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Editorial

Synodal Church

In his address on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis pointed out that, “It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”¹ In his vision, the Church is synodal at every level – everyone listening to each other, learning from each other and taking responsibility for the mission of the Church. The International Theological Commission, in the document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2018)² has developed further this concept of synodality.

Though synodality is not a new concept in itself, Pope Francis’ vision of synodality has given it new levels of meaning and new vitality for the life and mission of the Church. Church leaders and theologians have developed further Pope’s vision of synodality, but this vision and its practical implications are to be developed further.

Articles in this issue of *Asian Horizons* discuss different dimensions of synodality: biblical models and foundations; historical development; the vision of Vatican II; Pope Francis’ vision of synodality; canonical aspects; philosophical foundations; models from different continents; its implications for ecumenism, intercultural dialogue and contextual theologies; etc. In particular, the authors underscore that the vision and teachings of Pope Francis, as well as his style of leadership, have developed further the concept of synodality and have given a new impetus to grow

¹Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html

² http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html

into a synodal Church. Synodality is not about turning the Church into a democratic political system. Synodality is an invitation to 'walk together,' 'to journey together,' listening to each other and listening together to the Spirit to realise the mission of the Church to bring about the Kingdom of God.

Christoph Stenschke examines the resolution of the inner-Christian conflicts in the Acts of the Apostles and what the Church can learn from those accounts for practising synodality. He underscores that synodality is the way forward for the Church, especially in the face of the several crises it is facing today in a complex world. Francis Thonippara discusses how Jerusalem Council described in the Acts of the Apostles can be taken as a model for the Church today to live the essence of Christianity, namely, communion, through practising synodality. He explains how synodality can promote communion today and strengthen ecumenical relationships. Proposing a rereading of Vatican I in the light of Vatican II, Peter Neuner undertakes a critical appraisal of papal primacy and infallibility in the background of synodality. He emphasises that the synodal approach can be of great help in promoting ecumenical dialogue and communion.

Drawing inspiration from various philosophical concepts and literary theories, Paul Thelakat points out that the "authority could be compared to writing a novel from dialogic orientation of a word among other words creating new and significant artistic potential in discourse." He explains how synodality can lead the Church to a pastoral and missionary conversion to recover the original freshness of the Gospel. Nihal Abeyasingha elaborates upon the Synod of Bishops, which was instituted as an instrument of wider consultation. He makes a distinction between synodality as an ideal and synodal governance and underlines that synodal structure is in need of constant reform. According to Joachim Schmiedl, synodality is a style of Catholic ecclesiology. Narrating how the concept and practice of synodality developed in the Church, he opines that the "proposition of 'all' participating, 'a few' discussing and 'one' deciding contradicts the development of synodality."

Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, basing their arguments not only on a communion model of the Church but on the authority of conscience, propose the synods to be representative not merely of the episcopate, but of the whole Church "to bear testimony to the participation of all the People of God in the *communion-Church*." They also invite us to remember that dialogue and synodality are only ways to the endpoint, that is, the fullness of truth into which

the Spirit of God is guiding the communion-Church. Presenting the vision of Pope Francis of a synodal Church, Joseph Scaria Palakeel says that it is an invitation to journey together to evangelize. In a synodal Church, without distinction of the hierarchical roles, every faithful is invited to listen to the each other to discern together to bring about the Kingdom of God. Inocent-Mária V. Szaniszló assesses the procedures of democratic participation as described by the ITC document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*. Drawing inspiration from a few authors in particular, he points out the structural crisis in democratic participation in the society today, and underscores the need of strengthening dialogue and search for common solutions.

Rafael Luciani presents how the formation of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) was a unique reception of the Second Vatican Council, and CELAM, especially Medellín, has given shape to a synodal style and practice. This has become a model not only for Latin America, but for the universal Church. Ugochukwu Stophynus Anyanwu considers synodality as the cornerstone of Pope Francis' ecclesiology, and discusses its implications for missionary dynamism for the Church in Africa. The concept of synodality can facilitate dynamic missionary evangelization by promoting contextual theology and ecclesiological models suitable for the African context.

Varghese Poothavelithara elaborates upon the participative bodies in the Church as envisioned by the Codes of Canon Law (CIC and CCEO) and other relevant documents. According to him, an effective means to become a synodal Church is to develop participative bodies in the Church. He opines that while encouraging on the one hand the participative bodies, the canonical legislations have on the other hand placed limitations on them. He cautions that synodality and democracy should not be equated, since synodality is an ecclesial concept having both human and divine elements. Ikenna Paschal Okpaleke evaluates the concept and practice of synodality in the Anglican and Catholic Church and points out how synodality has emerged as an object of ecumenical learning. He also emphasises that synodality cannot be equated with democracy, rather it is a pilgrimage of the People of God with one another.

We have two articles on another very interesting theme, namely, how African and Asian theologies complement each other and how theologians in these two contexts can learn from each other. Francis Nguyen Thanh Hung makes a comparative study of the ancestral

eneration among the Africans and the Vietnamese and shows how it is integrated it into Christian faith and practice. Dhinakaran Savariyar expounds the quest for agency in African and Indian theologies.

From 2020, besides the printed version, we are launching also the **online version** of *Asian Horizons* (available at <http://dvkjournals.in/index.php/ah>).

We have reconstituted the Editorial Board of *Asian Horizons*. We thank those who have completed their term of service: Reimund Bieringer, Paul Chummar C., Andrews Mekkattukunnel, Aloysius Cartegenas, Lisieux Therese, CMC, Thomas Han and Jose de Mesa. We are grateful to the members who have accepted our request to continue. We welcome the new members: María Isabel Gil Espinosa, Massimo Faggioli, Peter Zhao Jianmin, Ormond Rush, Clarence Devadas, Kate Ward, Jutta Battenberg Galindo, Ingeborg Gabriel, Maeve Louise Heaney VDMF, Jeffrey Chang, Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, Nontando Margaret Hadebe, Bp. Theotonijs Gomes, Peter G. Kirchschräger, Pablo A. Blanco Gonzalez, Mathai Kadavil, OIC, Catherine E. Clifford, John Junyang Park, Beena Therese, CMC, Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, CMI, Marcel Sarot and Fabrizio Zandonadi Catenassi. The collaboration of more members from different continents will help us develop further the international network of theologians, which we hope, will be reflected in the contributions in *Asian Horizons*.

Shaji George Kochuthara
Editor-in-Chief

Asian Horizons: New Website

<http://dvkjournals.in/index.php/ah>

- Open access to all the back issues
- Open access to Abstract of the articles of the current year.