

SYNODALITY: TOWARD ECUMENISM AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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Abstract

Encounter, listen and discern! These three messages from Jesus are for spreading the gospel. He leads the Twelve and his followers in contact with the Holy Trinity and with humanity. The Church continued the Kingdom of God's mission to rule the globe. The synod is called upon by the authority of the Church to uphold and carry out the faith, moral doctrine, and disciplines of the Church. Additionally, the church moves forward in a synodal spirit. With churches and ecclesial communities, the Church fosters ecumenism. She also fosters interfaith dialogue with other religions. And the Basic Ecclesial Communities, which are prevalent among the population, are the most significant element in this style of life.

Key Words: *synodality, to walk together-communio-reconciliation, authority invokes the synod, encounter culture, ecumenism, interreligiousdialogue, and the role of Basic Ecclesial Communities.*

INTRODUCTION

On October 10, 2021, Pope Francis in the holy mass of Synodal Path affirmed that celebrating a synod entails traveling the same path as one another. He invited us to examine Jesus. Jesus first meets the wealthy man on the road, then he listens to his inquiries, and ultimately he assists him in determining what he needs to do in order to receive eternal life. Encounter, listen and discern! These three verbs that describe the Synod are what I would want to think about.

Synodality is essentially the soul, life and experience of the Church from the beginning. This thesis will lift up this matter exposing its essential elements and its implementation through the juridical practice, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and basic ecclesial communities. The main questions are: how the Church actualize the synodal spirit in her life, in the history and today? Who are those that should take part to realize the synodality as the way of Church's life? If this thesis were to be judged, it would be more appropriately described as a pastoral and spiritual reflection, as theology practice in the Church.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Threefold Essential Elements: Communion, Reconciliation, and Synodality

We should go back to Jesus' style of life in order to comprehend what synodality is. He established a *communio*, a tiny community, along with the disciples. It includes both the divine community and the human community. In order to bring everyone together as a family in harmony and peace, he taught the Kingdom of God.

Reflecting on Jesus' priestly prayer in Chapter 7 of the Gospel of John, we see passages as follows: "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me". Jesus' prayer example of who and what he wants us to be. He communicate his most important values to the Father and to us. We could claim that *modus orandi est modus docendi*. He is

instructing us on how to respect one another as brothers and sisters as well as how we should relate to God as our Father. He discloses to us his intention, that we united fellowship, in communion with the Trinity and the rest of humanity.¹

The word "communion" is the Greek word "koinonia," which means "participation in something else." Koinonia (Latin: *communio*), which appears nineteen times in the New Testament, is typically interpreted as participation in, fellowship with, or communion. Catholics prefer communion, it as fellowship its sacramental or spiritual meaning.²

Koinonia firstly refers to the soteriological idea of being incorporated into Christ in order to share in the divine life. According to 1 Corinthians 1:19, "God is faithful, and through him you were called to fellowship (koinonia) with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Through sharing in his sufferings (Phil 3:10; 2Cor 1:7) and through trust (Psalm 6), Christians can become one with Christ. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship (koinonia) of the Holy Spirit be with you all," is the tripartite benediction Paul. When God's promises "you may come to share (koinonia) in the divine nature" (2Ptr 1:4), the author of 2 Peter uses very forceful language. Koinonia therefore refers to the believers' participation in the divine life, which the fathers of the Eastern churches refer to as a process of divinization (theosis) and goes beyond simple fellowship.³

Second, *koinonia* has an ecclesiastical to it. A shared life with other disciples is what is meant by communion in the divine life. Paul defined being "in Christ" as having a common life in grace and the Spirit. Acts 2:42 uses the Greek word *koinonia* to characterize the community's shared life. The community's life with God and with one another has both vertical and horizontal aspects, according to the author of 1 John (1John 1:3; 6, 7).⁴

According to Pope Benedict XVI, there have always been two fundamental components that crucial for comprehending the Church. First, the new people of God include the dynamic of unification, in which individuals unite by turning toward God. Second, Christ serves as the center of this new people. Teaching of *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 14, "The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and the unity of human the human race".⁵

Pope Benedict XVI points out that the sheep, guests, plantation, and God's building were just a few of the many imagery Jesus used to describe the new people. One of God's cities, the city of his family, stands out as his favorite, that of the Family of God. The ecclesial communities family truly a church. From the level of the local church to the universal Church, communion is experienced. The communion of Christian spouses, which forms the cornerstone of the domestic Church, is said to be one of the many ties of communion and mission through which the Church reveals the life of the Trinity to the world. The communion between a bishop, his priests, and his flock; the communion between Peter's successor and the college of Bishops; the genuine but flawed communion

¹ Gerard Francisco P. Timoner, "To be of One Heart and Mind, on the way to God. Communion, Reconciliation, Synodality", in Jannel N. Abogado (ed.), *Church as a Communion. Perspective and Expressions the Asian Context* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2021), 21.

² Thomas P. Rausch, *Systematic Theology. A Roman Catholic Approach* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, Inc., 2018), 164.

³ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Gerard Francisco P. Timoner, "To be of One Heart...", 22.

between churches and ecclesial communities; and in hope, the communion with the heavenly Church and the rest of mankind.⁶

Pope Francis is aware of the issues that families. He stated in one that maintaining harmony in the household only required the use of the three magic words. The truth is that family unity can only be and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice; it requires a ready and generous openness of each and every individual to understanding, to forbearance, **and to reconciliation.**⁷

The entire Church should group of believers (Act 4:32). Is further defined by St. Augustine as being of mind and heart in God's plan. Intellect and heart does not have a clear *telos* in Augustine's view. *On the way to God. Being on a journey together, synodality* gives the idea of communion motion and dynamism. From a local chapter to an ecumenical council, every synodal occasion offers a grace opportunity for improvement. The distinction between "synodal spirit" and "synodal moments or synodal events" seems to be useful. The synodal spirit (affective synodality), which is an overarching ethos guiding Church communion at all times, is expressed in the eucharistic assembly in a simple yet profound way. Synodal moments or synodal events, also known as effective synodality, are the tangible expression of this spirit when an ecclesial community (parish, religious congregation, particular or universal Church) is called to a meeting by legitimate authority (Parish Priest, Superior, Bishop, or Pope) to resolve contentious matters (such as heresies in the early centuries) or to determine what is best for the community (renewal, etc.).⁸

Juridical Practices Concerning On Synodality

Bishops, in the history of the Church, chosen pastors the People of God. They used the various gatherings to debate matters pertaining to the *Tria Munera's* effective performance (faculty of sanctifying, of teaching and of governing) and to engage in conflict with one another. The council was, and continues to be, the most, official and structured way to discuss various issues impacting the well-being of the Church among numerous meeting modalities.⁹

A legitimate meeting of the ecclesiastical hierarchy that has been called to discuss and rule on issues relating to the faith, morality and discipline of the Church is referred to as a *concilium* in the ecclesiastical context. Such a gathering was commonly referred to as a *synodus* in ancient times. The word 'ynodus is derived from the Greek letter *συν* *συν*δοχος which is made up the participle *συν* (together) and the substantive *οδο*ς (journey). The term 'synode' first appeared in the *Canones Apostolorum* and originally meant the assembly or meeting or the prelates of the several Churches. Tertulian referred to the gatherings of bishops that took place across the Roman empire's many provinces as *concilium*. Thus, *synodus* and *concilium* were synonymous terms in antiquity.¹⁰

The characteristics that set the 'synod' or 'council' assembly apart from other assemblies are its authorized convocation by the appropriate authority; its structure, i.e., an assembly made up of individuals who are hierarchically in harmony with one another and intended to carry out its governing and magisterial duties within the Church through

⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹ Danilo R. Flores, *Conferences of Bishops. A Study of the Current Legislation* (Las Pinas City: Book off Life Publication, 2020), 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

discussions leading to the decrees that faithful. The legitimate convocation was that it adheres to the sacred canons of the Church's constitution, i.e., that it be called by someone who is authorized by a general or specific law. The members who have been called to the council have not only the right but also the duty to participate in its proceedings, particularly its discernment. Assembly is not referred to as a council but rather as a meeting or assembly of bishops whenever the participants are typically gathered not for binding decisions about doctrinal and disciplinary matters affecting the Church for other concerns that are by nature consultative, administrative, and urgent.¹¹

The diocesan synod, like the provincial councils or synods, is a remnant of traditional church practice. Pope Siricius appears to have held the first diocesan synod in the West in 387 in Rome. The Diocesan Synod was specifically addressed by two Councils: the Lateran IV (1215) and the Tridentine, which imposed the necessity of annual celebration on bishops in Session XXIV in November 1563.¹²

Such synod, which were once quite active, has been the last two centuries. In conformity with the wishes of the Second Vatican Council (*Christus Dominus*, n. 36,2), an endeavor is currently being made to reevaluate them, as they are the most significant expression of diocesan communion. Leaves a fairly large room. More than 600 canons pertain to diocesan bishops and mention their authority for determining and integrating the common law; this raises a variety of legitimate questions and confusions (concerns and perplexities).¹³

Are appropriately determined by the canon, which describes the diocesan synod as the gathering of priests and other believers of a particular church who, after being duly appointed, work with the diocesan bishop in line with the canons for the benefit of the ecclesial community (cf. can. 460).¹⁴

The idea of Synod established by the New Code differs significantly from that which was produced by the prior code. The Synod was a solely clerical assembly – indeed, a priestly assembly – under the Pius-Benedictine Code because only priests were allowed to participate (cf. can. 385). Canons 460 and 463, §3 of the New Code, however, provide for the admission of clergy and laity to the Synod. However, the laity's involvement is not entirely new because they have previously taken part in Synod celebrations. Thus, a long-forgotten practice of the Church was revived in response to both pastoral and theological considerations (ecclesial communion).¹⁵

THEORYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Cultural-Encounter Approach: Contextualization Of Synodality

There appear to be two groups of reasons theology. The first group could be referred to as external and includes political force, historical events, intellectual currents, and cultural changes. These internal factors within itself are in turn brought to light by these external ones, and they indicate both the possibility and necessity of practicing theology in context. Since they indicate a contextual imperative inside Christianity itself, these internal elements are more significant than the external ones.¹⁶

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Luigi Chiappetta, *Prontuario di Diritto Canonico e Concordatario* (Roma: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1994), 1149.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Manila: Logos Publication, Inc., 2003), 9.

There can only be one theology—one that holds true for all eras, all locations, and all cultures—if one operates from a classicist notion of culture. Here must be a theology for each culture and every period, nevertheless, if one bases their work on an empirical idea of culture. According to Lonergan, theology serves as a bridge between a cultural matrix and the significance and function of religion within it. In other words, theology serves precisely as the means by which religion is understood within a given culture.¹⁷

Because of this, synodality in our context should be discussed in the perspective of Indonesia's religious and cultural diversity. We promote ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. The faithful, or all Christians who reside in the Basic Ecclesial Communities, are the synodality's main.

Pilgrimage Together In Ecumenism

Along with other Churches and ecclesial communities from throughout the world, the Catholic Church is present among the populace. This fact to Jesus' mission, his disciples have been tasked with carrying out since the beginning. His prayer for Christian unity help us to understand his mission (cf. John 17:1-2; 18-23). Such prayer serves as a 'preface' and 'inspiration' in understanding what Christian unity is all about and why Christian churches have to work together to be engaged in dialogue and collaboration to restore the much-desire visible Christian unity.¹⁸ PHEME Perkins and Jany Jorgensen both claim that Jesus prayer for the unity of his followers has influenced ecumenism throughout the ages.¹⁹

The word 'ecumenism' is derived from the Hellenistic Greek word *oikoumené* which is a part of the *oikos* (dwelling or house; Mt 21:13; Acts 16:31). According to Acts 11:28 and Lk 2:1, it refers to 'the whole inhabited world'. But throughout time, it has been applied to a variety of situations. It represent all of the earth in ancient Greek culture. It distinguished between the world of the Greeks and that of the barbarians or non-Greeks. The Greek-speaking and subsequently the Hellenized world in the fourth century B.C. was 'where communication was possible'.²⁰

The Church Fathers used the concepts of universality and ecumenicity to explain one another in their writings, particularly Clement and Polycarp. Applying the idea of *oikoumené* allowed for the establishment of the world's usual meaning. Furthermore, the term 'ecumenical' also denoted awareness of a global communion of all Christians and their churches in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. At this time, Gregory Baum explains what the term of 'Church' means. Typically, the term refers to the entire Church, which was established by Christ on the leadership of the Twelve and disseminated over the entire world by Peter. When the biblical authors discuss the Church as the People of God where Jews and Gentiles are reconciled or when they describe the Church as the culmination of God's redemptive plan for mankind, it is generally viewed under the global aspect. Then, ecumenism, while aiming to bring about the unity of all Christians throughout the entire *oikoumené*, should keep in mind that the unity of the Churches is at the service of the oneness of humanity, of whom the Churches, like Jesus their founder, are servants.²¹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸ Edgar G. Javier, *Mission and Ecumenism: the Quest for Reconciled Diversity* (Tagaytay City: Devine Word Institute of Mission Studies, 2020), 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16-19.

Today, the term ecumenism is used to refer to everything that unites Christians from all denominations in their worship, missions, and effort to advance the Reign of God. The phrase refers to a contemporary Christian movement that is concerned with the Church's unity, renewal, and connection to God's work of reconciliation and renewal across creation. Our ecumenical mission in Asia, however, goes beyond only events and programs; it is a manner of being the Church.²²

Ecumenism tries to inspire Catholics to desire unity and a stronger witness to the outside world. A change of heart and conversion toward 'the Other' is also one of its main goals, which is prerequisite for the pursuit of Christian unity. Therefore, according to Vatican II, 'ecumenism cannot be worthy of its name without a change of heart'.²³

How does the Catholic Church as a whole honestly engage in dialogue with other Christian churches is the question that will bring our discussion on the Synodality and Ecumenism? What standards are the highest for our actions inside the Church?

It is vital to remember that ecumenism affects everyone, not just experts. Despite the fact that their roles and responsibilities differ, involves the entire Church, or all Christians. French theologian Yves Congar suggested a specialized pedagogy for ecumenism in light of this idea. First and foremost, it tries to improve the atmosphere by fostering understanding for the unique characteristic of the separated brethren, drawing attention to non-theological causes of the split, and eradicating the mutual mistrust that frequently arises merely from a lack of communication. Second, aims to foster respect for people and awareness of their admirable traits; patience in conversation; and every avenue. Thirdly, the Spirit, not diplomatic skill, is what brings people together. We should pray for it.²⁴

Walking Together In Interreligious Dialogue

Pope John Paul II spoke to the entire Church "at the beginning of the new millennium," which marks the beginning of "a new stage of the Church's journey," and highlighted crucial facets of Church life to "take up her evangelizing mission with fresh enthusiasm" (1, 2). The pope's *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, which was released on January 6, 2001, was intended to help the Church "shine ever more brightly in the variety of her gifts and in her unity as she journeys on"(3).²⁵

In keeping with the Second Vatican Council's teachings, John Paul II challenges the faithful to think about "the great challenge of interreligious dialogue to which we shall still be committed in the new millennium." This conversation must go on. It will be particularly crucial in creating a solid foundation for peace. The one God's name must intensify into what it already is: a name of peace and a call to peace (55).²⁶

It is vital to briefly review the history of the local church's renewed commitment to dialogue at the start of the new millennium. Without the innovation started by Pope John XXIII in his summoning of the Second Vatican Council, the Church would never have reached its current respect of dialogue. A perceptive observer can easily spot the "path of dialogue" the Spirit has led Christians along today from the perspective of almost four decades of experience following the conclusion of Vatican II in 1965. A "mandate for

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁵ James H. Kroeger, *Becoming Local Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Publication, 2003), 87.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

dialogue" can be easily identified by local churches from recent church experience and contemplation.²⁷

In the context of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI established the Secretariat for Non-Christians on Pentecost (May 17) 1964 as a separate organization from the Evangelization of Peoples. In 1988, it was renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in order to better reflect the Church's institutional commitment to reaching out to and interacting with people of all faiths. Its task was to look for strategies and tactics for starting a fruitful conversation with non-Christians.²⁸

On August 6, 1964, Pope Paul VI released his programmatic papal letter *Ecclesiam Suam*. The phrase "enter into dialogue with the world in which exists and labors" is used for the first time in an encyclical (67). God initiate the conversation about salvation on his own initiative because He loved us first (74). We must watch for the time when God might make our conversation effective (79).²⁹

The apostolic mission is claimed to be accomplished through dialogue in the same document. The Church in this area acknowledges and honors other non-Christian religions' moral and spiritual principles, and it aspires to work alongside them to advance and protect shared values such religious freedom, human brotherhood, admirable aesthetics, social justice, and law and order. The Vatican II texts, *Nostra Aetate*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Dignitas Humanae*, provide significant aspects for interpreting the Church's role in relation to world faiths. The Council fosters a great respect for all global religions through such publications (AG 10), particularly primitive and traditional religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism (NA 2-4; LG 16). Christians may only receive and follow the inspirations of the Spirit through discourse.³⁰

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) gathered in Taipei, Taiwan, from April 22 to April 27, 1974, to prepare for the International Synod on Evangelization. Their seminal text, *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, emphasized the integral preaching of the Gospel, the formation of a really local church, and the three-way conversation with peoples, cultures, and religions. The Church in Asia, in particular, ought to engage in dialogue with our peoples' great religious traditions.³¹

The brief statement that was made at the conclusion of the 1974 Synod stated that, confident in the work of the Holy Spirit that transcends the boundaries of the Christian community, the Synod desires to encourage dialogues with non-Christian religions in order to better understand the novelty of the Gospel and the fullness of revelation. Paul VI released *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on December 8, 1975, a year after the Synod. The Church values and respects non-Christian religion, according to EN (53). In addition, John Paul II specifically addresses "Dialogue with our Brothers and Sisters of Other Religions" in the fourth chapter of his mission encyclical, "The Paths of Mission" (December 7, 1990).³²

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

³² *Ibid.*, 92 & 94.

Basic Ecclesial Community, The Way Of Synodality

Following Vatican II, the BCSs initially appeared in Brazil and the Philippines as a part of the efforts to revitalize the Church and bring a communitarian experience of the Church, a new way to be Church. Thus, one method of implementing the changes in the Church begun by Vatican II the creation of BECs. In Medellin (1968), the Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM), approved the creation of BECs. Liberation theologians from Latin America began writing about BECs in the 1970s. BECs also continue to spread in Brazil and other Latin American nations. Small Christian Communities, or SCCs, also expand in Africa. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC), which was established in 1977, the establishment of BECs in Asia.³³

Small faith groups that are forming at the grassroots are referred to as BECs. They are not organizations, prayer groups, societies, or affiliations; they are communities. They are stable environments rather than specialized groups. The group members frequently reside to one another and communicate frequently. They qualify as communities due to their size, the level of comradery among the populace. They also be discussing the size and character of the community. Since they are regarded as a method of becoming Church, they are known as ecclesial. They represent the church at the local level, the church in the neighborhood, and the church in the village.³⁴

The ecclesiality of BECs is based on their affiliation with the diocese and the parish. They serve as the diocese's fundamental pastoral unit within each parish. Even though they are being served by lay leaders, the ordained pastors (priests and bishops) are providing pastoral leadership and direction. Just as the diocese is made up of a network of parishes, the parish is made up of a network of BECs. They belong to the larger communion of churches.³⁵

In *Redemptoris Missio* 51, John Paul II has a description of BECs:

These are groups of Christians who, at the level of the family or in a similarly restricted setting, come together for prayer, scripture reading, catechesis, and discussion of human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment. These communities decentralize and organize the parish community, to which they always remain united. They take root in less privileged and rural areas, and become a leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor and neglected, and of commitment to the transformation of society. They are signs of vitality in the Church, a cause of great hope for the Church, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a civilization of love.³⁶

The 'ghetto-mentality' is one of the trends that the local Church and the BECs must resist. We establish a thriving local Church and BECs that turn inward; Christian enclaves that coexist Islamic communities but have no connection to them. The 'ghetto-mentality' or proselytizing not acceptable of carrying out the missionary and evangeliz activities of the local Church and BECs. Through discourse and testimony, it is possible. Evangelization can be done legitimately and effectively through dialogue.³⁷

Since Vatican II, we have been made aware of the importance of having a conversation with Muslims in particular. We are obligated to cooperate with them in

³³ Amado L. Picardal, *Journeying towards a New Way of Being Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Communication Foundation, Inc., 2016), 3-4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

advancing justice, freedom, and peace as well as to live in peace, harmony, and friendship with them. There are various levels at which interreligious conversation can take place. This conversation has previously been by intellectuals and leaders from both sides. But the general public should also be involved. BECs should therefore be at the forefront of this discussion about life and justice.³⁸

CONCLUSION

The Church is portrayed by synodality as being at peace with God, the People of God, and even humanity. The Church exists in its historical setting according to the way that Jesus lived with his Apostles and Followers. Synodality first refers to formal and official gatherings endorsed by individuals in positions of power within the Church (Hierarchy). In the shape of the ecumenism movement, it was later made clear that the Church's spirit was present before brethren and sisters from other Christian communities. The Church engages in interreligious dialogue with other non-Christian believers as a result of their shared journey. The People of God in the Basic Ecclesial Communities serve as the major protagonists.

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³⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.