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The Marian Principle for a Synodal Church: A Catholic Perspective on Active Receptivity

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Abstract

This article examines how the Marian principle can contribute to the understanding and actualisation of a synodal Church. In light of the two ways in which the principle has been received in the papal magisterium and contemporary theology—one relating it to the role of women in the Church, the other interpreting it ecclesiologically—the study privileges the latter. It understands the Marian principle as an expression of the active receptivity of the Church as a whole, which does not generate its own life, identity, or mission but receives them at God's initiative and responds to that initiative in faith and freedom. In constructive dialogue with Balthasar's foundational intuition, as well as with biblical, conciliar, and sacramental ecclesiology, the article demonstrates how this receptive structure is shaped through listening to the Word of God and takes on a communional form in the Eucharist. Their transformative action gives rise to an *affectus synodalis*, understood as an enduring spiritual–ecclesiological disposition of shared obedience to God's initiative. Such a disposition enables the Church to practise mutual listening and communal discernment, to embrace the diversity of charisms, and to give ecclesial authority the form of service. The Marian principle therefore does not replace institutional reform but gives it a form shaped by the Gospel: synodal structures can authentically serve communion only if they are sustained by a Church that allows itself to be formed by the Word and the Eucharist.

Keywords: Marian principle; synodality; active receptivity; Word of God; Eucharist; *affectus synodalis*

1. Introduction

The Marian principle has received renewed attention in contemporary Catholic reflection on the Church. Appendix IV of the 2026 final report of Study Group 5 of the Synod on Synodality, *The Participation of Women in the Life and Leadership of the Church*, includes a study by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) entitled *The Marian Principle and the Petrine Principle: A Critical Look*. Its examination of Hans Urs von Balthasar's formulation and its reception in recent papal teaching highlights both the continuing relevance of the principle and the diversity of its interpretations. As the study observes, Balthasar's formulation fundamentally concerns the Church as a whole, although some of his writings also connect it with femininity, masculinity, and the respective roles of women and men in the Church (DDF 2026, Appendix IV, nn. 4–12; Leahy 1999, pp. 14–15, 25–36). These different emphases make it necessary to clarify how the principle is understood and what it can contribute to the Church's synodal life.

The present study develops this ecclesiological understanding of the Marian principle, interpreting it as an expression of the Church's active receptivity[1]: the Church receives her life, identity, and mission from God's prior initiative and responds in faith and freedom.

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Its central concern is what this understanding means for the realisation of the Church's synodal vocation. How does God form believers who open themselves to his initiative and to transformation by grace into an ecclesial subject, constituted in communion and capable of listening, recognising the dignity of every person, discerning together, and engaging in mission? To address this question, the study examines how God shapes the Church's active receptivity through the Word and the Eucharist, enabling it to become an enduring communal disposition, an *affectus synodalis*. This approach does not diminish the importance of concrete questions concerning ministries, responsibilities, and participation, but situates them within their ecclesiological presupposition: openness to transformation by grace is not merely one desirable synodal disposition among others, but the condition that enables the Church to live as a communion amid the diversity of charisms, ministries, and responsibilities, and to direct them towards a shared mission.

The relevance of this question also emerges from recent scholarship on Mary and synodality. Perrella (2023, pp. 101–54) presents Mary as a "synodal resource" for communion and co-responsibility. Lombardi (2024) develops the themes of listening, understanding, action, and accompaniment, while Li (2025, pp. 137–51) emphasises active listening, accompaniment of the marginalised, and relationships free from domination. Petrocchi (2024) connects Marian reflection with the Holy Spirit, Trinitarian communion, and the Eucharist. These contributions illuminate the dispositions and theological foundations of synodal life. Nevertheless, the constitutive relationship between the Marian dimension of the Church and synodality remains an area requiring further exploration, as Grech (2025) also observes.

To explore this relationship further, the article offers a constructive theological reading of the Marian principle within Catholic ecclesiology. The study takes Balthasar's foundational intuition as its point of departure without attempting a comprehensive reconstruction of his thought. After clarifying the principle's ecclesiological meaning and contemporary reception, the study situates active receptivity within biblical and theological accounts of the Church. It then examines its formation through the Word and the Eucharist before turning to synodal listening, the discernment of disagreement, and the relationship between the participation of all the faithful and the particular responsibility of pastoral authority. The conclusion draws together the implications for personal dispositions and ecclesial practice.

2. The Marian Principle as Active Ecclesial Receptivity

The Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops describes Mary as "the form of the Church who listens, prays, meditates, dialogues, accompanies, discerns, decides and acts" (Synod of Bishops 2024, n. 29).[2] This description gives a Marian expression to the understanding of synodality as the way in which the Church lives and manifests her communion. The Marian dimension is therefore not added to synodality from without; rather, it illuminates the way in which the Church lives her communion and mission.

Yet procedures of listening and discernment do not in themselves form a Church capable of listening and discerning. They presuppose an ecclesial subject that is open to God's action and allows itself to be transformed by it. Mary's listening, discernment, and action express precisely such openness: a response to God's initiative that engages her whole existence. Their ecclesial significance therefore goes beyond adopting particular attitudes; it concerns how this receptive response takes root in the life of the community and shapes its relationships and common action. This ecclesiological reading must be situated within the contemporary reception of the Marian principle, where its significance for the whole Church intersects with its application to the distinctive roles of women and men.

2.1. The Marian Principle: Ecclesiological Meaning and Contemporary Reception

In papal teaching, the Marian principle serves several related theological purposes. John Paul II develops the principle within his reflections on the dignity and vocation of women, yet in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 27, he relates it to the Marian dimension of the entire People of God and to the primacy of holiness over the Church's hierarchical structure (John Paul II 1988). Benedict XVI (2006) describes the Marian principle as more fundamental than the Petrine principle and sees in Mary's *fiat*, her "yes" to God, an expression of the Church's reception of God's initiative and response in love and service. Leo XIV (2025) likewise relates the Marian and Petrine principles and associates the former with the motherhood, fruitfulness, and holiness of the Church. Pope Francis gives greater prominence to its connection with femininity and the distinctive contribution of women, particularly in *Querida Amazonia* and his 2023 address to the International Theological Commission (ITC) (Francis 2020, n. 101; Francis 2023, p. 1088). The DDF study further notes that the repeated use of the Marian principle by successive popes has prompted the proposal that it forms part of their respective magisteria (DDF 2026, Appendix IV, n. 33).[3]

The DDF study also records concerns about interpretations that associate receptivity, obedience, or care primarily with women. Such applications may reinforce gender stereotypes or turn the distinction between Marian and Petrine principles into a justification for predetermined ecclesial roles (DDF 2026, Appendix IV, nn. 34–42).[4] At the same time, the study identifies a positive ecclesiological reception centred on the primacy of holiness, the vocation of all the baptised, and Mary as an image of the Church receiving the Word in faith (nn. 45–47). The receptivity examined here concerns every member of the Church and the ecclesial community as a whole, including those who exercise pastoral authority.

The basis for this interpretation lies in Balthasar's understanding of Mary's *fiat*.[5] Her assent to God's initiative is prolonged in the Church's response of faith and love (Leahy 1999, pp. 14–15).[6] In *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, Balthasar presents Marian faith, understood as assent to God's action, as the pattern for the being and action of the entire Church (Balthasar 1986, pp. 205–6). The Marian dimension thus concerns the Church's fundamental response to the gift from which her life proceeds.

Marcello Paradiso brings the relationship between Mary's personal response and ecclesial subjectivity into sharper focus. Drawing on Balthasar's formulation in *Sponsa Verbi*, he identifies Mary's act as "the fundamental subjective act of the Church" (Balthasar 1985, pp. 161–62; quoted in Paradiso 2024, p. 94). Paradiso further emphasises that, because Mary herself belongs to the Church as a believer, she is the subjective foundation of every personal act within the communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*, Paradiso 2024, p. 94). Consequently, the personal response of faith and the response of the Church do not exist side by side as two separate realities: the ecclesial response is realised in the free responses of the faithful, which receive their communional form within it. Paradiso develops the same relationship through the scene at the foot of the cross, where Mary's obedience and the disciple's apostolic witness together constitute the "original cell of the Church". The gifts Mary receives become fruitful and available to the Church and to each of its members (Paradiso 2024, pp. 100–1).

This interplay of divine gift, personal freedom, and ecclesial communion gives concrete meaning to active receptivity. The following subsection examines the biblical foundations of this understanding in the relationship between God's initiative and the response of his people.

2.2. Biblical Foundations of Active Receptivity

The structure we call active receptivity is inscribed in the history of salvation itself. This history begins not with the human search for God but with God's call and gift. Abraham is

called before he knows where his journey will lead (Gen 12:1–3); Israel becomes a people through an event of liberation initiated by God (Exod 3:7–10); and the covenant at Sinai likewise rests on an act that God has already accomplished: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exod 19:4). Election, liberation, and covenant thus disclose the same fundamental structure: the People of God do not establish their own existence and identity but receive them as a gift (Brueggemann 1997, pp. 467–72).

The primacy of God's initiative does not, however, imply the passivity of either the human person or the People of God. On the contrary, God's gift calls for a response. Abraham must depart; Israel must accept the covenant and walk the path opened before it; and listening to the Word of God entails putting what has been heard into practice. Biblical receptivity is therefore active: it encompasses listening, trust, discernment, obedience, and action. The human response contributes nothing to the origin of God's gift; yet without a free response, the gift does not come to fruition in the life of the person and the community. It is no coincidence that one of the foundational biblical formulae of the covenantal relationship is the injunction to listen: "Hear, O Israel" (*Shema Yisrael*; Deut 6:4). Here, listening does not mean merely perceiving the Word of God, but denotes a disposition in which the people receive the word addressed to them and allow it to shape their life (Brueggemann 1997, pp. 471–75).

Brueggemann (1997, pp. 467–85) further elucidates this structure by distinguishing between two interconnected ways in which Israel lives before God: listening to the Word of God, realised in justice, and dwelling in God's presence, expressed in worship, holiness, and contemplation. These two dimensions cannot be separated; from a Christian perspective, he describes their relationship as "a hermeneutical program of proclamation and manifestation, which in turn may be understood in Christian tradition as word and sacrament" (Brueggemann 1997, p. 475). His analysis is important for the present argument because it shows that, already in the biblical witness, the response of the People of God to God's initiative encompasses both listening to the Word and living in God's presence.

In the New Testament, the same dynamic comes into sharper Christological and pneumatological focus. The Church does not constitute its own identity but comes into being through Christ's call and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The First Letter of Peter expresses this succinctly: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:10). Paul likewise expresses this priority through the language of calling: believers are "called" (Rom 1:6–7; 1 Cor 1:2), while the diversity of charisms comes from the same Spirit and is given "for the common good" (1 Cor 12:4–7). The gift received thus becomes the source of action: it builds communion and enables its members to participate in its life and mission (Sánchez Navarro 2021, pp. 113–18). The Church is therefore both recipient and bearer of the gift: what it receives constitutes it as communion and sends it into the world.

The biblical witness thus holds together two inseparable dimensions: the primacy of God's call and gift, and the active, free, communional response of the People of God. Their conjunction constitutes the structure that this article calls active receptivity. We shall now show how this biblical dynamic finds expression in some of the major currents of twentieth-century Catholic ecclesiology.

2.3. Ecclesiological Coordinates of Receptivity: De Lubac, Congar, and Ratzinger

Although Balthasar's Marian principle provides the immediate point of departure for our discussion, the ecclesiological intuition we discern in it is not isolated within twentieth-century Catholic theology. Related emphases, developed in different theological registers, can be found in some of the most influential Catholic ecclesiologists of the period: in

Henri de Lubac's Christological and Eucharistic understanding of the Church, in Yves Congar's pneumatology and theology of charisms and reception, and in Joseph Ratzinger's understanding of the Church as *ecclesia audiens* (the listening Church) and communion. These authors do not constitute a single school, nor do they generally employ receptivity as a shared technical term[7]; their perspectives are therefore treated here as distinct systematic coordinates within a common ecclesiological orientation.

De Lubac's eucharistic ecclesiology provides this structure with an important Christological and sacramental foundation. In *Corpus Mysticum*, he reconstructs the patristic understanding of Christ's body, in which his historical body, the eucharistic body, and the Church as the Body of Christ are intrinsically connected rather than juxtaposed as three separate realities (de Lubac 2007, pp. 23–28, 189; cf. Irving 2018, pp. 281–82). The significance of this connection is not merely terminological. In receiving the eucharistic body of Christ, the faithful are incorporated into his ecclesial body; the Eucharist is therefore not merely the act of an already constituted Church but a sacramental event in which the Church is realised as the Body of Christ. De Lubac thus retrieves the patristic intuition that sacramental and ecclesial communion are intrinsically linked and that the Church is formed through participation in Christ's gift (de Lubac 2007, pp. 13, 17; McPartlan 2002, pp. 52–55).

De Lubac himself does not develop receptivity as a distinct ecclesiological category, yet his Eucharistic ecclesiology makes it possible to speak of the fundamentally "received" character of ecclesial identity. Halloran (2010, pp. 39–40) articulates this implication even more directly by bringing de Lubac into constructive dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion. He describes the Church as receptive and saturating flesh that receives its being from the body of Christ, and accordingly emphasises that the Church "cannot create herself" but "receives herself" from Christ's body.[8] From this perspective, the Church's capacity to mediate the life of Christ is inseparable from the fact that it lives by his gift.

Congar complements this Christological and sacramental perspective with a pneumatological and communional dimension. For him, the activity of the Holy Spirit in the individual believer cannot be separated from the Spirit's activity in the Church; indeed, the inseparability of pneumatological anthropology and pneumatological ecclesiology constitutes one of the distinctive features of his later thought (Groppe 2001, pp. 456–60, 464–465). Accordingly, in the first volume of *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, he emphasises that pneumatology cannot be restricted to a doctrine of the Spirit's indwelling in individual souls but must also account for how the Spirit distributes his gifts and, through them, builds up the Church (Congar 1983, p. 156).

Because the same Spirit forms persons and simultaneously draws them into ecclesial communion, this pneumatological structure has an important consequence for understanding the ecclesial subject. Reception of the Spirit is not confined to the institutional dimension of the Church but also occurs through the diverse gifts and charisms bestowed upon its members for the building up of the Body of Christ. In his essay *Pneumatology Today*, Congar (2018, pp. 216–18) accordingly speaks of a Church built "through the contributions of everyone": the baptised are not merely recipients of ecclesial activity but, through the gifts they have received, active subjects of the Church's life in communion with the ordained ministry. Groppe (2001, pp. 462–63) summarises this dimension with Congar's characteristic claim that the Church receives the fullness of the Spirit only in the totality of the gifts of all its members; charisms are therefore not merely a matter of individual spirituality but contribute to the very constitution of ecclesial communion.

Congar's concept of ecclesial reception brings into view the historical dimension of this communional act of receiving. In his classic study *La «réception» comme réalité ecclésiologique*, he defines reception as the process by which an ecclesial body genuinely makes its own

something that it did not give to itself; such an appropriation includes its own moment of assent and, where necessary, judgement (Congar 1972, p. 370). Although reception in Congar is not synonymous with receptivity, it shows how that which the Church receives is historically appropriated within the life of the communion. The pneumatological dimension and the dimension of reception thus converge in the same ecclesiological insight: the entire ecclesial body is vivified by the Spirit, while the faithful and the local Churches actively appropriate and actualise the gifts they have received as genuine subjects of ecclesial life.

In Ratzinger's "communio ecclesiology," the same structure finds expression in his understanding of the Church as *ecclesia audiens*. In *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, he writes that the Church can proclaim the Word of God only as a communion that has first received it in faith (Ratzinger 2005, pp. 31, 35–36). Its identity therefore does not derive from institutional self-constitution but from listening to the Word and from communion with Christ. This ecclesiological structure assumes personal concreteness in Ratzinger's understanding of Mary, who is not merely an exemplar for the individual believer but an image of the Church and its response of faith.[9] As the Daughter of Zion, Mary is for Ratzinger "true Israel" (1983, pp. 42–43), in whom Israel and the Church converge.

The authors considered here allow us to discern a common structure: in its origin and identity, the Church depends upon Christ's gift and the activity of the Holy Spirit, while its life consists in receiving and mediating what it has received. Yet situating the question in this way does not in itself explain how receptivity becomes a concrete and enduring form of ecclesial life. The perspectives examined above nevertheless provide two particularly important points of orientation for the next step of our argument. Ratzinger's *ecclesia audiens* directs attention to the Word of God, which the Church must first receive in faith, while de Lubac's Eucharistic ecclesiology shows how the Church receives the life of Christ and is formed as his Body. Congar's pneumatological and communional perspective, in turn, makes clear that what is received is not possessed passively but is appropriated and actualised through the Spirit in the life of the whole ecclesial body. In what follows, we shall therefore examine more closely how listening to the Word and participation in the Eucharist shape this fundamental receptivity into an enduring synodal disposition—the *affectus synodalis*.

3. The Performative Word and the Formation of the Ecclesial Subject

The first question, then, is how listening to the Word of God forms the People of God as a subject capable of synodal discernment and action. For the Word to shape the Church's synodal way of life, it is not enough for it simply to be proclaimed; it must become a Word received in faith, one that transforms individuals and their relationships, and draws them into communion. The primary question is therefore not what the Church does with the Word of God, but how the Word of God acts within the Church and shapes it. For this reason, both the ITC and the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality (ITC 2018, nn. 68–70; Synod of Bishops 2024, nn. 83–84) present communal listening to the Word of God as a fundamental form of synodal life, since through it a subject capable of communal discernment is formed.

To understand how the Word can exercise such a formative role within the Church, it is necessary first to clarify the theological character of revelation itself. *Dei Verbum* presents revelation not primarily as the transmission of a body of supernatural truths, but as God's self-revelation in history, in which the invisible God addresses human beings "as friends" and invites them into communion with himself (DV 2; Boeve 2011, pp. 416–33; O'Collins 2023, pp. 201–16). Revelation therefore has an intrinsically dialogical structure: God's address calls for the response of faith. In Jesus Christ, the incarnate Logos, this address

assumes its definitive and personal form, since God communicates not merely something about himself, but gives himself to humanity (DV 2; 4).

On these conciliar foundations, Benedict XVI (2010) develops in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (VD) a comprehensive theology of the Word of God as a living and active reality in the life of the Church. As Pié-Ninot (2011, pp. 12–13) observes, the exhortation seeks to contribute to the renewal of the Church by enabling the Word of God once more to become "a source of constant renewal" and to stand "at the heart of every ecclesial activity". In a world that increasingly relegates God to the margins, Benedict sees the Church's foremost task as enabling people once again to encounter the God who speaks and gives life (VD 2). The renewal of the Church through the Word, however, is not primarily a matter of multiplying activities centred on Scripture, but of asking whether the ordinary life of Christian communities genuinely creates space for an encounter with Christ, who gives himself to them in his Word: "This is not a matter of adding a meeting in the parish or diocese, but of seeing whether, in the usual activities of Christian communities, there is truly concern for a personal encounter with Christ who communicates himself to us in his word" (VD 73).

Verbum Domini understands the Word of God in a very broad sense; it is not simply identical with sacred Scripture. As Manicardi shows, Benedict develops an expansive "analogy of the Word" (*analogia Verbi*) encompassing the eternal Logos, creation (*liber naturae*), salvation history, the Incarnation, apostolic proclamation, living Tradition, inspired Scripture, liturgical and sacramental life, and the witness of the faithful. These different modes of God's speaking are intrinsically connected by their common origin and centre in the eternal Logos (Manicardi 2011, pp. 395–99). Decisive here is the Christological centre of this analogy: the Word of God is not discourse, a concept, or a norm, but the person of the incarnate Logos. Consequently, reception of the Word cannot be reduced to intellectual assent to a particular content. Benedict describes it as an event of formation: "To receive the Word means to let oneself be shaped by him" (VD 50). To receive the Word is to allow the Holy Spirit to conform the human person to Christ; according to Benedict, this process marks the beginning of a "new creation", in which "a new people comes to birth".

The performative character of the Word follows from this personal and Christological understanding. The Word of God is not merely informative but efficacious: it not only communicates what God does but is itself a mode of divine action. *Verbum Domini* expresses this with particular clarity in the liturgical context: "The relationship between word and sacramental gesture is the liturgical expression of God's activity in the history of salvation through the performative character of the word itself" (VD 53). In salvation history, what God says cannot be separated from what God does. His Word is "living and active" (Heb 4:12); hence, in the liturgy, the Church encounters the Word that "accomplishes what it says" (VD 53). The liturgy is therefore not merely a memorial of past events of salvation but the *locus* of God's present activity, in which the Word becomes an event of address to the Church today. Hahn accordingly grounds the normativity of the Word for theology in precisely this performative character: the Word is normative because it precedes and addresses the Church as a reality that it receives rather than produces.[10]

The performativity of the Word, however, must not be understood as a kind of automatism. When we say that the Word of God accomplishes what it says, we are not claiming that it operates independently of human freedom. God's initiative precedes and enables the human response, yet it seeks to become fruitful in the life of the addressee by awakening and engaging that person's freedom (DV 5; VD 22; 38). The efficacy of the Word is personal: the Word addresses human beings and calls them to the response of faith (VD 25). To receive the Word is to enter into an existential dialogue with Logos and to allow him to transform not only one's understanding of God, oneself, and others, but also these relation-

ships themselves. Receptivity is, in this sense, an active category. It is not the absence of action but the mode in which human freedom responds to God's initiative and begins to live and act from the address it has received.

This relationship between the efficacy of the Word and the freedom of its addressee assumes personal and ecclesiological concreteness in Mary, who is presented in *Verbum Domini* as the paradigm of the fruitful reception of God's Word (VD 27–28; 50). In an earlier work, Ratzinger (1983, pp. 27–28) had already described this disposition through the concept of *Entsprechung*: the response or correspondence of created freedom to God's prior initiative. In the event of the Annunciation, this structure assumes historical concreteness. Mary's *fiat* is not merely assent to a particular proposition but the free entrustment of her life to the God who addresses her: "May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). By opening her entire being to God's address, she receives the eternal Logos, who becomes flesh in her.

Such correspondence does not imply passivity: God's initiative neither excludes nor replaces human freedom but addresses it and calls it to active cooperation. The same disposition is expressed in Mary's words at Cana: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). In saying this, Mary directs attention not to herself but to obedience to Christ's word (Serra 1978, pp. 30–37; de la Potterie 1979, pp. 432–33).[11] Her response thus reveals how the performativity of the Word of God enters human history: not by bypassing the human person, but by God's address finding, within human freedom, a space in which it can be received and enacted.

Since the Second Vatican Council presents Mary as a type of the Church (*typus Ecclesiae;* LG 63–64), her *fiat* illuminates not only the personal response of faith but also the response of the Church. Although this response includes the personal responses of the faithful, it cannot be reduced to their sum. According to Benedict, reception of the Word entails not only the birth of a new human being but also the birth of a "new people" (VD 50). The same Word, received in the Holy Spirit, draws individual responses into ecclesial communion, in which unity is strengthened without the diversity of gifts being abolished (VD 30; 51–52). The Word, therefore, does not merely transform individuals who then remain alongside one another; by transforming their relationships, it forms them into a communal subject. This subject is grounded not primarily in shared interests, similarity of opinions, or organisational ties, but in common participation in the divine life and a common response to God's initiative (ITC 2018, nn. 43–46, 55; VD 50–51).

From this perspective, listening within the synodal process can be understood more precisely. The Church listens not simply to gather as many different voices as possible or to aggregate individual opinions, but to discern together what God is saying to it and how it should respond to his address (Synod of Bishops 2024, nn. 82–83). Communal listening to the Word of God and members of the Church listening to one another are not competing activities. The Church also listens to the Holy Spirit insofar as its members listen to one another and together discern the different voices in the light of the Word of God (ITC 2018, n. 68; Rush 2017, pp. 321–24). Listening to the Word thus creates space for mutual listening and provides a theological criterion for it: those who recognise themselves as having first been addressed can listen to another not merely as the bearer of a competing opinion, but as a member of the same communion, with whom they seek a response to God's initiative.

Listening to the Word is therefore not merely a spiritual prelude to the "actual" process of deliberation and *decision-making*, but a constitutive element of ecclesial discernment (Synod of Bishops 2024, nn. 82–84). Through such listening, the Church learns that it is not itself the source of the truth it proclaims and that none of its members may dispose of the Word of God arbitrarily; rather, it continually receives from the Word both its identity and the measure of its life (VD 50–51). Synodality therefore presupposes a community willing to be

shaped by the Word: one that does not absolutize its own positions or established patterns of action but submits them to communal discernment and remains open to conversion. Such listening neither eliminates differences nor automatically produces consensus. It does, however, form a communion capable of bearing and discerning differences and of seeking within them a path of common fidelity to the Gospel (Rush 2017, pp. 323–24; Synod of Bishops 2024, nn. 82–84). In this sense, the Church is *ecclesia audiens* before it is *ecclesia docens* (Ratzinger 2005, pp. 31, 35–36). Its proclamation, *decision-making*, and mission arise from the fact that it has first listened and received.

4. The Eucharistic Form of the Synodal Church

The receptive structure of the Church not only is realised in listening to the Word of God but also assumes its sacramental and communal form in the Eucharist: the Church not only listens to the word of Christ but receives his body so that it may itself become his body. The ITC therefore emphasises that synodality has its "source and summit" in the celebration of the liturgy and, in a particular way, in the full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharistic assembly (*synaxis*) (ITC 2018, n. 47). The Eucharistic *synaxis* is not merely an expression of an already existing communion but the place in which the Church continually receives and realises its identity as the body of Christ.[12]

An important theological foundation for this understanding is already provided by the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. It treats the liturgy not merely as one of the Church's activities but as the privileged *locus* in which her nature is manifested and realised (SC 2). This is given particular expression in SC 41, which identifies as the "principal manifestation of the Church" (*praecipua manifestatio Ecclesiae*) the full and active participation of all God's holy people in the same Eucharist, in a single prayer and at one altar under the presidency of the bishop. The Eucharist thus manifests the Church as a communion in which the common baptismal dignity and active participation of all do not eliminate the diversity of charisms, ministries and responsibilities. It is precisely in this structure of the Eucharistic assembly that Bua (2022, pp. 83–88) recognises the fundamental form of synodal life: the synod may be understood as an extension of the Eucharistic community, since the logic of gathering, participation and differentiated communion sacramentally realised in the Eucharist extends into the Church's common life and discernment. Synodality is therefore not a method of *decision-making* subsequently added to the Church, but a form of common life that must correspond to her Eucharistic identity.

Of particular importance for our inquiry is the anthropological and ecclesiological consequence of this relationship. If the Eucharist manifests and realises the *forma Ecclesiae*, the question arises as to what kind of subject is capable of living out this ecclesial form. The conciliar notion of *participatio actuosa* provides an answer. According to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy is the right and duty of the entire People of God, arising from the baptismal dignity of the faithful (SC 14). Active participation therefore does not consist merely in performing liturgical functions or increasing external activity. It designates the manner in which the entire community, in the power of the Holy Spirit, enters into Christ's liturgical action. As Lameri (2019, pp. 51–53) observes, the adjective *actuosa* refers primarily to the interior disposition of the faithful through which the grace being celebrated becomes operative in their lives. Such participation is both receptive and active: believers do not bring the sacramental event into being but allow themselves to be drawn into it and transformed by the mystery they celebrate.

This transformation is not confined to the individual. Its communal dimension is disclosed by the very structure of the Eucharistic prayer. In his comparative reading of the anaphoral tradition, Cesare Giraudo notes that the petition for the transformation of the gifts and the petition for the transformation of those who partake of them are two intrinsically

related components of the same epikletic dynamic. This relationship is expressed with particular clarity in certain Eastern anaphoras. The Alexandrian Anaphora of St Basil arranges it chiastically: the Holy Spirit is invoked upon the assembled community and upon the gifts, so that the gifts may be transformed into the sacramental body of Christ and those assembled, by partaking of it, may become "one body and one spirit" (Giraudo 2000, pp. 314–24; Repole 2022, pp. 159–60). The transformation of the gifts is therefore not an end in itself within the Eucharistic celebration but is directed towards the transformation of the assembled community into the ecclesial body of Christ. The Holy Spirit not only brings about Christ's sacramental presence but, through participation in his body and blood, forms a communion from the plurality of those gathered. It is precisely here that the Eucharist addresses the central question of synodal ecclesiology: how believers who are personally addressed become a single ecclesial subject. Their unity arises neither merely from mutual agreement nor from belonging to the same institution; through their participation in the one body of Christ, the same Spirit transforms them in their very relationships and forms them into an ecclesial communion.[13]

The question of liturgical participation thus leads to that of sacramental anthropology. José Granados observes that the sacraments are not confined to the moment of their celebration but place the human person within a new network of relationships that originate in the life of Christ. Baptism incorporates believers into Christ's life, while the Eucharist continually nourishes, deepens, and actualises this incorporation by drawing them into Christ's self-offering to the Father and into the communion of his body (Granados 2021, pp. 283–86). The fruit of Eucharistic participation is therefore not merely an interior or "spiritual" state but the gradual transformation of the whole of human existence. The relationships, decisions, and actions of believers acquire a Eucharistic form: their freedom is schooled in self-giving to God and others because it has itself been taken up into Christ's self-offering. The sacrament does not therefore need later to be "applied" to life; sacramental participation already communicates the form of Christian life by incorporating the human person into Christ's manner of being and acting (Granados 2021, pp. 296–98).

From this perspective, the relationship between *participatio actuosa* and synodality can be understood more precisely. O'Loughlin (2023, pp. 165–69) regards active liturgical participation as one of the fundamental conditions of synodal life. At the Eucharist, the faithful do not gather as isolated individuals; through their common listening to the Word, their prayer, and their participation in the one Bread, they become a single ecclesial subject. There they learn to speak and respond, to recognise and receive diverse ministries, to acknowledge their belonging to one another, and to situate their own activity within that of the entire community. The synodal disposition is thus the ecclesiological dimension of the transformation that already begins in the Eucharist. There, people are formed who are capable of living communion, participation, and mission.

At this point, the Marian principle gives personal embodiment to the form of freedom that corresponds to Eucharistic participation. Mary's *fiat* reveals a freedom that neither produces nor controls God's action but receives it and actively enters into it. Similarly, *participatio actuosa* is neither passive presence nor the autonomous production of the sacramental event, but active participation in the prior action of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

In this light, the designation of Mary as the "Woman of the Eucharist" acquires both anthropological and ecclesiological significance. John Paul II, in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), relates her response at the Annunciation to the Eucharistic faith of the Church: just as Mary received the Word who became flesh, so the Church receives in the Eucharist the Christ who gives himself to her in his body and blood (EE 53–58). The Marian and Eucharistic logics thus converge in the same dynamic: the gift received becomes the source of self-giving, while human freedom becomes active, fruitful, and capable of

communion precisely through receiving. The Marian principle thereby reveals the interior disposition presupposed by synodal life. The question remains, however, as to how this receptivity, shaped by the Eucharist and exemplified in Mary, becomes an enduring shared disposition of the Church—the *affectus synodalis*.

5. Marian Receptivity as Affectus Synodalis

5.1. Affectus Synodalis as a Spiritual–Ecclesiological Disposition

The enduring shared disposition of the Church, fostered by the Eucharistic formation of her members, may be designated by the term *affectus synodalis*. The ITC (2018, nn. 107–114) situates it within the spirituality of communion, whose source and paradigm are the Eucharistic *synaxis*. Here, *affectus* denotes not a discrete emotion or passing inclination, but a deeper disposition of the ecclesial subject that shapes its manner of listening, judging, and acting.[14] ITC therefore relates its formation to the conversion of heart and mind, the mutual acceptance of one another, listening to the Word of God, and communal discernment. Rush (2017, pp. 323–24) likewise observes that synodality requires particular spiritual dispositions on the part of all participants—a "synodal spirit" that must permeate the Church from the individual believer to the Bishop of Rome. The structural and spiritual dimensions of synodality therefore condition one another. Even well-designed procedures of participation, consultation, and decision-making acquire a genuinely synodal quality only through the way in which participants actually live them. The question, then, concerns not only which forms of participation the Church requires, but what the Church must become if it is to live them synodally.

It is precisely at this level that the contemporary relevance of the Marian principle becomes apparent. If *affectus synodalis* denotes the disposition that makes a synodal mode of ecclesial existence possible, the Marian principle illuminates its fundamental theological form. This understanding rests on the conciliar conception of Mary as *typus Ecclesiae*. Following Ambrose, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* (LG) describes her as a type of the Church "in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ" (LG 63); it then draws an analogy between Mary's believing reception of the Word of God and the Church, which likewise "receives the word of God in faith" and thereby becomes fruitful (LG 64). Mary thus discloses not simply a virtue to be imitated, but the pattern of an ecclesial existence shaped by receptive faith, free response, and fruitfulness in communion.

Marian receptivity is neither an autonomous form of ecclesial existence nor one that runs parallel to Christ. Christ's self-giving remains the source and content of the Church's life, while Mary personally embodies the creaturely response to this prior gift. Her *fiat* shows that receiving God's initiative does not entail renouncing freedom but allowing freedom to attain its fulfilment as response and self-giving. In the power of the Holy Spirit, receiving Christ's gift conforms the human person to his self-giving, so that receptivity itself becomes fruitful and self-giving. The Marian principle therefore does not establish a different logic of ecclesial existence; rather, it gives personal form to the freedom proper to the Church as she receives her identity from Christ and responds to his gift in the Holy Spirit (Levering 2024, pp. 415, 418–19).

5.2. Marian Symballein: Synodal Listening Amid Dissensus

Luke's portrayal of Mary shows that such receptivity is not confined to receiving a word whose meaning is fully clear from the outset. Following the shepherds' account, Mary "kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk 2:19); the verb *symballein* indicates that she relates the word she has received to the events, sets them alongside one another, and reflects upon their meaning (Serra 1982, pp. 89, 139–75). The same disposition deepens

as the narrative continues. Simeon's prophecy introduces into the promise of salvation a sign of contradiction and the foretelling of a sword (Lk 2:34–35). In the episode of the twelve-year-old Jesus, Luke explicitly states that Mary and Joseph "did not understand what he said to them" (Lk 2:50), while Mary nevertheless "kept all these things in her heart" (Lk 2:51; Serra 1982, pp. 111–23).[15] Marian receptivity therefore does not imply immediate clarity but the capacity to preserve the received word within an ongoing process of discernment, even when it introduces tension or its meaning is not yet fully accessible.

This narrative dynamic provides an important criterion for synodal listening. Listening is not complete simply because another person has been given the opportunity to speak. It requires the capacity to preserve the word received, to relate it to other voices and to the experiences of the community, and not to discount it merely because it introduces tension or does not accord with an already established understanding. Mary's *symballein* does not entail suspending judgement but a receptivity that does not rush to judgement. It receives the word as something that must enter a process of discernment, even when its meaning cannot yet be determined. This Marian disposition also offers a theological lens for considering what occurs when genuine listening does not immediately yield consensus, but instead brings to light differences that the existing patterns of ecclesial perception may not yet be able to accommodate.

Such receptivity becomes particularly demanding when listening does not lead directly to consensus but reveals divergent or conflicting judgements. In her analysis of the Amazon Synod, Gruber (2020, pp. 247–53) observes that a synodal process may broaden the possibilities for participation and yet remain confined within existing assumptions about what can be seen and said in the Church and who is recognised as a legitimate speaker. Dissensus, as Gruber understands it by drawing on Jacques Rancière, is therefore not merely the opposite of consensus or a confrontation between differing opinions. It can disclose exclusions and "blind spots" that the prevailing consensus fails to perceive. Disagreement thereby becomes an object of theological discernment: the question concerns not only which of the differing judgements is adequate, but also whether the manner in which the Church listens and judges allows something to become audible that its existing framework does not yet know how to recognise as relevant.[16] Dissensus is therefore neither an alternative to ecclesial consensus nor an independent criterion of truth; its value lies in preventing premature consensus achieved through the exclusion or silencing of differences.

At this point, the limitation of understanding synodality primarily in terms of participation becomes apparent. If participation answers the question of who may speak, receptivity denotes the Church's willingness to genuinely listen to what is said and to allow it to enter into communal discernment. The formal inclusion of a voice does not yet mean that it can contribute to shaping either the questions or the community's judgement. Receptivity does not entail affirming every position expressed, but a willingness not to exclude a voice before its possible theological relevance can be discerned. The *affectus synodalis* is thus also manifested in the Church's capacity to treat disagreement not merely as an obstacle on the way to consensus, but as an object of communal discernment. The aim of such receptivity is not an indeterminate plurality, but a judgement that does not exclude divergent positions before they have been genuinely heard and tested in the light of the Gospel (Gruber 2020, pp. 247–53; Borras 2021, pp. 106–7).

5.3. Sensus Fidelium and Differentiated Ecclesial Discernment

The theological foundation of such receptivity lies in the pneumatological and Christological constitution of the Church. Through their baptismal anointing, all the faithful participate in Christ's prophetic office, while the Holy Spirit bestows upon the entire People of God the *sensus fidei* (sense of faith), through which the faith received is recognised,

understood more deeply, and lived out in new historical circumstances (LG 12; ITC 2014, nn. 1–3, pp. 66–69). Mutual listening therefore carries theological weight: it is not merely a means of gathering experiences and opinions, but belongs to the process through which the Church discerns how the apostolic faith is received and lived out in the lives of the faithful. In this sense, Rush (2017, pp. 321–23) understands the *sensus fidelium* (sense of faith of the faithful) as a *locus theologicus* (locus for theological reflection)—not as a new source of revelation, but as a *locus* in which the Church, in the power of the Spirit, listens to what the Word of God that she has received requires of her today.

For this very reason, an individual voice can neither be directly identified with the action of the Spirit nor dismissed in advance as theologically insignificant. The *sensus fidelium* is not an aggregate of personal opinions; its authentic expressions must be discerned in relation to Scripture, the living Tradition, Eucharistic communion, and the Magisterium of the Church. The individual intuitions of the faithful may be intermingled with cultural limitations and errors, but they may also disclose aspects of the faith that have not yet been adequately articulated (ITC 2014, nn. 55–56; pp. 74–76, 81–83). The theological relevance of what is heard is therefore the fruit of ecclesial discernment; it can neither be presupposed nor excluded in advance.

Such discernment is an act of the entire, internally differentiated ecclesial subject. It aims not at an indefinite postponement of judgement but at common obedience to the will of God. Borras (2021, pp. 106–8) therefore grounds the communal elaboration of a decision in the pneumatological co-responsibility of all the baptised: all participate in listening to the Word of God, assessing the situation, and seeking what the Spirit is saying to the Church, while the holder of pastoral office assumes within this communion a particular responsibility for taking the final decision. The distinction between the elaboration and the taking of a decision therefore does not separate two unrelated acts but expresses different responsibilities within the same process of discernment (Synod of Bishops 2024, nn. 81–93; Zaccaria 2024, Sections 2.2 and 4.1). The requirement that the final decision bear a recognisable trace of communal listening is thus not merely a criterion of procedural transparency but an expression of the accountability of ecclesial authority before God and before the community among whose members the Spirit has distributed diverse gifts.

From this perspective, the Marian principle denotes not primarily psychological openness but the theological form of the Church as a subject of faith. Mary as *typus Ecclesiae* discloses the Church which, in the power of the Spirit, receives the Word, responds to it, and through it becomes fruitful (LG 63–65). The *affectus synodalis* is therefore not merely an interior inclination towards dialogue but a spiritual and ecclesiological *habitus* of common obedience to God's initiative, shaped by the Word and the Eucharistic gift. It guards both against the uncritical equation of all voices and against a form of discernment that would determine their significance before listening to them. Just as Mary preserves the word and *symballei* it, so the Church listens, compares, and judges in order to recognise, amid the diversity of voices, what Christ is saying to her through the Spirit. The Marian principle therefore does not determine the outcomes of discernment but discloses the form of ecclesial listening without which participatory structures may remain merely formal.

6. Conclusions: From Received Gift to Ecclesial Self-Gift

This study has shown that the Marian principle contributes to an understanding of the synodal Church not primarily as an additional model alongside her institutional or Petrine dimension, but by disclosing active receptivity as the fundamental form of ecclesial existence as a whole. Although Balthasar's intuition provided the immediate point of departure, the receptive structure it brings into focus is rooted in the biblical history of salvation and finds convergent expression, in different theological registers, in the ecclesiologies of de Lubac,

Congar, and Ratzinger. The Church does not create her identity and mission for herself but receives them from Christ in the Holy Spirit. She can therefore proclaim, act, and lead only as a communion that has first been addressed, graced, and transformed.

This receptive structure takes concrete form in listening to the Word of God and in the Eucharist. For the Church, the Word of God is not merely content that she interprets and proclaims, but a living and active reality that first forms her as *ecclesia audiens*. In the Eucharist, the Church not only receives the body of Christ, but is herself transformed by the Holy Spirit into his body: from the plurality of persons, charisms, and ministries there emerges an internally differentiated communion that lives from Christ's self-giving. Mary's *fiat* gives personal embodiment to the form of freedom corresponding to this twofold reception. Receptivity is therefore not passivity, but a free and active response in which the gift received becomes a life of self-giving. For individual believers, this means allowing their encounter with the Word and the Eucharist to reshape their own judgements and relationships, so that speaking with conviction remains joined to a willingness to listen, learn, and be changed.

From listening to the Word and from the Eucharistic formation of the Church arises the *affectus synodalis*. This denotes not merely an inclination towards dialogue or a willingness to participate, but an enduring spiritual and ecclesiological disposition of common obedience to God's initiative. It is precisely here that the distinction between participation and receptivity becomes apparent. Participation addresses the question of who may speak and take part; receptivity addresses whether what is said can genuinely enter into communal discernment and contribute to shaping the common judgement. The formal inclusion of a voice does not yet ensure that it has been genuinely heard. Just as Mary preserves the word she has received and *symballei* it, so the Church is called not to exclude differing voices and judgements in advance, but to listen to them, relate them to one another, and test them in the light of the Gospel.

Such receptivity entails neither the uncritical affirmation of every position expressed nor the predetermination of the outcomes of discernment. Disagreement is not in itself a criterion of truth, but it may disclose exclusions and blind spots that the prevailing consensus fails to perceive. Synodal discernment is therefore an act of the entire, internally differentiated ecclesial subject. Through the gifts they have received, all the baptised participate in listening and in the formation of a common judgement, while the holders of pastoral office assume, within the same process, a particular responsibility for taking the decision. This responsibility is not separate from the communion: the decision taken must bear a discernible trace of communal listening and discernment.

The Marian principle therefore does not replace the institutional renewal of the synodal Church but gives it a theological criterion and an evangelical form. It calls for structures that enable genuine listening, participation, differentiated co-responsibility, and the responsible exercise of authority. Without interior transformation, new structures may remain merely formal or become arenas for the redistribution of influence; without appropriate structures, however, active receptivity can scarcely find expression in the Church's common life and *decision-making*. The spiritual and institutional dimensions of synodality therefore condition one another.

The Church can credibly proclaim to the world the God who gives himself only if she herself lives from the gift received and becomes a gift. Her witness will be convincing not because she speaks about synodality, but because her relationships and ways of acting reveal what she hears in the Word and celebrates in the Eucharist: authority as service, freedom as response, participation as co-responsibility, difference without domination, and communion as mutual self-giving.

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Notes

1 We use the term *ecclesial receptivity* as a systematic rather than a historiographical category. It does not designate an established theological school or an uninterrupted terminological tradition; rather, it enables us to bring into relation different currents of Catholic ecclesiology in which the Church is understood as receiving its life, identity, and mission from God's prior initiative.

2 This description stands within a broader understanding of synodality as an ecclesial way of life. Francis (2015) describes a synodal Church as "a listening Church", while the International Theological Commission (2018, n. 6) defines synodality as the specific way of living and acting (*modus vivendi et operandi*) of the People of God through which its communion is manifested and realised. The Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* (Francis 2018, nn. 5–7) emphasises the listening of the entire People of God and the action of the Holy Spirit. The Final Document likewise presents synodality as a spiritual process of communal discernment of God's will for the Church today (Synod of Bishops 2024, nn. 28–29).

3 The study grounds this possibility by appealing to the criteria for assessing the authority of magisterial teaching as set out in LG 25; the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's instruction *Donum veritatis* (1990), nn. 17, 23–24; and the *Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio fidei* (1998), n. 11. On this basis, it presents the repeated and continuous use of the Marian principle by successive popes as a possible indication that it forms part of their ordinary magisterium (DDF 2026, Appendix IV, notes 76 and 80).

4 Similar concerns already appear in the main body of the Study Group's report, which warns that certain ways of portraying Mary in relation to women's roles in the Church may be based on ideological or cultural patterns that society attributes to women. It therefore proposes that, alongside motherhood, other aspects of Mary should also be emphasised, including her witness, her reflective and questioning stance, and her involvement in the life of the early Christian community (DDF 2026, Appendix IV, n. 17).

5 In Balthasar's usage, "principle" is not a technical concept with a single, strictly defined meaning; he also employs the terms "profile", "dimension", and "aspect" (Leahy 1999, pp. 13–14). The Marian dimension is nevertheless a constant feature of his thought and can be traced back to his early writings (Leahy 1999, pp. 14–16). Two works are particularly relevant here: *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church* (German original: *Der antirömische Affekt*, 1974) and *Our Task: A Report and a Plan* (*Unser Auftrag*, 1984). Coda (2022, pp. 182–83) distinguishes between "principle" and "profile" by associating the former with the constitutive dimension of Mary's motherhood in relation to the Church, and the latter with the style or distinctive quality that the Church receives from Mary in following Christ. The present study employs "Marian principle" because its primary concern is this ecclesiological and constitutive dimension.

6 Leahy notes that Balthasar situates the Marian principle within the broader context of the Church's unity, which signifies not uniformity but communion in difference patterned on Trinitarian unity. As the sign and instrument of unity, the Church comprises distinct dimensions that interact with one another; within this constellation, the Marian principle is the dimension in which Mary's yes to God is prolonged and finds expression in the holiness of love and life according to the Gospel as a unifying power at the heart of the Church (Leahy 1999, pp. 13–14).

7 A clear contemporary articulation of receptivity in ecclesiological terms is offered by Matthew Levering. In grounding it ontologically, he draws particularly on David L. Schindler and his understanding of created being as fundamentally receptive: because a creature does not give itself being, its free activity must likewise bear the imprint of this original reception of being (Levering 2024, pp. 412–14). On this basis, Levering places receptivity at the heart of the Church's mediation of Christ's gift and emphasises that the entire Church receives Christ in the Holy Spirit and is grounded in Marian receptivity to Christ and his gifts (Levering 2024, pp. 415, 443).

8 Halloran explicitly presents his interpretation as a constructive synthesis of de Lubac's ecclesiology and Marion's phenomenological categories, and, in certain respects, as an attempt to move beyond de Lubac's own articulation. The expression "receptive and saturating flesh" and the formulation that the Church "receives herself" should therefore not be attributed to de Lubac himself, but understood as Halloran's systematic explication of the implications of de Lubac's thought.

9 Havlík (2023, pp. 99–101, 105) emphasises that, for Ratzinger, Mary is the personal concretisation of the Church: in her complete openness to God, what the Church is becomes visible, while her motherhood is understood theologically as the reception of the Word of God in the obedience of faith. The Church is therefore not merely an institutional reality but, in the manner of Mary, is called to receive the Word of God in faith and render it fruitful.

[10] Hahn (2023, pp. 703–4, 709) shows that the relationship between the normativity and performativity of the Word in *Verbum Domini* draws on Ratzinger's earlier understanding of theology and liturgy. In *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, Ratzinger (1995, pp. 103–4) had already emphasised that theology is "pondering what God has said and thought before us" and that it presupposes faith in the Word that is given (Ratzinger 1995, p. 55).

[11] Both interpret Mary's injunction as directing attention towards obedience to Christ's word. De la Potterie also notes that this interpretation was adopted by Paul VI in *Marialis cultus* n. 57 (AAS 66 (1974), pp. 166–67).

[12] ITC notes that it is no coincidence that, from the earliest centuries onwards, synodal assemblies have assumed a liturgical and Eucharistic form. The *Ordo ad Synodum*, from the seventh-century Councils of Toledo to the modern *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*, shows that the celebration of the Eucharist and the enthronement of the Book of the Gospels are constitutive elements of the synodal event. The synodal assembly expresses a communion whose source is the Eucharist: the different local Churches gather in the communion of the one body of Christ and become a visible realisation of the one Church (nn. 47–48, 52; see also Bua 2022, pp. 86–89).

[13] Cf. 1 Cor 10:16–17; 12:12–13. The Church Fathers also address this dynamic. Augustine explains that, in saying "Amen" when receiving Communion, the believer assents to the body of Christ; yet, if this "Amen" is to be true, the believer must also become that body (*Sermo* 272: PL 38: 1247). Similarly, Hilary of Poitiers emphasises that the unity of believers arises not primarily from their agreement or decision to love one another, but from their sacramental participation in the one body of Christ (*De Trinitate* VIII, 7–18: SCh 448, 386–402).

[14] Historically, the Latin term *affectus* does not correspond simply to the modern concept of emotion but may denote the movement of desire, the orientation of love, and a person's deeper disposition towards the object of the will. In Augustine, the human person's interior orientation is determined by love, which, like a weight, bears one towards what one loves (*pondus meum amor meus*: *Confessiones* XIII, 9,10: BA 14, p. 440); conversion therefore also entails the transformation of one's *affectus* (*De doctrina christiana* I, 17,16: CCSL 32, p. 15). In his account of the degrees of love, Bernard of Clairvaux describes a journey in which the human will is gradually liberated from self-enclosure and conformed to the love of God (*De diligendo Deo* XV, 39–40: SBO III, pp. 152–54). For Bonaventure, moreover, the journey to God does not reach its goal through intellectual knowledge alone: in the final passage, the "apex of affect" (*apex affectus*) must be transferred and transformed into God (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum* VII, 4: *Opera Omnia* V, pp. 312–13). Although the term does not have precisely the same meaning in each of these authors, it generally denotes more than a transitory feeling: it concerns the dynamic orientation of human desire and love that shapes cognition, willing, and action. We do not thereby presuppose a direct terminological continuity between these usages and the contemporary expression *affectus synodalis*, but rather draw attention to the broader theological semantic field of the term *affectus*. For a historical survey of affective anthropology in Latin Christianity, see Biron-Ouellet (2024, pp. 33–52).

[15] In Lk 2:19, Luke describes Mary's disposition using the verbs *syntērein* (to preserve or guard) and *symballein* (to bring together, ponder, or understand). In Lk 2:51, the motif recurs with the verb *diatērein*, which denotes continued or careful preservation: although Mary and Joseph do not understand Jesus' words (Lk 2:50), Mary continues to keep all these things—the words and events—in her heart. Taken together, the two passages disclose an enduring disposition in which Mary preserves the words and events she has received and remains open to them even when she does not yet fully understand their meaning (Francis 2024, n. 19; Hoogerwerf 2023, pp. 175–91).

[16] Rancière uses the expression "distribution of the sensible" to designate the order that determines what can be perceived and said, and who is recognised as a speaking subject. Dissensus disrupts this order and thereby reveals its hidden exclusions (Gruber 2020, pp. 247–53).

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