

Prof. Arnaud Join-Lambert  
Université catholique de Louvain (Belgium)

# The innovation of the Diocesan Synod by and after the Second Vatican Council

*19<sup>th</sup> of November, 2021*

1



Cotonou Benin 2014



Borongan Philippines 1996-1997



Military Ordinariate  
of Austria 2012-14

# 1. Current diocesan synods: a religious innovation?

Post-conciliar diocesan synods ≠ former synods



Rodez France 2016

Krakow Poland 1653



→ A religious innovation ? (Bélanger & Bonenfant 2016)

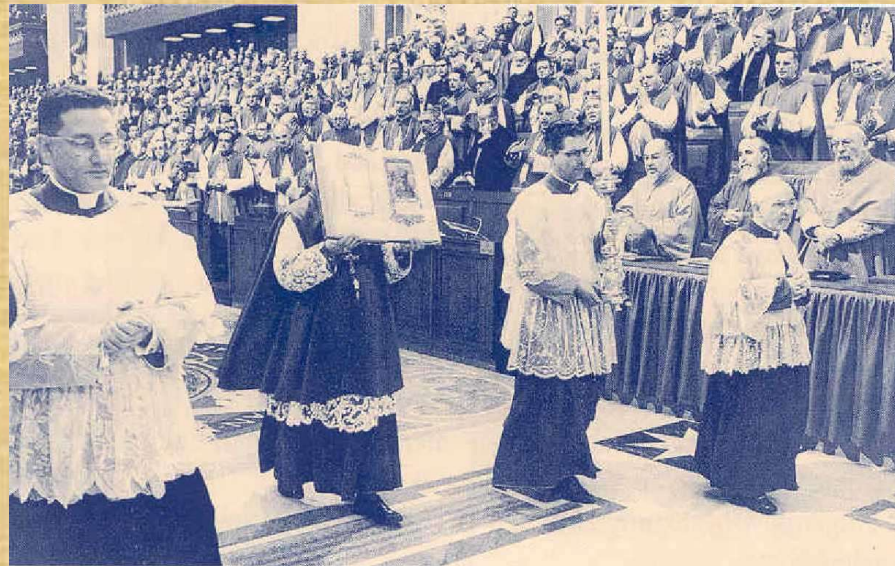
"A collective process which, out of a will for change in the face of a situation considered not to meet or no longer to meet current needs and aspirations, introduces a religious novelty and which leads, by negotiation or by imposition by means of a communication network, to a significant, effective and lasting socio-religious change or system of meanings."

## 1. Current diocesan synods: a religious innovation?

2. The proposal to renew diocesan synods (1960-1965)
3. The diffusion of the novelty (1965-1983)
4. The appropriation of the novelty (1983-2015)
5. The unfulfilled uptake of the novelty, by changing the practice of the diocesan synod and/or the system of signification (2015-2021...)
6. Four fields of suggestions for the adoption of the novelty of diocesan synods
  - \* consultation
  - \* Decision
  - \* Worship
  - \* Towards an episcopal synodal style

## 2. The *proposal* to renew diocesan synods (1960-1965)

- ▶ the common priesthood of all the baptised
- ▶ the ecclesiological principle of the *sensus fidei fidelium*
- ▶ the local Church as *portio* of the universal Church
- ▶ *Christus Dominus* 36 (« earnestly desires »)

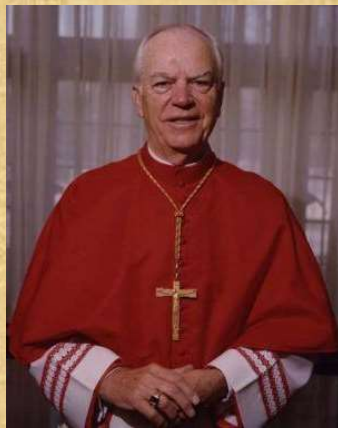


Council Vatican II,  
enthroning of the evangeliary  
at the opening  
of the plenary session

### 3. The *diffusion* of the novelty of diocesan Synods (1965-1983)

A time of very creative "synodal" flourishing

- preliminary survey of the people of God: Detroit USA 1969: 89.000 people ; Vienna-Wien Austria 1968-1970: 100.000 people
- preliminary working groups: Krakow Poland 1971-79, Synod 72 of Switzerland 1972-1975, Saint-Brieuc France 1969-1970



Card. John Dearden of Detroit



Synod 72 in Saint-Gall

## 4. The appropriation of the novelty of diocesan synods (1983-2015)

After the renewed Code of Canon Law 1983

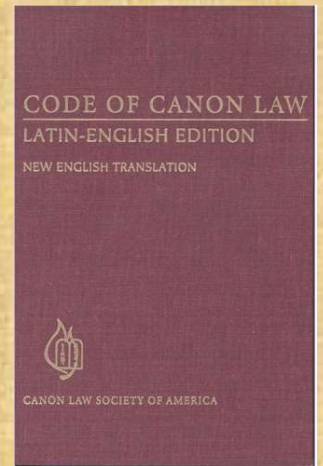
- the abolition of the ancient obligation to convoke at regular intervals
- the participation of the laity as full members of a synodal assembly (c. 463 §1-2)
- the invitation of observers from other Christian confessions (c. 463 §3)

About 1000 Diocesan Synods in 3 or 4 phases,  
Johannesburg South Africa 2007-08, San Pedro Sula Honduras 2012

The persistence of parasynods: forms of synodal processes which are not strictly canonical (forum, pastoral assemblies, youth synods, etc.)

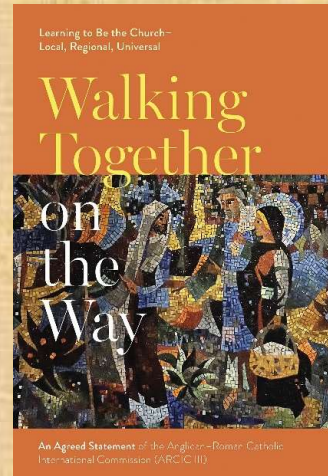


Batouri  
Cameroon  
2012-2014



## 5. The unfulfilled uptake of the novelty (2015-2021...)

- The promotion and the wide propagation of the notion of synodality (Pope in 2015, International Theological Commission 2018, and: Faith and Order 1998, ARCIC III 2018, etc.)
- The growing reference to texts published by episcopal conferences
- The recurrent denunciation of clericalism
- But: only 1000 for more than 3000 dioceses
- Recent parasynods → the incompleteness of the religious innovation of the post-conciliar diocesan synod. *Sinodo minore* Milan Italy 2018  
≠ Milan 1966-1972 and Milan 1995

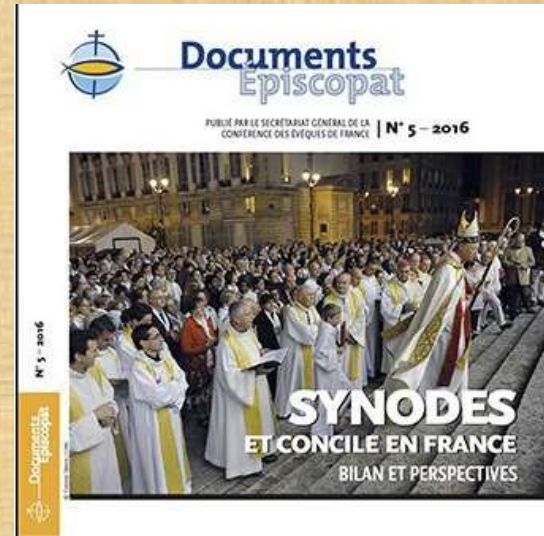


## 5. The unfulfilled uptake of the novelty (2015-2021...)

- In France, four criticisms expressed to invalidate the institution of the diocesan synod:
  - the cumbersome nature of the processes,
  - their poor results,
  - the uselessness or inadequacy of the canonical framework,
  - a "two-speed" Church between the members of the assemblies and the other faithful

More or less well founded; and other reasons:

- clericalism, patriarchal and misogynistic practices, understandings of canon law



## 6. Four fields of suggestions for the adoption of the novelty of diocesan synods

### ► Consultation

- Obligation of consulting the people of God (like in *Episcopalis communio* 2018)
- Professionalization for the data analysis and their interpretation Rancagua Chili 2008-2010 by the *Instituto de sociología* of the *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile*

### ► Decision

- Better link between the *decision taking* and the *decision making*
- Expended deliberative power and use of a veto right, Würzburger Synod in West Germany (1971-1975)



## 6. Four fields of suggestions for the adoption of the novelty of diocesan synods

### ► Worship

- Unify the liturgical dimension and the synodal assemblies      Périgueux France 1993-1996
- For a synodal mystagogy  
Tournai Belgium 2011-2013



### ► Towards an episcopal synodal style

- One synod per episcopate
- Revision of the criteria for choosing between candidats
- A more synodal selection and nomination of bishops

#### ENGLISH

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together in Your name.  
With You alone to guide us,  
make Yourself at home in our hearts;  
Teach us the way we must go  
and how we are to pursue it.  
We are weak and sinful;  
do not let us promote disorder.  
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path  
nor partiality influence our actions.  
Let us find in You our unity  
so that we may journey together to eternal life  
and not stray from the way of truth  
and what is right.  
All this we ask of You,  
who are at work in every place and time,  
in the communion of the Father and the Son,  
forever and ever. Amen.

updated  
Adsumus  
2021

## Highlights

- the reception of the Second Vatican Council is not yet complete in this area of governance in the local churches
- the innovation of the diocesan synod needed its own theological term
- The omnipresence of the notion of synodality since 2015 finds here a double explanation, both phenomenological and theological
- Toward a synodal Church through the synods
  - A topic for the current Synod of bishops

thank you for your attention

