 1995, 137). First of all, one should notice the crucial importance of the topic of synodality in the life and activity of Corecco who on many occasions took various approaches to understanding synodality, which is reflected in his works, and which made it the main source of inspiration for his scientific output. The article aims to underline the main elements of his thought, beginning with the analysis of the situation of “synodality crisis,” which Corecco sees in the direct post-synodal period, through the reference to the essence of synodality which he identifies with the term *communio*, and finally, by proceeding to the detailed description of how synodality presented this way allows one to understand in a specific and ultimately proper way the main legal concepts connected with synodality in the Church. Finally, an attempt at a reflection on the timelessness of Corecco’s thought is made with regard to the ongoing Synod of Bishops on synodality in the Church: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.”

## 1. The Cyclical Development of Understanding Synodality by Eugenio Corecco

The concept of synodality seems to accompany Corecco throughout his life. Born in 1932 in Airolo in the canton of Ticino, at the age of 12 he entered the diocesan seminary. After graduating from the theological studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University, as a student of the Lombard Seminary in Rome and after being ordained in 1955, he served as a priest in Ticino, then he continued his studies in Canon Law in 1958 in the Institute of Canon Law at the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Munich. Under the guidance of Professor Klaus Mörsdorf, in 1962 he obtained a doctorate based on the work: *The Formation of the Catholic Church in the USA through Synodal Activity*. After that, in 1966 he obtained a Bachelor of Civil Law degree at the University in Fribourg, Switzerland. Already in 1965, he began his activity as a professor of the Canon Law in the Diocesan Seminary in Lugano. After the next two years of working as a scientific assistant of Professor Mörsdorf, he returned to Munich (1967–69), and in 1969 he became a professor of Canon Law in Fribourg, where he stayed until he was ordained bishop in 1982. He worked on the concept of synodality on numerous occasions and from various perspectives, both as a lecturer and as a priest who was actively engaged in the life of the Church.

A holistic look at his concept of synodality requires taking into account not only his addresses as a professor, a bishop, or the Pope’s advisor but also his practical experience of synodality at the level of the diocesan, Swiss, or universal Church. As far as his works and speeches on synodality are concerned, three main categories could be distinguished: the first one of historical and analytical nature, aimed at

the critical analysis of synodality in the past and present of the Church; the second one aimed at the direct and systematic reflection on synodality in its ontological dimension, to use the term suggested by Corecco himself (see Corecco 1990, 303–29; 1997b, 82–108), and the third one, regarding synodality in its proper diversity at the level of life and mission of the Church meant in her totality as a community of bishops and the laity.

Among the historical works devoted to the analysis of his contemporary reality, and apart from the doctoral thesis (Corecco 1991a), one can also mention the work on the legislation of provincial and plenary synods of the United States of America (Corecco 1968, 39–94), on the reality of the particular Church within the canton, based on canton Lucerne (Corecco 1970, 3–42), as well as on the more general history of the synodal experience in the Latin Church and in the Byzantine Empire included in the article on synodality written for the *New Theological Dictionary* from 1977 (Corecco 1977, 1466–93; 1997c, 39–81). It seems that Corecco's interventions of a more systematic and doctrinal nature appear in two different phases, in the 1970s and again in the 1990s. In the first stage, apart from the second part of the above-mentioned article on synodality from the *Theological Dictionary* (Corecco 1977, 1483–93), the article that also deserves mentioning is *Struttura sinodale o democratica della Chiesa particolare?* [The Synodal or Democratic Structure of the Particular Church?], published in *Miscellanea*, the work to honor the Spanish lawyer Juan Becerrila y Antón-Miralles (Corecco 1974, 269–99; 1997e, 9–38). At the beginning of the 1990s Corecco, already as a bishop, published a few meaningful articles on synodality in the context of colloquies and congresses: *Ontologia della sinodalità* [The Ontology of Synodality], *Sinodalità e partecipazione nell'esercizio della "potestas sacra"* [Synodality and Participation in Practice of the "Potestas Sacra"] (Corecco 1991b, 69–89; 1997d, 109–29) and *Articolazione della sinodalità nelle Chiese particolari* [Articulation of Synodality in Particular Churches] (Corecco 1992, 861–68; 1997a, 130–139). Apart from the most significant ones, there are also others, shorter and more occasional, in which the author addresses the first or the second of the above ideas; in order to become acquainted with them, one should take a look at the general bibliography included in the book *Canon Law and Communio: Writings on the Constitutional Law of the Church* (Borgonovo and Cattaneo 1999, 45–53). When one speaks about synodality in the Church, what is mainly meant is the role of bishops, of priests and of laity in the Church and their mutual relations. The indications of the fundamental principles are properly used in determining the tasks for the faithful—both the laity and the clergy, in building the Church. Numerous works of Corecco were devoted to the issues of "sacra potestas," the mission of the laity, and to the mutual relation between the laity and the clergy, in which the meaning of synodality is developed and expressed in the concreteness of various ecclesial vocations. What is more, one should not forget about certain synodal experiences such as Corecco's participation in the Synod in Switzerland in 1972 and the Synod in Rome

in 1987, devoted to vocation and the mission of the laity, in which Corecco participated as a member invited by Pope John Paul II who, even before his pontificate, had been exploring the issues of participation and the responsibility of the clergy and the laity in the Church (Wojtyła 1981, 239–372). The Synod in Switzerland which lasted 1972–75, was intended by the Conference of the Episcopal Council to become a moment for reflection and a tool to realize the provisions of the Vatican Council with the active participation of the laity (Moretti 2020, 123–34). Corecco becomes engaged in the synod at both the federal and the diocesan levels. The very acknowledgment of the boundaries of this experience made him aware of the limitations of the democratic model which originated in the Swiss civil structures and is inadequate to express the real nature of the life of the Church (Corecco 1972, 32–44). As will be shown, this experience will be the starting point for his considerations on synodality. The Roman Synod from 1987, on the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church, 20 years after the Second Vatican Council, regarded Corecco as a protagonist of the innovations demanded by the Pope, both in the preparation of the preparatory document as well as in developing synodal practice in the Church (Moretti 2020, 302). It will also be an occasion for a deepened reflection on the position of the laity in the Church and on the relation to the priestly ministry, and thus on some aspects of the practical realization of synodality (Corecco 1987a, 162–71; 1987b, 46–57). Summing up, the issue of synodality accompanies Corecco throughout his life. He is an active participant in the synodal experience, in particular in the meaningful moments of the post-conciliar period at all the levels within the ecclesial structure: the diocesan, federal (of the Swiss Church as a whole), and the universal level. He addresses the issue of synodality in the scholarly dimension, both at the historical and systematic planes, complementing the issue with the interventions that concern the role and the mission of the ordained ministers and the laity as well as their mutual relations.

## 2. The Significant Influence on Eugenio Corecco's Thought

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of Corecco's reflection on synodality, a mention should be made of his deep bond with the so-called "Munich school" because it determines his systematic approach to the entirety of canon law and, in particular, to the discussed topic. Having discussed certain particular harmonies of thoughts, it is worth asking whether and to what extent the meeting with Luigi Giussani, the founder of the movement *Comunione e Liberazione* (CL), influenced Corecco's attitude in reading and evaluating the mutual relations in the Church established by Jesus Christ.

## 2.1. Eugenio Corecco and the Munich School

Corecco completed canonical formation at the Institute of Canon Law at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Munich. The Institute was established by Mörsdorf and was influenced by his vision of shaping canonical thought in the relation between theology and law within canon law (Gerosa 2006, 113–18; Cattaneo 2002, 825). Taking part in the ongoing discussion on the reality of law and the Church, Mörsdorf refuted the main assumptions of the thesis proposed by Rudolph Sohm that law and the Church are contradictory to each other. He showed that the canon law in the Church was not only introduced in order to organize the life of the community but also it is fused with the ecclesial structure and has been present in the Church ever since its initiation. The awareness of the ecclesial nature of the first Christian communities was the legal awareness, the fact is underlined in the discussion with Sohm and with other Protestant theologians. The specific concept of the canon law as well as the entire fully developed legal system must not be transferred to the reality of the original Church but it is necessary to prove that the Church as the legal reality has always been so. Due to the fact that after the unification of Italy, the departments of canon law were incorporated into faculties of law—such an approach was far from the so-called Italian school of canon law and it claimed the right to the exclusively legal nature of the discipline of the canon law.

Corecco, while studying in the Munich school, established and developed relations of deep friendship not only with Master Mörsdorf but also with other students, among whom one should mention Winfried Aymans and Oscar Seier, whose works on synodality and on the concept of *communio* contributed even more to the development of Corecco's concept. Without undermining the influence of the school as such, it seems that Corecco, with his individual effort, significantly contributed not only to its further development but also exerted influence on the reform of the Code of the Canon Law, thanks to the particular bond of respect and friendship with John Paul II (Astorri 2014). Corecco is far from denying the legal nature of the canonical study, however, he emphasizes the “theological” origins of the Church and her structures and thus he states the impossibility of transferring the legal concepts worked out by the civil law into the ecclesial reality (Wijlens 1992, 121–72; Cattaneo 2012, 381–83). He distinctly analyses this correlation in the debates on synodality and on the nature-related relations between priestly ministries in their various dimensions and God's people as a whole.

## 2.2. Eugenio Corecco and Comunion e Liberazione

The Milan movement CL, which Corecco was a member of, as well as its founder, Giussani (a friend of Corecco), also influenced his attitude. Meeting reverend Giussani strongly affected Corecco, who was fascinated with the charism of the priest

from Milan, who presented the power of the Christian experience and the answer to the deepest existential human needs in a new and entertaining way (Moretti 2020, 58–61). The necessity to accept the truth of human existence reflected in the Son of God the Man Jesus Christ guided young people to read and see the reality in the light of the Gospel. The sophisticated critical sense of the founder of the CL Movement prepared the participants of the movement not only for emphasizing what was positive in all the manifestations of the human culture and in the relations in the social and ecclesial spheres but also for noticing the dissonance with “the greater fullness” of life which was facilitated by the Christological event.

Moving to the canonical ground of comprehension and of regulating the internal ecclesial relations, the methods of management taken from the civil law can only be the object of the same critical analysis, which is why it is not surprising that they are inadequate. Although Corecco and reverend Giussani never confronted each other on the issue of synodality; it seems that the power of Corecco in criticizing those who deluded themselves into thinking that they can realize the Christian ideal of the Church, that is a well-integrated community, simply by copying the structures which originate in the civil models, and who suggested the concept of *communio* in order to indicate a new modality of a relation, including the hierarchical intra-ecclesial one, is also partly based on the intellectual consonance with reverend Giussani as far as the vision of the world and the way of perceiving Christianity are concerned. The basic specific nature of Giussani’s approach should also be emphasized: the method of assessing reality should not be individualistic but rather “common or community-based,” in accordance with the modality born out of the Holy Spirit. Here Corecco clearly refers to the CL formation program for Christian communities at universities:

Every Christian possesses [...] a new method of life. [...] He is a new man who, no longer belonging to himself but to Christ, is committed to providing his community with all the spiritual and material goods, without excluding anything. Such a methodology is distinguished by the universal judgment or the judgment of a community (cf. *Comunione e Liberazione* for groups of Christian communities at universities, Milan 1971). Its meaning harmoniously results from the importance of judgment in human life because it animates, generates, and controls its development. If the Christian life was a communion, it would be impossible for the judgment which accompanies the life and rules it, not to be a communion as well. The collective judgment should not be perceived as the deductive application of an abstract criterion to reality in which one lives, nor as a common effort which is aimed at working out a common opinion which, however, is never arrived at but as the constant pursuit to read the reality which is co-created every day and shared in the community according to the principle of faith born by the common Spirit Who made the first Christians “of one heart and mind” (Acts, 4, 32). (Corecco 1997e, 28)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this and all other cases translated by Andrzej Proniewski.

Thus one can understand how pluralism is expressed through fellowship (and how it should function) in the Church, as well as its true nature, and hence the modality of synodality in the Church, which will be presented further on, when the concept of *communio* will be discussed.

### 3. The Genuine Synodality According to Eugenio Corecco

As has already been mentioned above, Corecco does not develop his thought on synodality in a completely systematic way but he advocates for this matter a few times, with various insights or emphases depending on the circumstances. To follow the first assumption of Corecco's doctrine on synodality, the Authors will begin by examining Corecco's strong criticism that he transferred to his new post-conciliar synodal experience. The Church should aspire to the model of *communio* (Gerosa 1991) in order to understand the need for internal relations in the community of believers. In light of this principle, Corecco reinterprets the overall hierarchical and collective relations in the Church and presents their Christian authenticity and irreducibility to the state models, as will be shown on several examples.

#### 3.1. The Crisis of Post-Conciliar Synodal Experiences

Corecco's starting point for his considerations on synodality is the observation of the crisis of the post-conciliar experiences. This crisis is mainly perceived at the level of particular Churches, that is, dioceses. The Second Vatican Council established several advisory councils which aim at supporting the mission of the Church: priestly council, pastoral councils as well as the councils proposed at the parish level which are mentioned in the Decree On The Apostolate of the Laity. However, according to Corecco, "they have already been experiencing a deep crisis" (1997e, 15), which results from a misguided attempt to build them modeled on democratic structures. In reality, as Corecco notices, while the problem of the way of the exercise of collegiality is not questioned at the level of the universal Church, at the level of particular Churches, the members are more and more in favor of democratization. Also "in terms of breaking up [...] as if the structure of the particular Church (=of the dioceses) was radically different from the structure of the universal Church." (Corecco 1997e, 10) Corecco strongly emphasizes the fact that the universal Church and the particular Church can be ruled only by the same constitutional principles (see Corecco 1997e, 13). As "From the point of view of the constitutional structures, the Second Vatican Council discovered anew with all clarity, but also with all determination, that any office in the Church essentially has a synodal dimension." (Corecco 1997e, 13) If, at the universal level, the Second Vatican Council clearly stated the



modality of the synodal dimension in “structural and constitutional” terms (Corecco 1997e, 14), that is the acknowledgment of the supreme authority of the college of bishops in the hierarchical communion under the authority of the Pope, we should also acknowledge that it must also be present at the level of the particular Church:

By the power of the principle according to which the universal Church is realized only by means of the particular Church (*in quibus*), it should, on the one hand, be stated that the synodal dimension of the ecclesial offices, which is an important aspect of the constitutional structure of the Church, must also be present and must be realized at the level of the particular Church, and, on the other hand, as the synodal structure is characteristic and it constitutes the basic dimension of all the ecclesial offices, it is the only possible form of shared responsibility and the participation of God’s people as a whole in leading the life of the particular Church. (Corecco 1997e, 14)

The results are as follows:

Any discourse on the subject of the “democratic” structure of the particular Church is therefore unacceptable from the ecclesiological point of view, and any attempt to interpret and experience the synodal structures of the particular Church (Synods, Priestly Councils, Pastoral Councils, etc.) in democratic categories is equivalent to falsifying the ecclesial reality. (Corecco 1997e, 14–15)

According to Corecco, the lack of proper awareness of the nature of the Church, that is insufficient ecclesial awareness, is the reason behind the deep crisis of the new diocesan councils. It is forgotten that “democracy, as every constitutional system, is a structure of power which, whether we like it or not, is, as any other system, authoritarian in a way, essentially in terms of the division of power.” (Corecco 1997e, 17) This basic misunderstanding makes one perceive the new synodal structures with fear in advance as if they were a threat to the hierarchical power while, at the bottom, there is discontent because the possibility of influencing decision-making is very limited. However, in the Church, as reminded by Corecco—the relations between the hierarchy and other God’s people “must never be ultimately expressed in terms of the division of power.” (Corecco 1997e, 17) Since in the Church, against the order of the state, the power of bishops, that is their specific service and the ultimate responsibility, must not be delegated, similarly to the role of God’s people, which does not depend on whether the hierarchy grants the laity some power. In both cases, the foundation of their shared responsibility in the Church is laid in the sacramental dimension. The mutual relations and the cooperation between them should therefore be considered in proper categories that originated in the theological reflection on the Revelation and not in more or less adequate analogies taken from the experience of the civil law. If it is true that since ancient times the reality of the Church has involved



indications and elements that have contributed to the evolution of the life of the Church, one must not disregard the risk of the uncritical adaptation of elements that are inappropriate for the ecclesial reality (Corecco 1997e, 24). “In the case of diocesan councils, they uncritically adopted the assumption concerning their activity that they should function in the image of a parliament or like democratic associations.” (Corecco 1997e, 24) These statements should be understood in the light of the specific context of cantons in Switzerland in which the Church often had to take the form of democratic and parliamentary structures in order to be acknowledged as a public body (Corecco 1970, 3–42). However, the regulations of the German diocesan synods are also not free from this criticism (Mörsdorf 1969, 461–509). To overcome the crisis, it is necessary to refer to the categories which clearly determine the specific nature of the Church.

### 3.2. The Concept of *Communio*

To understand what human relations and cooperation in the Church should look like, one should begin with the mystery of the Church herself. Corecco used the concept *communio*, which summarizes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on ecclesiology and it seems to him to be the most proper concept for expressing the deep nature of the Church (Saier 1973; Gerosa 2006, 130–148). The relation between the universal Church and the particular Church and the function of the bishops in them constitute the first and promising model of this new type of structure: “Episcopi [...] singuli visibile principium et fundamentum sunt unitatis in suis Ecclesiis particularibus, ad imaginem Ecclesiae universalis formati in quibus et ex quibus una et unica Ecclesia catholica existit” (LG 23; “The individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches comes into being the one and only Catholic Church”). The formula used by the Second Vatican Council *in quibus et ex quibus*, “recognizes the mystery of the Church in its institutional form. Therefore, it is a model which can be recognized only through faith, which, due to the strict logic, is not properly reflected in any constitutional state model, not even in the federalist model.” (Corecco 1981, 1223; cf. Wijlens 1992, 130–131) The universal Church is not the sum of the particular Churches, nor are the particular Churches a small portion of the universal Church. Therefore, the mutual relation of the particular Churches and the universal Church cannot be understood in terms of an association or confederation but it is necessary to assume a different and specific concept, the concept *communio ecclesiarum*, which expresses the novelty of this state of affairs (Corecco 1997c, 64–73; 1997d, 109–11; 1997e, 10–11). The principle of *communio* also applies in the particular Churches with regard to the relations between the bishop, the other ordained ministers, and the lay faithful. It is also inappropriate to use the concepts of representation or monarchical power, which originate from civil-law

systems. This is a specific modality that also has its basis in the sacramental structure of the Church, in particular in the holy sacraments of baptism and ordination, and which does not have any equivalent forms in other legal systems and, therefore, can be referred to as *communio hierarchica* (Corecco 1997c, 73–79). Based on such a principle of *communio*, one can understand the methods of authentic synodality in the Church, both at the level of the relationship between the particular Churches and the universal Church and within the particular Church considered individually.

### 3.3. *Communio Ecclesiarum* and Collegiality of Bishops

The general council and various forms of particular councils and episcopal conferences are exceptionally solemn manifestations of synodality and *communio ecclesiarum* (Gerosa 2014, 65–77; Corecco 1972, 32–44). The Bishop of Rome has the highest and full authority in the Church and possesses “supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church, which he is always able to exercise freely.” (CCL can. 331) The Pope is also the Head of the College of Bishops who “together with its head and never without this head, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church” (CCL can. 336), *cum Petro et sub Petro* [with Peter and under Peter]. “The college of bishops exercises power over the universal Church in a solemn manner in an ecumenical council.” (CCL can. 337 § 1) Here it should also be explained in what way the opinions of bishops, expressed individually or collectively, are decisive indeed if in any case, the result depends on the opinion of one of them (Aymans 1969). Other difficulties appear when attempting to define the power and competence of the conference of bishops, which, on the one hand, seems to be reduced to a purely advisory body but, on the other, is entrusted with the function of governing, which in some cases seems to enter the decision-making areas of the competence of diocesan bishops. To properly understand the nature of these forms of collegiality, and hence to be able to properly realize them, according to Corecco, it is necessary to return to the sacrament of holy orders because “synodality can be properly considered only as a proper dimension of the sacrament of ordination. Thus, thanks to the fact that all the bishops are ordained in the same sacrament, the essential relation of synodality is born.” (Corecco 1997a, 132) Corecco notices that it is a phenomenon parallel to the one that concerns the Church as such. Just like the one Church of Christ is realized in two dimensions: particular and universal, “at the same time, there exists one sacrament of priesthood that provides the ecclesial service which is marked with the double dimension: personal, that is particular and universal.” (Corecco 1997a, 132) The dialectic between the particular and the universal goes back to Christ Himself as He is the One Who appointed numerous apostles, and thus the bishops, but this is reflected in the person of the bishop and not the college as such.

“The sacrament of holy orders is a premise of the existence of the synodal dimension. Synodality originates from the initial dimension of the holy orders as the bishop’s responsibility for providing unity with all the other bishops in order to ensure the salvation of the particular Church.” (Corecco 1997a, 134) *Potestas sacra* of bishops (Corecco 1984b, 24–52) is manifested in two ways: in the preaching of the Word and in ministering sacraments (Wijlens 1992, 32–33). In ministering sacraments, the bishop acts alone, and with regard to the rite, it is always the same rite and it has the same binding power for the entire Catholic community. “The Word is easily submitted to various degrees of expressing and interpretation of the truth. Hence the only preaching of the Word, expressed at the level of universality of the Catholic Church can constitute the ultimate criterion of its veracity.” (Corecco 1997a, 135; cf. Corecco 1997d, 115–18) At the level of the Word, the synodal dimension is celebrated and expressed in various ways. Thus the results of such an approach to understanding the synodal role of bishops can be seen in two particular moments in the life of the Church, even if they are not the only ones: at the General Council and at the Conferences of the Episcopal Council. In the case of the General Council, the opinion of bishops is deliberative but it should not be meant in the proper sense for the general theory of law:

Voting itself serves to determine who among the bishops and which particular Churches represented by them reached the same assessment on the issues concerning faith and discipline, rather than to settle some issues. It is not a discretionary fact concerning power but—at least at the level of the fundamental issues—an act of observation. What is more, the common assessment of the Council itself does not result from the assessment of the majority, as it is in a parliament, but rather from the convergence of the opinions of bishops with the opinion of the Pope. Because it is a synodal event and not a parliamentary act of the majority, it is only natural that to make the decisions it is necessary to obtain moral unanimity. (Corecco 1997b, 104)

The conclusive argument in such a form results from recognizing the human will but “in the sense that the testimony of bishops on their faith and on the faith of the particular Churches is ultimate.” (Corecco 1997b, 105) This particular concept of the nature of the opinion-forming voice of the bishops makes it possible to overcome the relation of competition or competitiveness with the function of the successor of Saint Peter—of the “Head of the Church”: it is by no means a negation, neither it makes the other opinions redundant, but they are together “synodal” with the authentic testimony of the revealed truth. As far as the synodality at the level of particular councils and the synodal conferences is concerned, it is clear that synodality did not originate in the synodality of the universal college of bishops, as if it was just a small part taken out of the whole, but it embodies “synodality itself, by the power of sacrament received by particular bishops.” (Corecco 1997a, 135) From this point

of view, according to Corecco, apart from the differences in the structures of particular councils and the conferences of bishops, their synodality originates from the sacrament of Holy Orders received by each bishop separately. Here Corecco seems to be warning against further increasing the frequency and further developing the prerogatives of the episcopal conferences, which could lead to diminishing the meaning of the role of a bishop (see Corecco 1997a, 135). Even if the episcopal conference was unanimous, it would not be granted the *status quo* of universality which is granted only to the whole College of Bishops with the Pope.

Basing synodality on the sacraments of the holy orders, in particular on the function of the preaching of the Word, on the one hand, Corecco manages to explain the real nature of the deciding voice of the bishops in the Council, thus solving the apparent contradiction with the prerogatives of the Petrine ministry of the Pope himself, but, on the other hand, he reassesses the authentic synodality of “working groups of bishops,” such as the Episcopal Conferences, contributing to excluding the risk regarding the diminishing of the *sacra potestas* of each separate bishop.

### 3.4. *Communio* with Presbyters and Laity

The synodal structure, based on the episcopal ordination, is realized not only at the level of the Universal Church, but also within each particular Church. There must not be any difference of structure between the universal Church and the particular Church. As far as the relation with the clergy is concerned, Corecco emphatically reiterates that “a bishop, by definition, does not exist by himself but only with the college of priests” (1997a, 136), although the latter, having no granted fullness of the sacrament of holy orders, cannot represent the universal Church:

The deep reason for the existence of the college of presbyters with the bishop as its head consists in the fact that the universal Church would not come to existence (with her synodal structure) in the particular Church if the latter was structurally heterogeneous with the previous one, that is, if it did not have the synodal structure but if it was managed monistically only by a bishop. The synodal nature of the particular Church as such results from the very nature of the sacrament of holy orders which is realized according to three various degrees: as bishops, priests, and deacons. (Corecco 1997a, 136)

There is a difference in synodality between bishops and priests—Corecco intentionally does not mention deacons. The bishop’s ministry of sacraments is open to synodality in two directions: universal and particular. The universal dimension assumes *communio ecclesiarum* and is manifested at its highest level in the college of bishops *cum Petro et sub Petro*, but it is also expressed at the lower levels of cooperation. The second direction is the one within the diocese, which is practically manifested in the relations of a bishop with the clergy, but also, although in a different way, with all

the faithful. As far as synodality at the priestly level is concerned, as priesthood is of a lower degree than the whole of the bishop's ministry, its value is only internal. In other words, the bond between priests (or the clergy) and the bishop is synodal in nature, while there is no college of priests. The bond between priests and the universal Church is manifested in their unity with the bishop (Corecco 1997a, 137). Here Corecco wonders whether it is possible to broaden the concept of synodality in its previous meaning to involve also the level of the lay faithful. The answer to this question can always be found in the sacral nature of the Church (Corecco 1984a, 194–218). As is reminded by the Second Vatican Council, there is an essential difference between the ministerial priesthood, based on the sacrament of the holy orders, and the common priesthood which results from the sacrament of baptism (*LG* 10). They are “two different ways of participation in the one priesthood of Christ.” (Corecco 1997a, 137) By the power of baptism, which is combined with the ordained ministers and which is also constantly present in the ordained ministers, the lay faithful take responsibility for the Church. Corecco is reluctant to assign this bond the connotations of synodality which he considers to be reserved for those who “were clothed” in the holy orders.

The attempt to define this bond (the shared responsibility of the laity and of the ordained ministers in building the Church) as synodality would, however, mean giving the concept of synodality essentially different, and by that, heterogenous meaning and thus cause theological confusion. If it is true that the lay faithful are the members of the diocesan Synod, it does not mean that by the power of their participation in the diocesan Synod as such, the laity should be given some dimension of synodality which results from the sacrament of the holy orders because the nature and the purpose of the sacrament of baptism which would make them the participants of the sacrament of holy orders, cannot be changed. (Corecco 1997a, 138)

Corecco points out that although in the diocesan synod priests and the laity gather together, all of them are entitled to the consultative voice, it must not lead to the conclusion that their positions are equal. “Regardless of the ability of the canonical order for the more precise determination of the specific way of the priests’ and the laity’s voting, their ecclesial position within the diocesan Synod remains different in its essence.” (Corecco 1997a, 138) Corecco seems to be hoping that the concept of synodality will no longer be used to indicate in an undifferentiated way the values of the laity’s and the clergy’s participation in the synod. According to Corecco, it would be better to use the concept advising to specify the laity’s participation in the synod, as was suggested by Aymans (Corecco 1997a, 138) in his works. The concept of synodality could be reserved for the ordained ministers and as far as the laity is concerned, it would be better to use the term “advisory,” in order to indicate that participation in the “synod” is not the privilege of the priesthood by the power of the sacrament of

holy orders but by the power of common priesthood which results from the sacrament of baptism. It is all meant to maintain proper proportions of the relations in the community of the Church of both the different lay offices and the different degrees of holy orders of the clergy which take into account the proper understanding of the hierarchical and synodal dimensions of the Church.

### 3.5. Advisory Voice

In order to complete this short review of Corecco's opinion on synodality, the Authors should re-analyze the concept of constitutional voting. As was shown above, the concept of *communio ecclesiarum* does not have any counterparts in the civil systems because it is based on the principle of faith rooted in the Christian revelation. Even the concept of the "voice of the bishops" cannot be understood as, e.g., the voice of a member of the civil parliament. Their voice is rooted in "the fullness" of the sacrament of holy orders and it is best understood as a testimony in the process of discovering the revealed truth. The advisory voice in the canonical system is reserved for the clergy and for the laity within the synods of different levels and for other consultative bodies and/or the co-responsible. Perceiving it from a purely civil perspective does not reflect the true meaning of this institution in the Church:

The difference in relation to the general theory of the state law consists in the fact that in the Church, the advisory voice is not a limiting of the power of the weakest by the strongest. On the contrary, it institutionalizes the necessity inscribed into the dynamics of communion. It depends on the principle of *communio*, understood as the fact of the necessary immanence of constitutive elements of the ecclesial reality. In this particular case, it concerns the immanence *sensus fidei fidelium al munus docendi* of the sacramental ministry of bishops. (Corecco 1997d, 125)

The case of diocesan councils is paradigmatic. The particular Church consists not only of the bishop and his presbytery, but also of the lay faithful. Their participation in the co-responsibility in the Church within the diocesan and parish councils does not occur by the power of delegation of the ordained ministers or the support in replacement but is based on the sacrament of baptism and on the common priesthood. On principle, no faithful should be excluded. At the same time, the bishop, by the power of the received holy orders, is bound with the responsibility that he cannot transfer to anyone else. These two poles are not mutually exclusive, but they are ideally incorporated in the process of working out the common assessment which comprises all the opinions of the members and the conclusion of which is determined by the authority. In this sense, making use of the consultation with the clergy or with the laity is not only a formality but is a necessary method for the authority to take a decision in an ecclesiological accurate way.

From the perspective of communion and immanence, the problem of authority in the Church defies the possibility of placing it, like in democracy, as a problem of power-sharing; at the same time, it sets the problem as the natural process of communicating based on the principle of the ecclesial communion of various diaconies and charisms. (Corecco 1997d, 127)

It can be seen here to what extent the method of common assessment worked out by the community of the faithful, according to the teaching of Giussani addressing his groups of Catholic students, constitutes an ideal pattern for realizing synodality. The synodal process of making decisions in the Church does not happen through a clash of different opinions, with the victory of the opinion of the majority of voters, neither can it be imposed by the authority of the bishop. This is because it is the result of community judgment, or in other words, the collective discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which according to its nature, aims at moral unanimity and specifies through the position of authority which confirms what was achieved and makes it binding. This procedure does not mean either the weakening of *sacra potestas*, or the more gracious assigning of the lay faithful some role in the responsibility for the Church by the hierarchs because also the role of the latter does not result from delegation but is based on the sacrament of baptism.

## Concluding Remarks

Corecco's interest in synodality accompanied him throughout his life, in the theoretical sphere as a canonist and in the practical sphere as a priest in the Church who actively engaged in synodal activity at the levels of the diocesan, national, and general Church. His reflection on synodality, in particular on the need to be synodal, is characterized by the excellent theological approach: the reality of the Church originates in the Christian revelation, therefore its structure, including the legal structure, must be in accordance with its deepest essence. Hence the necessity of a critical approach to legal terms that originated in the experience of civil law in order to verify their adequacy and eventually modify them or create new ones. After emphasizing the boundaries of the democratic concepts of power-sharing, of representation, and of parliamentary systems, Corecco identifies the principle, based on the sacrament of the episcopal ordination, which allows for the proper functioning of the synodality of the Church in her specific nature in the concept of *communio ecclesiarum*. The hierarchical articulations do not constitute its criteria of the division of power but they represent the boundaries that Christ wanted, and that require the assessment of the community. Taking into account the current atmosphere in the Church and the almost feverish seeking of "synodality" in the Church, it seems that Corecco's thought, which would deserve a more extensive study and which would also take into account



the specific contexts in which his reflection matured, remains valid mainly in two directions. On the one hand, the fact that the law in the Church should become an increasingly perfect reflection of the theological nature of the Church, apart from the simplifications and the environmental influences, and, on the other hand, the fact that it is also a manifestation of ecclesiological vision which should be examined thoroughly in order to check if it is genuinely in line with the faith of the Church. From this perspective, the propositions of structural reforms which falsely present the spiritual origins of *sacra potestas*, are indeed far from the Catholic Church's opinion. On the other hand, the task of community assessment, however fascinating it may seem, is not deprived of actual difficulties concerning human limits and sin. In this sense, pursuing the path of constant conversion and listening to the Holy Spirit is always necessary, not only at the individual level but also at the community level. An analysis of Corecco's teaching on synodality and of the specific boundaries of some of his historic achievements constitutes a stimulus for discerning his entire, possibly even not fully recognized potential.

*Translated by Monika Gierak*

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