

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. The foreground and middle ground are dominated by vibrant green, terraced agricultural fields, likely rice paddies, separated by narrow dirt paths. In the lower center, there is a dense, lush green forest area with various types of trees, including palm trees. The overall scene is bright and verdant, suggesting a healthy, cultivated environment.

**THE *SENSUS FIDELIUM* AND CANON LAW  
IN A SYNODAL CHURCH**

## Preliminary Remarks and Explication of Terms

### I – The Sensus Fidelium

- An aspect of faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit given along with faith, which enables believers to comprehend and make sense of their own God's self-communication and salvific invitation to God's inner life.
- The exact term, *sensus fidelium*, is not used in any of the Vatican II documents. The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* no. 12, talks rather about "the supernatural sense of the faith of the entire people of God" (*supernaturalis sensus fidei totius populi*). Neither is the term *sensus fidelium* used in the 1983 Code of Canon Law.
- The *sensus fidei fidelis* (not just *sensus fidei*) refers to the sense of the faith of the individual believer.
- The *sensus fidei fidelium* or *sensus fidelium* on the other hand refers to the corporate ecclesial sense of the faith that could be found at local ecclesial communities.
- The *sensus fidelium* is both a theological concept and an ecclesial reality.
- The term *sensus fidelium* can also be interpreted both as "a sense *for* the faith" and as "a sense *of* the faith".

## 2 – Canon Law

- Not simply the “Code of Canon Law” or canons stipulated in the Code, since not all the canons are laws in the proper sense of that word, nor are all the church’s laws incorporated as Canon into the Code.
- By “canon law” we mean, firstly, a body or system of norms or rules promulgated by a competent ecclesiastical authority, for the governance of the external life of the Church; secondly the science or art of making, interpreting, applying or receiving laws.
- The term “canon lawyer” encompasses legislators, administrators, judges and academic lawyers, all of whom effectively contribute to the legal life of the Church.

## 3 – Synodal Church

- A Church that *listens, dialogues, and discerns* among all the faithful what the Spirit is saying it in the light of the Gospel.
- Revelation:
  - **1)** foundational revelation, which is revelation inasmuch as it reached an unsurpassable, once for all fulfillment in Christ;
  - **2)** revelation as it continues today and invites people to faith in a living personal and communal encounter with God;
  - **3)** revelation as a reality to come; revelation as “future”, “final” or as a reality that will be glorious and definitively consummated in the life to come.
- A synodal church is attentive to these three temporal aspects of divine revelation – revelation in the sense of the past, present and to come – under the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit.

# From the Sense of Faith to the Sense of Law

## The Disciples of Jesus

- The *sensus fidelium* was a fundamental element in their believing.
- The four Gospels are four distinct sense of the faith, four distinct expressions of the meaning of Jesus Christ.
- The evaluative benchmark for reinterpretation and reception of the communal memory of Jesus

- The *sensus fidelium* was also essential in the early Christian's attempt to formulate laws that would help safeguard their faith values (e.g. the Council of Jerusalem).
- The emergence of the "canon" of the New Testament is itself the result of a process marked by the interaction between the sense of the faith and the law and aimed at consensus amidst diversity.

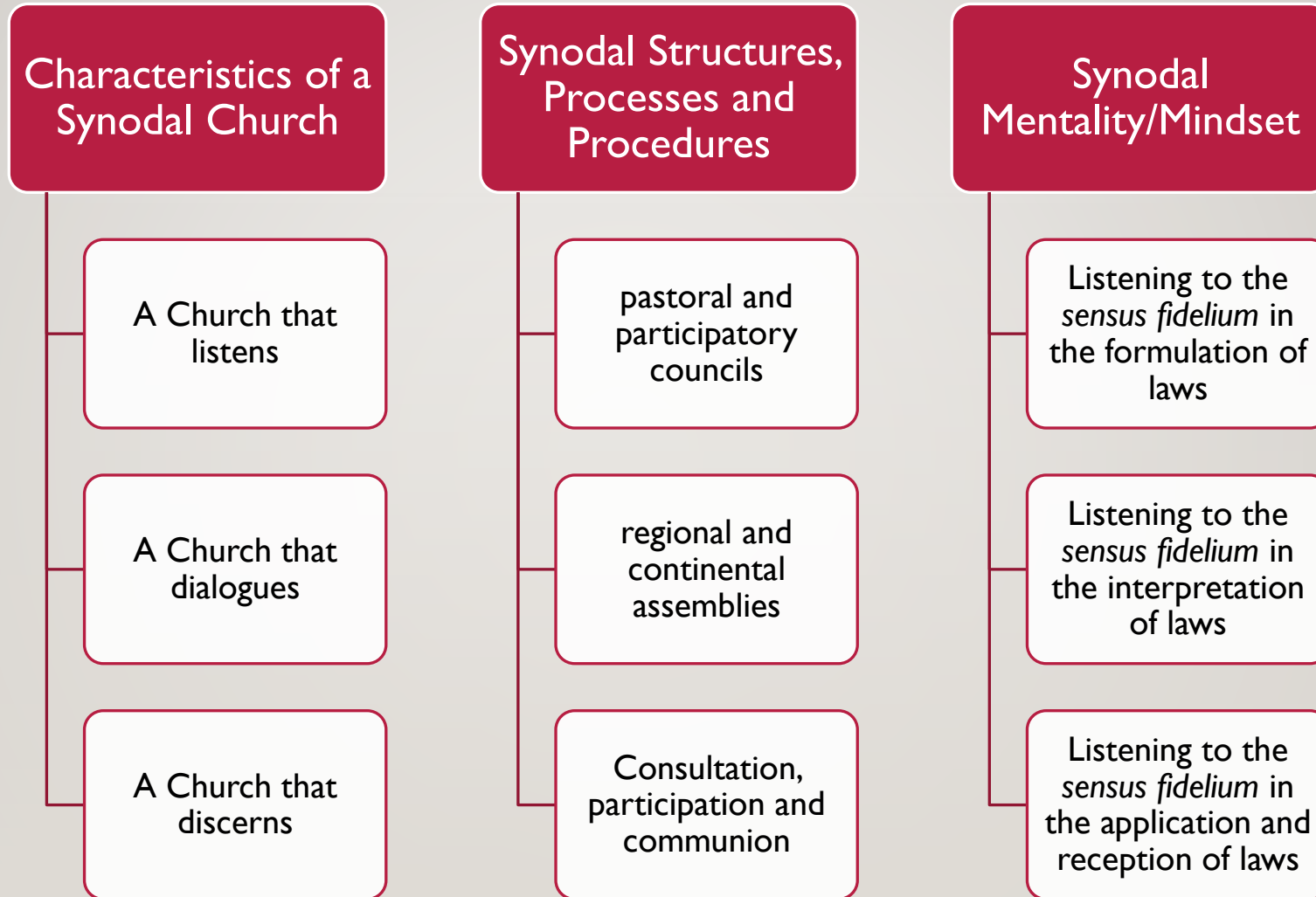
# From the Sense of Faith to the Sense of Law

There is, therefore, a close link then between the *sensus fidelium* – which is an aspect of faith – and canon law in the Church.

Pope John XXIII announcement of the Council and updating of ecclesiastical norms.

Pope John XXIII, but also Pope Paul VI and, later, Pope John Paul II, saw the necessity of forming an organic relationship between the *sensus fidelium* re-discovered at the Council and the post-conciliar legislation.

# Synodal Church as a Fertile Context for the Interaction Between *Sensus Fidelium* and Canon Law





THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
ATTENTION

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