

Synodality and Charisms

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Synodality and Charisms: A Pentecostal Perspective on Hierarchical and Spiritual Gifts in the Life and Mission of the Church

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to evaluate the relationship of synodality and charisms in Catholic teaching from a Pentecostal perspective. Although a consideration of the charisms is implied in the discussion on synodality in Catholic documents, there exists no comprehensive theology of the nature and function of charisms in their contribution to the synodal journey. A critical identification of the role of charisms, specifically in conversation with the role of hierarchical gifts, and brought into dialogue with the new charismatic movements and communities within Catholicism and Pentecostal Christianity, reveals an imbalance in the exercise of hierarchical and charismatic gifts in the church that presents a foundational problem for the future of synodality.

Keywords

charisms, hierarchical gifts, *sensus fidei*, spiritual discernment, synodality

The current global synodal process is of great ecclesiological and pneumatological significance, although the interpersonal and communal aspects of both dimensions have not received much attention. Synodality refers to a way of communion of all members of the church journeying together that involves the active

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participation of the entire assembly rather than exclusive ecclesial meetings and episcopal gatherings.¹ In its programmatic document, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” the International Theological Commission (ITC) defines synodality as “the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the church . . . summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.”² More overtly, the Commission identifies “the principle of synodality” as “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ.”³ This action of the Spirit in the church, what we might call its pneumatological principle, is determining the process of synodality in the experiential form of a corresponding spirituality.⁴ Hence, the Commission dedicates a section to the spirituality of communion and emphasizes its concrete manifestation “in the exercise of various gifts and charisms received from the Holy Spirit.”⁵ However, the array of texts identified by the General Secretariat of the Synod as “official documents”⁶ on synodality have not engaged significantly the ecclesial experience and praxis of these various gifts, that is, how the charisms appear within those participating in the synodal process. Although a theology of charisms is implied by the pneumatological principle, the documents do not develop a comprehensive theology of synodality that accounts for the human experience and exercise of the charisms in the church.

In this article, I argue that the significance of this lacuna is evidenced by a failure in Catholic thought to bring synodality into dialogue with the specific ecclesial contexts where the charisms have great theological weight: the new charismatic movements and communities and the various forms of global Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity.⁷ We find the same neglect in wider ecumenical discussion and critical responses to synodality that are almost completely silent on the role of charismatic gifts in the synodal process. Addressing this lacuna is one of the chief tasks of this article. What is needed therefore is an examination of how charisms and synodality are mutually related in a way that allows, first, the charisms to enrich the synodal process and, second, synodality to offer a conducive ecclesial environment for the exercise of the charisms. I intend to contribute to this aim by identifying the nature and scope of

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1. General Secretariat of the Synod, “What Is Synodality?,” <https://www.synod.va/en/the-synod-on-synodality/what-is-the-synod-about.html>.
 2. International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” (March 2, 2018), §8, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html.
 3. ITC, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” §46.
 4. ITC, §55.
 5. ITC, §109a.
 6. See “Synod: Resources,” <https://www.synod.va/en/resources.html>.
 7. The most widely accepted distinction is between so-called classical Pentecostals connected with global revivals occurring at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Charismatic movements in the established churches arising in the middle of the century, and neo-charismatic groups that share a similar emphasis. Not all the new ecclesial communities noted in the synodal literature can be classified in these categories. See Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 16–23.

the theology of charisms in the current understanding of synodality. What I offer is a Pentecostal perspective on synodality that critically engages the relationship of charismatic and hierarchical gifts as found in the synodal texts and brings them into dialogue with a global spiritual renewal movement known for its dominant focus on the gift of the Holy Spirit and the public exercise of the charisms.

The first part provides the groundwork by presenting and analyzing the implicit theology of charisms contained in the Catholic documents. My use of the terms “charismatic” and “hierarchical” follows their usage in the official synodal documents. Although these texts do not provide a strict definition, they use “charismatic” generally to denote in a narrow sense the spiritual gifts (*charismata*) discussed in the New Testament. I will focus on this narrow use of “charismatic” in order to navigate the broader, and often ambiguous, sense of “charismatic” in the documents as expressing any benevolent gift of God. The difficulty of this twofold sense is that the broader application of “charismatic” to the entire spiritual life of the faithful includes the hierarchical gifts, whereas the narrow definition does not.

In regard to “hierarchical,” the documents refer to the spiritual gifts that pertain to the sacrament of Orders, that is, the episcopal, priestly, and diaconal ministries given by the Spirit in the sacrament of ordination. The documents understand both terms as different though complementary dimensions of the gifts of the Spirit. This pneumatological complementarity of charisms and hierarchy underscores that the church must be understood in terms of both grace and human response, spirituality and institutional reality, and the forms these dimensions take in facilitating the participation of all the faithful.⁸ I employ the reference to pneumatology in the broadest sense to focus the conversation on the activity of the Holy Spirit in the synodal journey, whereas the attention to the charismatic dimension illuminates the human experience of that activity, of which the charismatic and hierarchical gifts function as modes of expression.

The dialogue and distinction between these gifts afford a critical reading of the individual and communal, personal and institutional, and social and cultural conditions of the human experience of the Spirit.⁹ This concern for the “human” dimensions of spiritual gifts is a common feature of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches known

8. See Richard R. Gaillardetz, “The Chimera of a ‘Deinstitutionalized Church’: Social Structure Analysis as a Path to Institutional Church Reform,” *Theological Studies* 83, no. 2 (2022): 219–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639221091289>; Richard Lennan, “Beyond Scandal and Shame? Ecclesiology and the Longing for a Transformed Church,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2019): 590–610, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563919856370>.

9. On the significance of a socially and anthropologically conscious ecclesiology, see Patrick S. Franklin, *Being Human, Being Church: The Significance of Anthropology for Ecclesiology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016); Roman Giger, *Kirchenbilder: Anthropologische und theologische Dimensionen in Entwürfen der neueren katholischen Ekklesiologie* (Vallendar: Schönstatt-Patres, 2006); Angelo Scola, *Chi è la Chiesa? Una chiave antropologica e sacramentale per l'ecclesiologia* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2005); Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History*, vol. 1, *Historical Ecclesiology* (London: Continuum, 2004); Christoph Seidl, *Der erste Weg der Kirche ist der Mensch: Anthropologische Dimensionen der Ekklesiologie* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001).

for emphasizing the freedom of the Spirit who is “poured out on all flesh” (Acts 2:17) and works through, but also beyond and in contrast to, dominant social, cultural, or ecclesial expectations (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, or office).¹⁰ The exercise and experience of the charisms is a normative feature of ecclesial life found in the statements of faith of all Pentecostal groups. A critical reading of synodality from this perspective reveals a fundamental imbalance in Catholic literature regarding the practice of the charismatic life in the church and suggests that the role of the charisms, particularly in theological reflections on the new charismatic movements and communities, offers significant contributions to otherwise neglected dimensions of the synodal journey. Thus, the second part of this study turns to the new charismatic movements and communities and particular attention is paid to *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, possibly the most important post-conciliar official Catholic text on an ecclesial praxis of the charisms.¹¹ I argue that the imbalance can be understood in terms of a lack of mutual accountability between the persons, offices, and structures exercising and discerning charismatic and hierarchical gifts. The final part considers the specific contributions of Pentecostalism with a focus on the report of the sixth phase of the international Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue on the exercise of spiritual gifts. This text voices a Pentecostal perspective informed by Catholic concerns for the life and mission of the church rather than ideas more exclusive to Pentecostal theology and praxis. The ecumenical context confirms that the foundational problem and promise for establishing a theological convergence of synodality and charisms is adequately articulating the coessentiality of hierarchical and charismatic gifts. Further, that this can be done particularly through a developed theology of charismatic discernment.

Charisms in Catholic Documents on Synodality

This initial section examines the teaching on spiritual gifts in two documents by the International Theological Commission (ITC), “*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church” (2014) and “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” (2018), and the Synod’s *Instrumentum Laboris* (2023). These documents belong to the core group of Catholic texts on synodality and contain the most substantial discussion on the charisms.¹² The

10. See Wolfgang Vondey, *The Scandal of Pentecost: A Theology of the Public Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2024), 159–92.

11. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter ‘Iuvenescit Ecclesia’ to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Regarding the Relationship between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church” (May 15, 2016), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160516_iuvenescit-ecclesia_en.html. See John Stayne, “Post-Conciliar Developments in the Catholic Doctrine of Charisms: *Lumen Gentium* and *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* Compared,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2022): 192–211, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00211400221098013>.

12. Other, shorter documents offer no significant engagement with the topic, aside from the apostolic constitution, *Episcopalis Communio* (2018), which provides pastoral guidelines. Similarly, we find few general references to the variety of gifts and diversity of charisms in the preparatory document of the Synod of Bishops (2021), the “Official Handbook for

aim is to identify the substantive limitations of these texts in regard to charisms and their function as part of the socially constituted customs and habits facilitating the participation of the faithful. Each analysis identifies the place given to the charisms in the synodal process, the references to particular gifts, and their exercise and authority in the local assembly.

My analysis suggests that while the Catholic texts acknowledge the synodal significance of the charisms, they exhibit a bias against affirming a concrete ecclesial praxis that can sustain and develop the charismatic dimension of synodality as a fundamentally human and social activity. Instead, they understand charismatic gifts as dependent on the hierarchical. This dependency is formative for the church's synodal ecclesiology; it restricts the exercise of the charisms by failing to account for the diversity of charismatic gifts experienced among the whole range of members of the community and by placing the activity of the Spirit within the confines of the activity and authority of the hierarchy. Each discussion aims at developing constructive explorations of how these limitations might be remedied.

“*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*” (2014)

Although the ITC's document “*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*” does not specifically discuss synodality, it develops a foundational pneumatology that becomes important for subsequent discussions of the charisms.¹³ The aim of this section is to indicate that a lack of concern for the charisms is present already in the essential dimensions of the life of faith. The presentation of this document builds on Vatican II's recognition of the sense of faith (*sensus fidei*) as the supernatural discernment of the faithful, which is “aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth.”¹⁴ Because the sense of faith is “intrinsically linked to the gift of faith received in the communion of the Church” (§2), it is considered the sense of the entire community of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*), and it is the convergence of this sense (the *consensus fidelium*) that emerges

Listening and Discernment in Local Churches” (2021), the Synod's “Biblical Resources for Synodality” (2022), and in the documents for the diocesan phase and speeches and addresses of Pope Francis on the synodal process. A more focused consideration of the contribution of charisms appears in the “Working Document for the Continental Stage” (2022), albeit with no variation or further development of the core texts.

13. International Theological Commission, “*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*” (2014), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html.
14. *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), §12, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter cited as *LG*). See Beáta Tóth, “Knowledge of the Heart: Notes on the Definition of the *Sensus Fidei* in the Personal Life of the Believer,” *New Blackfriars* 104 (2023): 195–207, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12788>; Jos Moons, “‘Aroused and Sustained by the Holy Spirit’? A Plea for a Pneumatological Reconsideration of *Sensus Fidei* on the Basis of *Lumen Gentium* 12,” *Gregorianum* 99, no. 2 (2018): 271–92. See especially ITC, “*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*,” §48–65.

as a foundational gift for the collective and unanimous experience, expression, and discernment of the faith (§§3, 22, 32, 47, 66).¹⁵ Put differently, the awakening of faith is the primary activity for the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit.

However, the Commission provides only very selective references to the charisms manifested in the individual and the community, and it does so to maintain the distinction between the hierarchical and charismatic gifts originally made in *Lumen Gentium*.¹⁶ For example, despite the affirmation that the Spirit's gifts are found in the whole community (§§44, 74, 81), the ITC immediately points to the special function of the hierarchical gifts (§44) exercised by the bishops (§46), the magisterium (§74), and the pope (§79). Although many Catholic theologians today tend to minimize the distinction, either interpreting both gifts categorically as charisms or distinguishing them only as different types of the same gift, the "*Sensus Fidei*" document accentuates the difference and thus makes it instrumental to the synodal process.¹⁷ Despite the ITC's emphasis on the consensus of the entire community, expressed in the repeated desire for an "active role" (§§33, 34, 39, 41, 44, 45, 72, 89) of both hierarchy and laity, the document's ambiguity of the relationship between charismatic and hierarchical gifts and its lack of identification of particular charisms effectively distance the experience and exercise of both gifts from the active sense of the faithful. Instead, the charisms form a feature of the pneumatological principle active within hierarchical Catholic ecclesiology without explicit grounding in the human interpersonal and communal experience active in the diverse individual and congregational forms of charismatic and hierarchical gifts.

The document states that essential to the *sensus fidei* is not the distinction between but the complementarity of hierarchical and charismatic gifts (§44), by which is meant their shared exercise in and contribution to guiding, unifying, and directing the church.¹⁸ Hence, the role of the hierarchical gifts is to preserve the continuation and progression of the apostolic tradition (§46),¹⁹ whereas the charismatic gifts are to guide the faithful in the understanding and the knowledge of the "spiritual realities which they experience" (§58).²⁰ The complementarity of the gifts therefore relies on the active participation of all the baptized (hierarchy and laity) who together "have

15. Leon Siwecki, "*Sensus Fidei* as a Gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church," *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* (2019): 361–78, <https://doi.org/10.21697/stv.7782>; Wolfgang Beinert, "Sensus Fidelium," in *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 655–57.

16. *Lumen Gentium*, §4. The charisms are mentioned also in §§7, 12, 25, 30, and 50.

17. On the various Catholic responses, see John Stayne, "The Contribution of Francis A. Sullivan, SJ to a Deeper Understanding of Charisms in the Church," *Theological Studies* 81, no. 4 (2020): 810–27 at 819n39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563920985248>.

18. Jos Moons notes the importance of the adjectival forms *donis hierarchicis et charismaticis* in the document to specify their equality. Moons, *The Holy Spirit, the Church and Renewal: Mystici Corporis, Lumen Gentium and Beyond* (Boston: Brill, 2021), 235.

19. See *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965), §8, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

20. This emphasis relies on Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–II.9.1, co. and ad. 2.

received the Spirit and are endowed as members of the body of the Lord with gifts and charisms" (§74) intended "for the renewal and building up of the Church" (quoting *Lumen Gentium*, §12). Thus, both the laity and hierarchy have a charismatic role in the sense of the faithful. The hierarchy, as a subsection title in the document states, "nurtures, discerns and judges the *sensus fidelium*" (§76). They are the ones "who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth" (*Dei Verbum*, §8). In turn, the laity's task is to receive the magisterial teaching, as "prompted by the Spirit . . . by means of the *sensus fidei* that they possess" (§79). All of the gifts of the Spirit therefore foster the ecclesial unity, forming a "*conspiratio* of all the charisms and functions in the Church" (§81).

Yet the document leaves open the patterns of human behavior and systems of social relations that identify (i.e., accompany if not govern) the ecclesial exercise of the charisms. How exactly is the possession of the *sensus fidei* manifested in the exercise of the charisms? What kind of spiritual prompting (e.g., prophecy, tongues, words of knowledge) accounts for the reception of the charism of truth by the local assembly? How are the various charisms recognized by the faithful in order to achieve a consensus in the community? The document is silent not only on examples of the community's active role in exercising specific charisms but also on how the faithful discern the shared gifts of the Spirit. If the charisms belong to the "active capacity" (§44) of all of the faithful, and constitute in this sense both a divine gift and a human capacity, what is the form of their human reception and mode of performance among both hierarchy and laity? The range of these questions suggests that the charisms are not considered essential for the recognition and preservation of the sense of faith.

The sparse discussion of the charisms in the exercise of faith accentuates the challenges to reconcile charismatic and hierarchical gifts in the life of the local assembly. The difficulties are particularly apparent in the integration of charisms into the activities of the faithful. The active participation of the laity in the life of the church is considered "the first and most fundamental disposition for authentic participation in the *sensus fidei*" (§89).²¹ This fundamental human disposition becomes visible for the ITC in constant prayer, active participation in the Eucharist, regular reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, active engagement in the church's service and mission, and notably, the "discernment and exercise of gifts and charisms received from the Holy Spirit" (§89). The place of the charisms in this list is indicative of one possible expression of active participation, but the Commission is silent on the complexity that characterizes the human diversity of charismatic practices and the fit and scope of the charisms to support the sense of faith across the other activities. Since the document speaks of active participation in the life of the church generally, the use of the term "charism" indicates a broad reference to abilities that must not be reduced to the discussion of the charisms in the New Testament. At the same time, while the ITC affirms that "there are countless ways in which such participation may occur" (§90), no

21. On the history of the concept, see George Hafemann, "'Full, Conscious, and Active Participation': The Mystical Body of Christ and Active Participation in the Liturgy from Pius X to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*," *The Dunwoodie Review* 23 (2000): 151–87.

examples are provided for a charismatic participation of the individual or a sustained charismatic praxis of the congregation rooted more explicitly in the exercise of the charisms in the life of the local church. The placement of charisms as one possible item on the list faces the risk of instrumentalizing the charisms by reducing their role to specific functions. Instead, the ITC should consider the possibility that the gifts and charisms of the Spirit can express or accompany *all* of the other activities as a form of charismatic participation. In this sense, the whole life of the faithful can become a charismatic expression of the pneumatological principle of synodality.

A Pentecostal reading submits that the universal application of the charisms must go beyond the participation of the laity and consider that the charisms are gifts that extend also to the ecclesial office and the hierarchy—a link not generally found in Catholic theology. When the charisms are expected not only in selective forms of participation, they may indeed be indispensable to the *sensus fidei* because participation in the life of the church can be seen as charismatic in its essence. An important step toward this goal is provided in the document by admonishing the shared exercise of gifts to begin with first “seeking to discover and develop . . . and helping others to discover and develop their charisms” (§104). The discovery and nurture of spiritual gifts by individuals and the community, both in the limited sense of the charisms and the broader sense of gifts of the Spirit, is therefore integral to the development of the sense of faith.

Although the ITC recognizes the ecclesiological function of spiritual gifts in broadly pneumatological terms (generally with references to “all of the gifts of the Spirit” exercised by “all of the baptized”), the document lacks pastoral guidelines that help the faithful recognize the *sensus fidei* in the diverse social and human manifestations of charismatic activity. Arising from the initial distinction between charisms and hierarchy is a division of pneumatology and anthropology, particularly individual and communal gifts and their contributions to the life of the church in the human experience and exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. Problematic is not only the scarcity of a theology of the laity with regard to the charisms but also the lack of integrating the *sensus fidei* in a shared ecclesiology of laity and episcopacy that is grounded not in their ecclesial differences (e.g., office or vocation) but in their shared human experiences. The potential consequence is a division of the synodal journey not merely of ecclesial but anthropological proportions. The importance of the human and social dimensions of the charisms lies in their recognition as gifts of the Spirit that are freely directed at humankind and therefore subject to the character of human nature, in its individual and social conditions, as much as they are identified in their particular function in the church as the exercise of the Spirit’s gifts in the life of the human person and the human communion of the faithful.

“Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” (2018)

In its subsequent document, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” the ITC acknowledges “the doctrine of the *sensus fidei fidelium*” (§9) explicitly as the

basis for developing its teaching on synodality.²² The text further explores several of the ideas of the earlier document, especially the complementarity of hierarchical and charismatic gifts. The pneumatological principle is particularly evident in its broad understanding of the charisms in the church. Yet, the frequent use of the terms “spiritual gifts” and “charisms” generally as synonyms (§18, however, see §109a) and complemented by the terms “charismatic gifts” (§§46, 74), “gifts from the Holy Spirit” (§67), and more broadly “everyone’s gifts” (§104), complicates the discussion with a lack of distinction.

The ITC acknowledges that Vatican II’s “ecclesiology of the People of God stresses . . . the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries” (§6).²³ Because the gifts of the Spirit express God’s authority in the church, the exercise of charisms by the community requires an objective order “so that they can develop in harmony and bear the fruit they are meant to bear for the good of all” (§18). At the same time, the document acknowledges that “the term *χάρισμα* also evokes the gratuitous and varying character of the free initiative of the Spirit, who grants each one his or her own gift with a view to the general good” (§18). The free exercise of spiritual gifts therefore must be placed under the rule of love and mutual submission, or more precisely, what the ITC calls “the law of mutual solidarity” (§22) through which should be achieved a synergy between the charism of the individual (particularly the episcopal and synodal leadership) and “the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on the whole community” (§36). That this synodal synergy is designed “to activate the ministries and charisms present” (§53) in the life of the whole church reveals the dominance of ecclesiological thinking over anthropological concerns: the Spirit pours out the charisms freely on the whole community, yet the gifts are not received or exercised freely by each person; rather, the divine initiative of distributing the charisms for the common good requires their ecclesial activation and organization.²⁴ It is within this context that the document sees the need to distinguish between charismatic and hierarchical gifts rather than to unite them. This distinction suggests that the pneumatological principle is exemplified in the praxis of synodality by the preference for hierarchical gifts over the exercise of the charisms.

22. See Ormond Rush, “Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church,” *Theological Studies* 78, no. 2 (2017): 299–325, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563917698561>; Pavol Hrabovecký, “John Henry Newman’s Understanding of the *Sensus Fidelium* and the Current Challenges of Synodality,” *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Theologica* 12, no. 1 (2022): 29–40, <https://doi.org/10.14712/23363398.2022.16>; Gerard F. O’Hanlon, “Synodality, the *Sensus Fidei*, and Doctrine,” *The Furrow* 73, no. 9 (2022): 468–75.

23. See Declan Marmion, “‘A Church That Listens’: Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” *New Blackfriars* 102 (2021): 442–58, esp. 443–49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12609>.

24. Elizabeth Teresa Groppé argues that Yves Congar’s unique contribution to Catholic pneumatology is the joining of the ecclesial and the anthropological dimensions in *Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85–114.

The document does not clarify how the synodal synergy regulates the initiative of the Spirit in the human community, and no specific charisms or those who exercise the charisms in the community are named explicitly. The ITC is clear that all of the faithful “are meant to receive the various charisms given by the Holy Spirit” (§55), but there is no discussion of that variety or of the use of charisms as a human capacity in the service of the synodal synergy. In the first instance, “all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit” (§67). Conversely, in close reliance on “*Sensus Fidei*,” and because of the principle that the church “is *synodally governed, but episcopally led*” (§36, emphasis in original), the document accentuates the distinction between charism and hierarchy (§46) so that there is need for “a decisive promotion of the principle of coessentiality between hierarchical gifts and charismatic gifts in the Church” (§74). While the ITC adds that the hierarchical gifts derive “from a specific charism that is conferred sacramentally” (§119), the Commission does not explain from where the faithful derive *their* specific charism, except to infer that the gifts derive from the sacrament of initiation, or if not received sacramentally, that the gifts are generally “dispensed by the Holy Spirit” (§§72, 55) and exercised through participation “in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Jesus Christ” (§46).²⁵ On the one hand, the Commission recognizes the origin of the charisms in the gift of the Holy Spirit received at baptism and speaks of the baptismal dignity of each person (§§46, 72, 109) that allows for an equal role and activity of everyone in the exercise of spiritual gifts. On the other, the document proposes that there are different gifts received by the local churches, the priesthood, and various individuals, so that synodality depends on the synergy between the diversity of offices, roles, and vocations that exercise authority in the church.

The charisms predicate this diversity (§§6, 75, 79, 83), yet apart from a tangential observation that vocations spring from specific gifts (§109d), the manifestation of charisms in the document designates more overtly the evidence and not the origin of ecclesial diversity and synergy. Hence, the pneumatological principle of synodality is charismatic primarily in a functional way: the charisms are instrumentalized and, when exercised correctly, function as confirmation of the diverse yet undivided church (§61). Put more provocatively, charisms express but do not produce synodality. In their potential correlation, the synodal process can be charismatic, and if properly exercised (for the common good), the charisms manifest synodal synergy even if in an anonymous and passive way. But the ITC does not indicate whether the charismatic community, the hierarchy, or the individual must, by the same token, be properly synodal, that is, whether the human element in the exercise of charisms can help or hinder the activity of the Spirit and hence the synodal process. This inattentiveness is symptomatic for an ecclesiology expressed in the general confines of pneumatology rather than in the human experiences and concrete practices of the Spirit’s

25. See Francis A. Sullivan, “Vatican II on the Charisms of the Faithful,” in *Vatican II: Fifty Personal Stories*, ed. William Madges and Michael J. Daley (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012), 116–19.

activity manifested by the charisms. The advent of the new charismatic movements and communities has elevated this task theologically while also complicating the concerns around the proper exercise of spiritual gifts.

The Commission responds to three levels of problems regarding the exercise of charisms: first, the diversity of gifts must be experienced in the parish (§83); second, the local and communal exercise of charisms must proceed in mutual collaboration (§104); and third, the faithful must resist “insufficient appreciation” (§105) of charismatic gifts in the community. The pneumatological principle is closely identified in the resolve of these problems through “the logic of a reciprocal exchange of gifts” (§9). This logic can be seen as an extension of the admonition in *Lumen Gentium*, §13 to “share spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal resources” held in the local churches. Since this logic forms the ground for a corrective exercise of the charisms, it can address the exchange of gifts by individuals, communities, institutions, and movements.²⁶ Yet, given the interdependence of individual and communal gifts, and the distinction between hierarchy and charisms, the document attributes the logic primarily to the communal (§61) rather than to the individual dimension: local churches share their charisms (§61) in particular structures and processes (§76) governing the exchange of gifts, enhancing the journey of local communities (§85), forming the ground for communal discernment (§114), and offering reconciliation with other communities (§117). The logic of this exchange is not illustrated with the help of any particular spiritual practices, functions, or resources, whether among the laity or the hierarchy, in the individual person or the community.

This social and anthropological deficit in explicating particular ecclesial practices contributes to the impression that the actual process of “mutual exchange” is rather ambivalent. No distinction is made between receiving, recognizing, and exercising different gifts, on the one hand, and between exercising and exchanging gifts, on the other. The dominance of binary pairs in our common vocabulary of exchange, including “give and take,” “buy and sell,” or “loan and borrow,” can easily shift the attention unequally toward the use-value of charisms and the instrumentality of the entire process.²⁷ Although the Commission employs the vocabulary of exchange to designate a process of generosity and gratuitousness, the document does not explain whether the faithful can in a proper sense initiate a process that includes the “giving” of a spiritual gift (hierarchical or charismatic) to others, how that gift might be “received,” and whether there exists the possibility to offer a “return-gift” that would identify an actual “exchange.” Since Catholic theology nowhere speaks of the possible exchange of hierarchical gifts, the discussion of “gifts” in this context must refer more narrowly to the exchange of the charisms. The resulting ambiguity exposes the interdependence of ecclesiological and anthropological concerns in the pneumatological principle: if

26. ITC, “*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church,” §86 points to *Ut Unum Sint*, where John Paul II refers to the “exchange of gifts” (§§28, 57) in ecumenical dialogue.

27. See Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Ian Hamilton Grant, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2017), 28–64.

synodality is based on the logic of mutual exchange, how precisely are the charisms “shared” by different individuals or communities? What human processes govern the recognition, reception, and return of different spiritual gifts? And how do the charisms function in the interchange of individuals, laity, episcopacy, and community?

A response to these questions may be sought in the small range of biblical references that allude to specific charisms.²⁸ Particularly pertinent seems the grounding of the more broadly defined reference to spiritual gifts, and the concerns raised by the Charismatic Renewal, in a theology of charisms with roots in the biblical discussion surrounding their individual and congregational exercise and experience. Although the reader is left to identify the actual gifts mentioned in these passages, the reference to 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 points to words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, healing, powerful deeds, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. The subsequent verses 28–31 identify apostles, prophets, teachers, deeds of power, healing, forms of assistance, leadership, tongues, and interpretation. And the reference to Ephesians 4:11-13 adds apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. While the document notes Romans 12:4-5 regarding specific roles in the church (§22), no reference is made to prophecy, ministry, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and compassion noted in Romans 12:5-8. Lacking is also a clear designation of specific hierarchical and charismatic gifts and their cooperation as well as a discussion of the distinction often made in these texts between gift and office, community and individual. The result is again more properly a pneumatological rather than specifically anthropological ecclesiology, and while these dimensions overlap, there is a distinct absence of illustrating the complementarity of human and social capacities in the coessentiality of hierarchy and charisms, how the faithful contribute practically to the charismatic life, whether the communal experience of the Holy Spirit is more than the combination of individual charismatic acts, and how these contributions are recognized and governed when it comes to facilitating synodal communion, participation, and mission.

Instrumentum Laboris (2023)

The most recent contribution to this discussion is the “working document” *Instrumentum Laboris* of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which was drafted on the basis of all the material gathered during the listening phase and in particular the final documents of the continental assemblies (§3).²⁹ In an unprecedented shift of procedure, this text is the result of a move from consultations at the local level to a universal document.³⁰ The majority of the text is dedicated

28. See Thomas R. Blanton, *A Spiritual Economy: Gift Exchange in the Letters of Paul of Tarsus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

29. XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “*Instrumentum Laboris*: For the First Session (October 2023),” https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/PAGINATED_ENG_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS-A4.pdf.

30. See Arnaud Join-Lambert, “De la consultation à l’*Instrumentum laboris* dans les synodes diocésains. Typologie des processus et perspectives,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 144, no. 2 (2022): 247–57, <https://doi.org/10.3917/nrt.442.0247>.

to three worksheets for the synodal assembly explicitly “prepared to facilitate discernment” (26) on the major themes of the continental phase.³¹ Although this emphasis promises to address the ambivalence at the local level, the discussion on particular charisms in the first part of *Instrumentum Laboris* is surprisingly sparse. Precisely because this text is a working document intended to proceed from the consultation of the people,³² an observation of the charisms would have significantly enhanced the discernment of actual practices of participation. What I have shown is that the coesentiality of charismatic and hierarchical gifts depends on the logic of reciprocal exchange governed by the law of mutual solidarity that expresses the synergy activated by the pneumatological principle of synodality. Clarifying the role of the charisms in this process would explain how the synod envisions the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the church, which it makes crucial to a synodal process that involves the participation of both laity and hierarchy. The failure to observe how spiritual gifts manifest the pneumatological principle in the local communities is indicative of the wider reasons why the synod does not include the charisms among the major themes of the continental phase.

Instrumentum Laboris endorses the principal affirmation that a synodal church is founded on the recognition of a common baptism, “which is manifested in the participation of all, with the charisms of each, in the mission of the Church” (§20). Yet, aside from the general assertion that charisms are common gifts for mission (§54), the synod offers no further explanation of the actual manifestation of charisms as signs of a missional synodality. The only additional references in the first part acknowledge the variety and “extraordinary wealth of charisms” (§6; see §§16, 55) and emphasize the value of this diversity in their relationship to the hierarchical gifts (§54). Nonetheless, despite the astonishing sixty references to the Holy Spirit, there is no concentrated discussion of spiritual gifts. Instead, the document’s argument that a synodal church is an integral experience “inhabited” by the Spirit (§20) enforces a “synodal method” (§32) that speaks of listening to and guidance by the Spirit without identifying experiential forms of either the Spirit’s activity or the human capacity to enact the Spirit’s gifts. The more frequent references to “gifts” in general do not indicate a specific concern for the giving, receiving, and exercising of particular gifts. This neglect is especially evident in the extended discussion of synodality as a “conversation in the Spirit” (A.2) albeit with reference to spiritual encounters, prayer, personal reflection, and meditation rather than to any of the charisms or to the dynamic of exercising the “conversational” gifts (e.g., tongues and prophecies) in the local assembly—a problem that otherwise dominates the letters of the New Testament. The consequence is a pneumatological ecclesiology that expresses the gifts of the Spirit through ecclesiastical

31. For the procedure and organization of each continental stage, see <https://www.synod.va/en/synodal-process/the-continental-stage/continental-assemblies.html>.

32. Cardinal Mario Grech, “Press Conference: Presentation of the *Instrumentum laboris*, First Session of the XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops” (June 20, 2023), https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2023-06-20_instrumentum-laboris/2023.06.20-Grech-EN.pdf.

concerns (e.g., communion, participation, and mission) rather than anthropological priorities of human nature (e.g., sanctification), personhood (e.g., transformation), and society (e.g., justice).

The worksheets suggest that the absence of a specific theology of charisms in the first part is likely the consequence of insufficient reflection than of an actual poverty of the charismatic experience in the local congregations. The bishops affirm that charisms belong to the baptismal dignity of each member and the entire community (43), so that the worksheets can express the specific desire “to recall the particularity of . . . charisms and ministries” (27) and “to recognize and enhance the gifts and charisms present in the community” (47), including “the charisms of women” (46), lay associations and movements, and the new communities (36).³³ At the same time, the worksheets speak more predominantly of the specific charisms of priests (44) and the community of bishops (45) with emphasis on how the episcopal ministry unifies and discerns the charisms (59). Particular references to spiritual discernment (23, 24, 40, 43), especially “an urgent need to discern the emerging charisms” (43) emphasized repeatedly in the suggestions for prayer (24, 27, 32, 36, 38), propose that the congregational experience reflects the New Testament discussion that not all charisms are equally beneficial for the common good.

Hence, the bishops affirm the coessentiality of charismatic and hierarchical gifts with the assertion that “spiritual authority linked to a charism is different from that linked to ministerial service” (51) and that the decision-making processes need to connect to the specificity of charisms (54). The apprehension associated with the free exercise of charismatic gifts culminates in the warning that “a diversity of charisms without authority becomes anarchy” while the exercise of authority without charisms is dictatorship (49). Yet there is no illustration of this rule, and no examples are given of specific charisms, an explicit diversity of charismatic expressions, the misuse of charisms in the parish and diocesan life, or the corresponding hierarchical gifts that should regulate the abuse.

The continued absence of specific charisms in a document emerging from the local level may imply a discussion in other official Catholic texts, although precise references are rare except to the Letter by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, in the specific context of establishing the coessentiality of hierarchical and charismatic gifts in *Instrumentum Laboris*, §54. Since we also find this reference to the letter in “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” (§§51 and 86), it is permissible to bring the conversation on synodality into dialogue with the theology of charisms of *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*. What I have argued is that the charisms

33. The influential work by Paul Evdokimov, *La femme et le salut du monde: étude d'anthropologie chrétienne sur les charismes de la femme* (Paris: Casterman, 1958), developing the particularity of the charisms of women, is indicative of the significance of a social anthropology of the charisms. See also Christine F. Cooper-Rompato, *The Gift of Tongues: Women's Xenoglossia in the Later Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

lack a proper integration in the Catholic synodal literature, which provides a pneumatological principle with a general charismatic orientation but lacks specific accounts of the experience of charisms and their embeddedness in human nature and community. The critical reading of the core documents has revealed a fundamental imbalance in the distinction between charismatic and hierarchical gifts resulting from a separation of laity and episcopacy. This separation reflects a more deeply rooted deficit concerning the role and function of human nature and human community in the life of the whole church endowed with the gifts of the Spirit. Although synodality depends formally on the coessentiality of charisms and hierarchy, the exercise and discernment of the charisms is placed in the hands of the episcopacy without a corresponding accountability of the hierarchical gifts. The ecclesiology of the documents exhibits an ambiguous anonymity regarding those who exercise the charisms, the nature of those gifts and their actual contribution to the synodal process, as well as a distinctive bias toward the hierarchical gifts. Synodality as conceived in these texts is fundamentally hierarchical but only potentially charismatic.

Charisms and Hierarchy in *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* (2016)

This section aims at a comparative reading of the 2016 letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, or, using its full title, the “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Regarding the Relationship Between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church.”³⁴ My goal is to identify the specific character of the coessentiality of charisms and hierarchy that may inform the previous discussion and offer a response to the problems identified thus far. While the letter has received only marginal attention, its context is generally situated in continuity with *Lumen Gentium* and the efforts toward new evangelization emerging under John Paul II.³⁵ That this letter precedes

34. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* (May 5, 2016), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160516_iuvenescit-ecclesia_en.html.

35. See Stayne, “Post-Conciliar Developments,” 195–98; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ed., *Iuvenescit Ecclesia. Testo e commenti* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019); Domenico Sigalini, ed., *Carismi e ministeri: riflessioni sul documento Iuvenescit Ecclesia* (Bologna: EDB, 2019); Carlo Fusco, Pasquale De Rosa, and Elisabetta Scomazzon, eds., *Carisma e Istituzione in Movimenti e Comunità ecclesiali: Atti della giornata di studio Roma, 18 gennaio 2018* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018); Juan Bautista Duhau, “Carisma e institución en las nuevas realidades carismáticas: Crecimiento y crisis en los movimientos eclesiales y nuevas comunidades,” *Teología* 55, no. 127 (2018): 189–212, <https://e-revistas.uca.edu.ar/index.php/TEO/article/view/1673/1557>; Gabriel Richi Alberti, “A propósito de *dones jerárquicos*,” *Revista española de teología* 77, nos. 1–2 (2017): 135–56, <https://repositorio.sandamaso.es/bitstream/123456789/360/1/06%20RICHI.pdf>; Andrés Sáez Gutiérrez, “Consideraciones sobre el fundamento teológico de la relación entre institución y carisma a partir de la concepción paulina de ‘evangelio,’” *Revista española de teología* 77, nos. 1–2 (2017): 55–80; Anthony Ekpo, “Personal Charisms and the Charism of Office: A Possible Convergence,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 94, no. 2 (2017): 180–99.

the contemporary synod on synodality confirms the suspicion that the current discussion has not adequately taken account of the nature and function of the charisms in the life and mission of the church. The specific audience of the letter underscores the importance placed on the charisms for the particular concerns of the hierarchy. I argue that the bias in the core documents on synodality affirms a systemic distrust of Catholic ecclesiology in charismatic gifts that can be traced back to the charismatic movements, particularly the exercise of the charisms when brought into conversation with the institutional hierarchy.

The importance that the introduction of the letter places on “multiform ecclesial groups” (§2) locates the discussion on charisms and hierarchy within the more general ideas of classical ecclesial themes and the continuous emergence of ecclesial movements throughout the history of the church.³⁶ However, a closer reading of the introduction shows a far more focused concern for the rise of “numerous ecclesial groups that constituted a great source of renewal for the Church,” and more precisely, the “new realities” and “more recent realities that can be described as groups of the faithful, ecclesial movements, and new communities” (§2). The immediate motivation for *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* is the appearance of twentieth-century charismatic movements that have brought both newness and disruption to the church. More specifically, a reference by the CDF points to the public meeting of John Paul II at the Pentecost Vigil in 1998 with members of more than fifty new communities and ecclesial movements.³⁷ When we read *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* as a response to the charismatic renewal, the letter takes on new significance for the distinction of charismatic and hierarchical gifts. Although the discussion is rooted in the theology of Vatican II, this particular distinction does not represent a major theme in any ecumenical documents on the charismatic renewal.³⁸ Only Roman Catholic statements mention the distinction, and even then it does not find significant development in Catholic texts, despite its reference in documents on synodality, until *Iuvenescit*

36. See Antonio Ciudad Albertos, “‘Debita cum auctoritate ecclesiastica relatione servata’: Apunte histórico para entender la nueva normativa sobre asociaciones de fieles,” *Ius Communionis* 9 no. 2 (2021): 255–75, <https://repositorio.sandamaso.es/handle/123456789/12205>.

37. *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* §2, n9. John Paul II, “Speech: Ecclesial Movements and New Communities on the Vigil of Pentecost” (May 30, 1998), §7, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980530_riflessioni.html. See also Paolo Martinelli, “Natura della coesistenzialità tra doni gerarchici e carismatici nella Chiesa: Una lettura della Lettera *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* (2016),” *Revista española de teología* 77, no. 1–2 (2017): 105–33, <http://repositorio.sandamaso.es/handle/123456789/359>.

38. See Kilian McDonnell, ed., *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*, 3 vols. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1980); Arnold Bittlinger, ed., *The Church Is Charismatic: The World Council of Churches and the Charismatic Renewal* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981); and the various Malines documents published 1974–87.

Ecclesia.³⁹ The letter's chief concern is the coessentiality between charisms and hierarchy, and it is through this clarification that the conversation on synodality can enter into dialogue with contemporary theology of the charisms and a more broadly situated theology of the new charismatic movements and communities.

Iuvenescit Ecclesia begins with the emphasis on the renewal of the church in the power of the Spirit that characterizes the pneumatological definitions of synodality albeit with "a particular attentiveness to the charismatic gifts" in order "to recognize and value the numerous charisms capable of reawakening and nourishing the life of faith" (§1). A strength of the document is that its ecclesiological proposal focuses on identifying the pneumatological principle, that is, the activity of the Holy Spirit, in the relationship of the charismatic and hierarchical dimensions of the historical church. Hence, the letter accentuates that the new ecclesial groups constitute "powerful dynamic realities" because they arise "from a shared charism" among the faithful by bringing together the people of God "according to their diverse charisms" (§2). The charisms manifest how the gifts of the Spirit animate the life of the entire church. The apparent link established here between the charisms and the *sensus fidei* raises questions about the "binomial" (§8) of charismatic and hierarchical gifts noted in *Lumen Gentium* and the diversity of meaning of the term "charism" in the New Testament, although the discussion proceeds without a concrete explanation of what is meant by either "hierarchical" or "charismatic" gifts. While this lack of definition is symptomatic for all documents on synodality, the particular attention to the praxis of charisms in *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* indicates its importance for responding to the problems identified in the core documents, even if the inherent bias is further perpetuated.

Where the letter excels is in attributing to the different gifts different benefits and consequences among the faithful and by so doing exposing the significance of their coexistence. Fundamentally, the charisms are portrayed as gifts of the triune God manifested in the communion of the body (§4) and directed at the good of everyone (§5). Unlike the documents on synodality, the letter explicitly mentions specific gifts, generally distinguishing between gifts of the word and gifts of action (§5), highlighting the usefulness and visibility of some gifts while implying that others may be less visible and restricted in use. Pointing to the chief texts in the New Testament, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* distinguishes between exceptional gifts and ordinary gifts, charisms for the benefit of the individual and for the guidance of the community, as well as gifts given through the laying on of hands (§6) in preparation for the more substantial distinction between charismatic and fundamental grace (§4) and between

39. The distinction appears only in documents of the Roman Catholic Church, "Statement of the Theological Basis of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal," in McDonnell, *Presence, Power, Praise*, vol. 3, 1–10; "The Charismatic Renewal and Ecumenism," in McDonnell, *Presence, Power, Praise*, vol. 3, 175–279; statements by the Roman Catholic Church, Canada, "Charismatic Renewal: Message of the Canadian Bishops Addressed to All Canadian Catholics," in McDonnell, *Presence, Power, Praise*, vol. 2, 84–97; and the Roman Catholic Church, USA, "Statement on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal," in McDonnell, *Presence, Power, Praise*, vol. 2, 104–13.

charismatic and hierarchical gifts (§8).⁴⁰ The motivation for placing emphasis on these distinctions seems to come from a concern for the recognition of the new movements. This concern appears indirectly with a recurring but critical emphasis on establishing and maintaining order and union in the churches. It is voiced more directly with the exhortation that the charisms are not considered in the New Testament “as authorizing one to withdraw the obedience owed towards the ecclesial hierarchy, or as bestowing the right to an autonomous ministry” (§7). And it appears specifically in justifying the necessary “interventions” (§10) of the Magisterium. The underlying concern of *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* is therefore the possible juxtaposition of charisms and hierarchy to some extent experienced in and anticipated with the integration of the new ecclesial communities in the history of the church.

The problems encountered with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and many of the new communities born out of it, have exposed the impact of theological convictions that construct from the experience of the charisms more exclusive claims of a normative charismatic theology. Disagreements among these communities, some of which reject the labels “Pentecostal” and “Charismatic” altogether, reveal the threat of division in the church along parish, diocesan, and ecumenical lines. The response of the letter to these concerns is to highlight the post-conciliar principle of the coessentiality of charismatic and hierarchical gifts (§10). Nevertheless, the letter is less a commentary on the coessentiality of charismatic and hierarchical gifts than an exposition of what appears to be a sense of the possible contradiction of this principle in the charismatic communities. Hence, the letter alerts its recipients that the theological foundations are established in response to “every sterile contraposition or extrinsic juxtaposition between the hierarchical and charismatic gifts” and “to avoid equivocal theological visions that would posit a ‘Church of the Spirit,’ distinct and separate from the hierarchical-institutional Church” (§11).⁴¹ The uneasy distinction of charisms and hierarchy is clearly most pronounced in the experience of the charismatic renewal movements.

The distinction is nowhere more evident than in the contrasting designation of the *ordered* conferral of hierarchical gifts with the *unpredictable* distribution of charisms (§12) already indicated in the synodal literature. Although both gifts are united and essential, and both are rooted in the sacraments, each gift is “ordered” differently, the hierarchical gifts “of their nature stable, permanent, and irrevocable” but the charisms “towards a more intense ecclesial life” and “the historical forms of the latter are not guaranteed” (§13). More specifically, the hierarchical gifts hold “a special place” that is seen even in the order of charisms (§14), suggesting that charismatic gifts manifest a personal response to the grace of the hierarchical gifts (§15), an individual grace that can manifest in diverse forms (§16) and that should “be adequately articulated within

40. See Gabriel Richi Alberti, “Sinodalidad y carismas en la Iglesia,” *Revista española de teología* 79, no. 2 (2019): 253–70, <https://repositorio.sandamaso.es/handle/123456789/2322>.

41. See Stayne, “Post-Conciliar Developments,” 196–98; Alberti, “Sinodalidad y carismas,” 253–58.

the ecclesial communion and faithfully transmitted over time” (§17). Despite the principle of coessentiality, and even with the absence of any overtly negative characterization of the charisms, there is a clear hesitancy (and tension) in the document to elevate charismatic practices to the same “essence” as hierarchical gifts in what appears to be a general tendency to distinguish the hierarchical order of the church from the personal life of the faithful, applying the charisms only to the latter, and effectively subordinating the order of spiritual gifts (if not the spiritual life of the laity) to the aims of the Spirit *as discerned* by the hierarchy.

The discussion ends with criteria for this discernment of charisms, a need frequently highlighted in the synodal documents, although the letter offers no corresponding list for the discernment of hierarchical gifts. Considering these are transmitted through sacramental ordination, discernment of hierarchical gifts might include determining who should exercise oversight of this discernment so that the gifts are used appropriately, whether for the individual or the common good. The criteria for the discernment of charisms follow the wider concern of the document “with reference to ecclesial groups” (§18) in order to ascertain the authenticity of charismatic gifts.⁴² The immediate concern is not the development of normative criteria but the particularity of identifying “those charismatic gifts that are configured as charismatic groups within the ecclesial communion” (§19). Put differently, while aimed at the promotion of coessentiality, the criteria for discernment serve primarily the protection of the institutional dimension of the church. Applying the principle of coessentiality would suggest that charismatic gifts can also serve as means to ascertain the authenticity of hierarchical gifts. The document initially recommends the recognition of reciprocity (§20) of charisms and hierarchy, a general principle that reflects the logic of the exchange of gifts. However, the law of mutuality extends to the relationship between the universal church and the particular churches (§21) via the hierarchical gifts under which the charisms are not integrated but subordinated.

When charisms extend beyond individuals, they pertain to the charismatic “dimension” of the church, which exists in both universal and particular expressions, and can establish “new charismatic entities” that belong properly to both ecclesial dimensions. This interpenetration of the charisms occurs through their exercise as part of the common priesthood (not the *sensus fidelium* central to the synodal documents) of all people and the charismatic life of ordained ministers and the various ecclesial vocations (§22). Yet concrete forms of ecclesial recognition of the new communities, and their ecclesial dimensions, depend not on the law of mutual solidarity (e.g., their shared charism) but on the present Code of Canon Law.⁴³ This context tends to favor more the institutional and less the charismatic dimension of the church. Canon Law does not directly address the notion of synodality and has only more recently developed

42. Referenced in *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Christifideles Laici*, and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

43. Note 116 of *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* points to canons pertaining to private associations, public associations, clerical associations, Institutes of Consecrated Life, Societies of Apostolic Life, and Personal Prelatures.

attention to the *sensus fidei*.⁴⁴ Charismatic gifts are addressed primarily (and vaguely) in the contexts of the episcopal office and the juridical status and administration of the ecclesial movements.⁴⁵ In turn, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* lacks an anthropological sensitivity that does not segregate the charisms a priori on institutional grounds but instead considers the constructive, creative, and corrective contributions of the potential unruliness of the charismatic gifts distributed freely by the Holy Spirit to human beings in their different functions in the church. To this deficiency belongs also the question of whether the charisms are passing gifts or obtain a habitual status in the human person, including the possible union of the charismatic and the hierarchical gifts in the same ecclesial office.

The segregation of charisms discloses a more fundamental and pervasive fissure in Catholic ecclesiology concerning the forms of accountability envisaged between the episcopal and charismatic dimensions of the church. The seclusion of charisms reemerges at the end of the letter, albeit more overtly, in the expression of the possible “danger” (§23) posed by the new charismatic entities when put in contrast to the hierarchical gifts. The ultimate foundation of the church is therefore the mutuality of respect for both the particularity of the charismatic communities and the fundamental ecclesial regimen that favors the integration of charismatic gifts in the ecclesial hierarchy. Considering its address to the Catholic bishops, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* presents charisms primarily through the regulative function of the hierarchical order. In that regard, the resulting theology of charisms is narrower than the vision of *Lumen Gentium*.⁴⁶ The deficit of social and anthropological concerns is further extended by the absence of a discussion on the existence of the charismatic dimension in every particular church and every individual (clergy and laity) and how this charismatic universality might also affect the hierarchical order.⁴⁷ Neither does the letter explain how the potentially universal presence of charisms among all the faithful affects the fundamental equality of every member.⁴⁸ The letter ends without a concrete proposal for the discernment of what exactly constitutes the essence of hierarchical and charismatic gifts that makes them coessential in the life and mission of the church.

44. See Myriam Wijlens, “‘The Church of God Is Convoked in Synod’: Theological and Canonical Challenges Concerning the 2021–2023 Synod,” *Centro Pro Unione Semi-Annual Bulletin* 100 (Fall 2021): 86–107; Alan Modrić, “La Sinodalità nel sistema giuridico della Chiesa,” *Periodica de re Canonica* 107, no. 4 (2018): 545–71; Anthony Ekpo, *The Breath of the Spirit in the Church: The Sensus Fidei and Canon Law* (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls, 2014).

45. See John P. Beal, “Charism, Mission, and Canon Law: Management as Ministry,” *Studia Canonica* 55, nos. 1–2 (2021): 169–94, <https://doi.10.2143/STC.55.1.3290157>; Gianfranco Chirlanda, “Charism and Juridical Status of the Ecclesial Movements,” *Catholic International* 11, no. 4 (2000): 376–81.

46. See similar observations in Moons, *The Holy Spirit*, 327.

47. For a positive assessment, see Rush, “Inverting the Pyramid,” 299–325.

48. John A. Renken, “Synodality: A Constitutive Element of the Church: Reflections on Pope Francis and Synodality,” *Studia Canonica* 52, no. 1 (2018): 29, <https://doi.org/10.2143/STC.52.1.3285212>.

This section has elucidated that the bias in the core documents on synodality points to an anthropologically and socially deficient ecclesiology evidenced by a fundamental distrust in the charismatic activity of the faithful. The suspicion is systemic to an imbalance in the coessentiality of charismatic and hierarchical gifts and enforces institutional and hierarchical boundaries on the *sensus fidei* that do not exhibit mutual accountability structures. The recent criticism associated with the lack of accountability and discernment of the Catholic hierarchy, and the absence of concrete rules of discernment in the synodal literature, suggest that a resolution to the imbalance cannot immediately come from Catholic teaching or agreed ecclesial forms of charismatic praxis.

Spiritual Discernment in “Do Not Quench the Spirit” (2015)

This concluding section focuses on a response to the problems identified regarding the synodal process from the experience of the charismatic life in Pentecostal congregations. Although in need of further development, the ecumenical conversation highlights the specific contributions of a sensitivity to the discernment of charisms in the human and social contexts among the laity and the episcopacy, the ecclesial office and the congregational life. The final report of the sixth quinquennium (2011–2015) of the international Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue is dedicated exclusively to the exercise of spiritual gifts.⁴⁹ Although the report does not engage directly with the notion of synodality, it does provide a significant proposal for the discernment of charisms.⁵⁰

From the outset, the document identifies the church as charismatic in its very nature (§9) and equipped “in all ages and cultures . . . with charisms” (§21). At the same time, the report acknowledges the problematic view of the cessation of charisms (§21), the historical “decline in the manifestation of charisms” (§22), that “in many places . . . the exercise of charisms is a source of tensions and concerns” (§29), and that there is “an insufficient discernment of the charisms” (§29). In order to transfer this concern to the synodal literature analyzed above, it is helpful to apply the principle of the coessentiality of hierarchical and charismatic gifts to this ecumenical discussion with attention to how the process of individual and communal discernment can aid the sense of faith and its consensus among the faithful. This concluding exercise illustrates that the synodal journey can draw from a more receptive ecumenical engagement with the Pentecostal experience of charisms. By addressing the concerns of the mutual accountability of charismatic and hierarchical gifts, spiritual discernment emerges as a foundational charism for the life and mission of the church.

49. “‘Do Not Quench the Spirit’: Charisms in the Life and Mission of the Church. Report of the Sixth Phase of the International Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue (2011–2015),” *Information Service* 147 (2016): 47–62.

50. See Wolfgang Vondey, “Ecumenical Discernment in the Pentecostal-Catholic Dialogue: A Response to ‘Do Not Quench the Spirit,’” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 41 (2019): 527–33, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-04103036>.

The report reveals a twofold, though not readily apparent, distinction of spiritual discernment. Initially, discernment is identified as the specific “charism of discerning the source of a spiritual manifestation” (§73). Discernment is treated as one gift among others, in this case, “to distinguish what is true from what is false or wrong” (§73). Alternatively, the report recognizes discernment as necessary “whenever” another gift is exercised, so that charismatic discernment is “integral to the practice of spontaneous charisms in public worship” (§76). On the one hand, the document identifies this integral exercise as the disciplined practice of communal discernment and elevates its synodal character, which “helps the gathered community to express other charisms” (§77). On the other hand, the report exhibits the struggle to reconcile the exercise of this specific charism with a communal practice that is also shared by Catholics and Pentecostals respectively. The former “emphasize that the ecclesial dimension is essential to discernment” (§97), echoing the perspective in the Catholic synodal documents, along with the tendency to elevate the role of the hierarchy, whereas the latter “emphasize the responsibility of every individual believer” (§98), thereby shifting a communal ecclesiology of the charisms to those who actively exercise the gifts. Both agree that spiritual discerning is a human capacity exercised in community but approach the way to a synodal praxis of discernment from different ends.

The coessentiality of hierarchical gifts, while not mentioned explicitly, plays an important role in approaching ecumenical agreement. For Catholics, although discernment should be exercised by everyone, “no charism is exempt from being submitted to the Church’s shepherds” (§97). Admitting that the hierarchical authority can restrict the manifestation of spiritual gifts, the responsibility of authoritative discernment among Catholics remains in the hands of “pastoral oversight” (§102). In contrast, Pentecostals acknowledge the challenges of exercising the charisms responsibly in the life of every believer, yet the difficulty also lies with exercising “adequate accountability” of the ecclesial leadership and the structures that allow every believer to discern the spirits. Hence, what the report implicitly suggests is a disciplined practice of discernment that can function as a synodal exercise that includes both the hierarchy (the ecclesial office and leadership) and the local community (the assembly and every individual).⁵¹ In its ecclesial dimension, spiritual discernment can be seen as the bridge between hierarchical and charismatic gifts and therefore as a foundational charism for establishing synodality.

The report sets out the following criteria for spiritual discernment agreed by Catholics and Pentecostals.⁵²

1. The manifestation of a charism must align with the biblical Scriptures and reflect a faith rooted in the mind of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 2:16).

51. Vondey, “Ecumenical Discernment,” 528–29.

52. While the report identifies them as “common criteria,” it is noteworthy that they are placed in the section titled “Pastoral Oversight Regarding the Exercise of Charisms” (section IV), rather than congregational exercise.

2. The charism must conform to church teaching and the *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful).
3. The charism should build up the church, promoting unity and charity.
4. The individual exercising the charism should be a person of spiritual and moral maturity.
5. The individual exercising the charism should be responsive to pastoral leadership (§95).

Each aspect of discernment holds significant implications for developing a synodal method that is sensitive to the human and social experience of the charisms in the church.

(1) The importance of Scripture is evident throughout the conversation for the understanding of the gifts of the Spirit, in general, as well as of specific charisms and the experience of the charisms in the New Testament communities. Hence, the discussion on the discernment of spirits (§§73–90) begins with the assertion that “Catholics and Pentecostals have a general agreement in interpretation as they look to the key passages of Scripture regarding discernment” (§73). Significantly, the foundational exercise of communal discernment is based on a prior act of discerning the authority and meaning of the biblical texts. While the commitment to the Scriptures is hardly controversial (§15), the need for theological education (§99), the neglect of scientific knowledge (§102), and the challenges of individualism, materialism, and secularism (§103) set out in the document should alert the synodal community that general knowledge and understanding of the biblical texts can by no means be taken for granted as part of the *sensus fidelium*. The “Biblical Resources for Synodality” (2022) issued by the Commission on Spirituality recommends the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina* in the Catholic Church.⁵³ Reading, reflecting, praying, and contemplating the Scriptures forms an indispensable synodal practice foundational for the exercise of hierarchical and charismatic gifts. Pentecostals tend to follow more loosely identifiable spiritual practices, yet always with the expectation that engaging with the biblical texts is guided by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and therefore also is a charismatic act.⁵⁴ This interdependence of biblical and charismatic witness needs to be further developed to become useful for the concrete practices of a synodal method. Its alignment with the Scriptures can help identify charismatic and hierarchical practices that exemplify the pneumatological principle of synodality.

(2) The importance of the *sensus fidelium* ties the act of discernment further to the human and social dimensions of ecclesiology by rooting the faith in the human response to God rather than a particular ecclesial function. The report underscores the

53. Commission on Spirituality Biblical Sub-Group, “Biblical Resources for Synodality,” 9, <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/spirituality/Biblical-Resouces-for-Synodality-A4-EN.pdf>.

54. See Scott A. Ellington, “Scripture: Finding One’s Place in God’s Story,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (New York: Routledge, 2020), 63–72.

“specific responsibility” of ordained ministers to discern the gifts of the Spirit yet also that spiritual discernment can be exercised by “any of the faithful” so that “discernment is an exercise in which clergy and laity have complementary roles” (§88). Still, the report credits the special charism of discernment only to a few “who serve the Church in communion with pastors who have ultimate responsibility for discerning charisms” (§88). Yet, unlike the Catholic synodal teaching, the principle of coessentiality is most closely identifiable not in a supernatural gift of discernment (apparently attributed to the hierarchy) but in the attempt to locate the ability (as gift and responsibility) in the “intuitive sense” of every believer resulting from “the close relationship one maintains with the Lord” (§89). Essential to establishing a biblically grounded synodality is therefore the complementarity of hierarchy and laity that promotes the establishing and maintaining of an individual and communal closeness to God before, during, and following the manifestation of the charisms (not the least in the engagement with the Scriptures).

(3) The aim to edify the church regards the manifestations of charisms as expressions of the communal goal to promote unity and charity. Although the action of the Holy Spirit is the principle of synodality and “the diversity of charisms and ministries” (§26), pastoral oversight must endeavor to “maintain the unity of the Spirit” (§92), and “the whole community has a responsibility to verify the work of the Spirit” (§94). Furthermore, the charisms as “instruments of unity” (§104) also enrich the unity of the church and the churches, so that the discernment of spirits is always an ecumenical task, and those endowed with the charisms “have a special grace” (§106) and responsibility (§107) in the synodal process. Unity and love are both products of and presuppositions for the charismatic life, not only as an ecclesial but as a fundamentally existential human and social condition. Hence, the synodal method must principally be carried out ecumenically and that means it must be derived from a coessentiality of all churches in which the charismatic (and the hierarchical gifts in a broader sense) are recognized.

Contributing to this recognition are the final criteria of discernment that place emphasis on (4) individual spiritual and moral maturity and (5) personal accountability to pastoral leadership. The report lacks direct engagement with specific questions of morality, although the text is replete with references that might help identify an ethics of charisms, including the notions of holiness, virtue, truth, responsibility, authority, submission, and service.⁵⁵ Placed in the realm of the individual, spiritual and moral maturity are demanded from both clergy and laity, and a responsible charismatic life cannot be expected apart from a responsible moral life. The charisms therefore reveal the importance of a synodal ethics that is grounded in the human and social conditions of ecclesial life and views charismatic and hierarchical gifts as interdependent moral obligations of the faithful. In turn, the responsiveness of those who exercise the charisms to the oversight of the pastoral leadership is indicative of the accountability that governs the communal discernment. The action of quenching the Spirit can be

55. See “Do Not Quench the Spirit,” §§11, 25, 28–30, 34, 39, 41, 56, 71, 73–74, 82, 84, 88–89, 93–94, 98, 100, 105–7.

the result of moral failure and unresponsiveness to ecclesial leadership by each member of the community but is exacerbated by wider communal patterns that juxtapose charisms and hierarchy.

Pentecostals might add that these criteria must also account for the failure of the episcopal hierarchy to submit to the charismatic gifts and discernment of the community and the distribution of charisms in the liberty of the Spirit. The accountability of *hierarchical* gifts must follow the same criteria for discernment: alignment with the Scriptures and a faith rooted in the mind of Christ; conforming with the *sensus fidelium*; edifying the church, promoting unity and charity; spiritual and moral maturity; and responsiveness to the communion of charisms. This mutual application of an ethical accountability of synodality indicates that the discernment of spirits is foundational at least to the negotiation of charisms and hierarchy. Listening to the experience of the charismatic renewal *ad extra* has sharpened the attention of both participants to the congregational realities that shape the exercise of charisms in the different traditions. The discernment of these realities has brought the conversation partners closest to identifying different ways of perceiving the relationship of charisms and hierarchy, which includes the reconciliation of the churches.

Conclusion

In this study, I have provided a foundation for identifying and evaluating the theology of charisms contained in the Catholic documents on synodality by clarifying the nature and scope of the synodal method through the relationship of charismatic and hierarchical gifts. The documents examined in this article indicate a perspective on synodality in which charisms and hierarchy are complementary gifts. Yet the analysis of this distinction has revealed a fundamental imbalance in Catholic ecclesiology with particular bias toward the institutional and episcopal hierarchy at the neglect of the human and social conditions of ecclesial life that include the experience of the charisms among all of the faithful. A corresponding reading of *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* identified the bias as a lack of mutual accountability resulting from a generalized pneumatological principle, a lack of consideration of the contribution of charisms to a spiritual anthropology of the church, and an overtly critical response to the charismatic movements without a corresponding ethic and discernment of episcopal leadership. The result is a vision of synodality that is fundamentally determined by the hierarchy at the cost of suppressing the congregational and charismatic functions of the faithful.

The impact of Catholic spirituality on the synodal process is not yet clearly determined, and the juxtaposing of charismatic and hierarchical gifts, despite the emphasis on their coessentiality, the critical appreciation of the new ecclesial movements, and the evident unfamiliarity with charismatic practices, tends to remove the charisms from view of the *sensus fidei* that otherwise forms the foundation of the synodal journey. What remains is a conditional exercise of the charisms, which are instrumentalized and segregated in a synodal praxis determined largely by the intentions of a hierarchical ecclesiology. The pneumatological principle of Catholic synodality attributes the activity of the Spirit principally to ecclesial functions under episcopal

oversight and neither nurtures the uninhibited exercise of the charisms in the church nor issues a sufficiently clear invitation to the charismatic movements that their presence is both welcome and necessary for the future of the life and mission of the faithful.

In response, this analysis has pointed to the importance of joining the pneumatological and anthropological dimensions of the church by developing rules of spiritual discernment for the exercise of both charismatic and hierarchical gifts. The question of mutual accountability points beyond the problems each dimension holds for the synodal praxis to their integrative function as part of a shared sense of faith that informs a synodal ecclesiology where charisms and hierarchy are united and indispensable for each other. This theology of charisms can then serve as a ground for developing a more expansive charismatic theology of synodality. The extension of this synodal conversation to the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements can provide significant resources for this task by proposing specific guidelines of discernment that extend to the spiritual life of the divided churches. A synodal presentation of spiritual discernment must apply equally to institutional and non-institutional churches, episcopacy and laity, hierarchical and congregational communities, local congregations and individuals. These insights suggest that the most immediate task is the construction of a synodal method of discernment that values equally the gifts of charisms and hierarchy.

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