

## *Editorial*

### **Towards a Synodal Church: Moral Implications**

It was on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2015, on the occasion of the ceremony commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, that Pope Francis first spoke of a 'synod' and 'synodality', noting that what the Lord is asking of us today in the third millennium is 'synodality', namely, that the laity, the pastors, and the Bishops of the Church, journey together and strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission.<sup>1</sup>

Pope Francis officially launched the two-year (now extended to three years) 16<sup>th</sup> Synod of Bishops, Synod on Synodality, on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2021, having as its theme "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission." Communion and mission, he explained, are theological terms describing the mystery of the Church; 'communion' is cohesion and interior fullness, in grace, truth and collaboration, while 'mission' is our apostolic commitment to the world of today. 'Communion' and 'mission' will remain abstract if there is no participation of the members, and hence Pope Francis encouraged the participation in the synod of all the baptized through their local churches, since, through baptism, all Christians are called to take part in the Church's life and mission. Synodality, the Pope stated, involves walking together and listening to one another, but above all to the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, "Ceremony Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops" (17 October, 2015), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/document\\_s/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/document_s/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html).

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, "Address of the Holy Father Francis on the occasion of the Moment of Reflection for the Beginning of the Synodal Journey" (09 October, 2021),

It was most appropriate, then, that while the various dioceses of the world were engaged in their own reflections and discussions on the Synod on Synodality, the Association of Moral Theologians of India (AMTI), also decided to reflect on this important synodal theme, with a special focus on its moral implications for India. Consequently, the topic of the AMTI Conference this year (21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2022) was entitled, "Towards a Synodal Church: Moral Implications." The sixteen articles presented in this volume dwell on the various issues on the theme and its moral implications, especially in the context of India.

In his Presidential Address, Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, the current president of the AMTI, while stressing that synodality belonged to the genetics of Christianity from the very beginning, through its various ecumenical councils, regional or provincial synods, the diocesan synods, and the *palliyogam* of the Syro-Malabar Church (which later on was lost sight of), at the same time, centralization, clericalism, and hierarchicalism also existed side by side, in practice making the members of the Church unequal, and distorting the synodal nature of the Church. He went on to show in various documents of the Second Vatican Council how the communal and collegial character of the Church was rediscovered, and how Pope Francis, following Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI, has now given a further boost to synodality through the Synod on Synodality. Kochuthara goes on to list the various issues that the Church faces today due to a lack of synodality, and highlights especially the problems of justice and transparency in the Church. If we are truly to be a synodal church, then women and men are to be recognized as equal in dignity, and be given equal opportunities to work together for the good of the community and for the glory of God.

In his keynote address, "Synodality: Call for a Participatory Church 'Journeying Together,'" Yesu Karunanidhi explores the concepts of 'Synod' and 'Synodality' from the point of view of linguistics, philosophy, Bible, history, and theology, and then follows up by discussing the various synodal challenges to theological ethics, and the ethical challenges to synodality.

Jipson Joseph begins his article "Ethical Process in Decision-Making for a Synodal Church," by uncovering the meanings of 'synod' and 'synodality.' The present Synod on Synodality called for by Pope Francis serves as a good "synodal model for decision-

making” since he has urged the bishops to consult their priests and the lay faithful in order to arrive at good decisions through open, free and honest discussions, patient listening, and consensus-building. Drawing on P.C. Singh and Bernard Lonergan, the author explains the process of decision-making and how good decisions are arrived at. He discusses the three indispensable keys at the heart of a synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission and the three keys at the heart of prudent decision-making: discernment, participatory-consultation, and a responsible decision.

Quite often, the lay faithful have a very minimal role in decision-making or in the life of the Church. Nelson Mathew, O.Carm. discusses the role of the lay faithful in a synodal church in “Lay Faithful in a Synodal Church.” The synodal model of being church, emphasized since Vatican II, and in which the entire People of God participate in the life and mission of the Church, is clearly a shift from the traditional Church’s idea of a teaching hierarchy and a learning laity. A core element of the synodal church is the *sensus fidei*, a spiritual charism of discernment, possessed by the whole Church. The author traces the roots of the understanding of *sensus fidei* through the Old and New Testaments and in the writings of some prominent theologians. He next discusses how the theological foundation for the participation and communion of the laity in a synodal church is based on its Christology, Ecclesiology, and its understanding of the Holy Trinity. The author suggests how synodality can foster the participation of the entire people of God at the local (parish or diocesan) levels as well as at the universal level, while also detailing how synodality can help lay participation in the multi-cultural, multi-religious, and pluralistic context of India.

What is the rightful place of women in the Church today? Sr Ann Mary Madavanakkad, CMC, in her article “Women in a Synodal Church,” notes that there is a growing awareness today that there is a bias against women and that they are not given their rightful place in the life and mission of the Church. Delving into both the OT and the NT, she uncovers the important roles played by various women in salvation history and in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the early Church, and highlights the inferior treatment meted out to women in the church through the centuries. She concludes by detailing the various ways women are, and can be, helpful in the synodal Church today, while also making some suggestions for improving the status of women in the Indian church.

In “Equality and Justice as Keys to Building a Synodal Church,” John Karuvelil, SJ, explains that synodality, ‘walking together,’ is at

the heart of Christian vocation and mission, and that synodality can happen only in communion, modelled on the Trinitarian God – the Father, the Son and the Spirit, who lives communion and synodality in its perfect form. Equality and justice are keys to synodality. In the absence of either of these the question of synodality becomes moot. John elaborates on equality by first explaining the two foundations of equality for Christians, namely, equality at the level of creation, that is, being created in the image and likeness of God, and equality that is received by the fact of our baptism into Christ. He then looks into the various dimensions of justice, like the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, communion, participation, option for the poor, etc. and explains the importance of each of these aspects for synodality and the building up of a synodal Church.

Josin George Kaithakulam, CMI, in “Ethical Exercise of Leadership in a Synodal Church” first attempts to highlight the various ways synodal leadership can be exercised and then explains that the best model found in the Bible is that of ecclesial leadership. The Christian perspective of leadership becomes ethical only when leadership is redefined as serving the good of everyone at stake (servant leadership), exercised in openness and humility after the example of Jesus, rather than on becoming mere administrators or acting in a domineering manner. The missionary discipleship is the criterion of judging how synodal we are; our mission is the source and end of synodal leadership.

Mathew Illathuparampil highlights the issue of “Transparency and Accountability in the Synodal Church.” Hopes for a synodal Church are rising all over the world, and together with it, greater transparency and accountability, which today the Church greatly lacks. He expounds the concepts of transparency and accountability, arguing that transparency is no longer an option, but a moral obligation for the Church; transparency cannot be ensured by legal mechanisms alone, but is based more on trust, built up by participation and co-responsibility of all its members. As the Church becomes more and more synodal, it will become more and more transparent and accountable. The author then details the various expected areas of transparency in the Church, along with the means to ensure such transparency and accountability.

Today, unfortunately, we see that there is a lot of abuse of power in the Church. William Eronimoose, MI, discusses this issue in “Abuse of Power Versus Synodality.” Power, when used rightly, brings about a lot of good, because “the source of power is God, the model is Christ, and the *telos* is the good of the person.” The author details

how power may be used in rightful ways, as well as the various ways power is abused and the harmful effects they bring. He then sums up the discussion with the true meaning of synodality as put forth by Pope Francis, and how synodality can be a good remedy today to curb the abuse of power and use it rightly for the good of all and for building up God's Kingdom.

John Crasta's article, "Making the Indian Church More Synodal," brings out the idea that the whole People of God should acknowledge their specific vocation in the Church and work towards its realization. For the Indian Church to be synodal it needs to be more democratic, and one of the important ways to achieve this end is to return to its roots, later impoverished by clericalism, to the life of the early Christian community, where we see synodality truly at work. Some other ways of enhancing synodality in the Indian Church are through a closer communion with the Dalit and Tribal Christians and the victims of exclusion and marginalization, through gender equity, listening to the voices of the poor, and the care for our common home.

Sr Dery Davis K., in her paper, "A Synodal Church in the Indian Context of Religious and Cultural Pluralism," attempts to illustrate how a synodal Church can walk alongside people of various religions and cultures in India. The article explores the theological grounds of religious pluralism, the present-day conditions in India, and how synodality manifests itself in the religious and cultural pluralistic reality of India. The paper also focuses on how the synodal principles of communion and participation are used by the Church in the multi-cultural context of India. Finally, the article ends with a few suggestions for making the Indian Church truly synodal.

Sahayaraj Stanley, SJ, dwells on the missionary dimension of a synodal Church in "A Synodal Church in Mission - Ethical Implications (Perspectives from Tamilnadu)." A truly synodal Church engages in fulfilling Jesus' mission of building God's Kingdom on earth. In tracing the history of mission up to the present, Sahayaraj chalks out three distinct models of the missionary Church: a 'conquering' Church (going forth to foreign lands and cultures and planting itself in those unfamiliar territories), an 'intellectual' Church (entering into a cognitive dialogue with local cultures in the hope of eventually winning people's minds and hearts), and currently, a 'prophetic' Church (focusing on an all-inclusive liberation of all). The synodal Church's three 'inner' ethical implications, and three 'outer' ethical ramifications are elaborated. For a fruitful 'inner' ethical orientation, it is argued that a synodal Church needs conversion and

the need to believe in the ‘good news’ of Jesus and to help people grow in mature faith. Other ethical ‘outer’ challenges include tackling the menace of clericalism and removing the curse of casteism. Finally, Sahayaraj argues that a synodal Church needs to adopt the prophetic approach with a view to total societal transformation.

Paulachan Kochappilly, CMI, exploring “Synodality in the Eastern Churches: Ethical Implications,” sees synodality in the Eastern Churches in her sacramental and liturgical life. The Eastern Churches, in general, and the Syro-Malabar Church, in particular, is the Church singing the praise and honour, worship and thanksgiving to the Lord our God. The author explores the structure, nature, and nurturing ground of synodality in the liturgy of the Syro-Malabar *Qurbana*. The liturgy helps to build up the assembly, which is then sent forth to build up the human community and the world

Gigesh Thomas Meckal, TOR, in “Catholic Sexual Ethics—Voices of Dissent, the Ecclesially Liminal and the Synodal Church: A Critical Theological Examination,” presents the vision of Pope Francis, stressing that in order to discern the *sensus fidei* with regard to sexual morality, it is not sufficient to just listen, as some prominent theologians argue, to only committed believers, but to each member of the Church, especially those who are on the existential periphery, in their own particular contexts, and whose views on sexual ethics may diverge from the official teachings of the Church. Gigesh argues that apart from lived experience, due consideration of other sources of theology, viz. scripture, tradition and reason, is also necessary for the accurate discernment of the movement of the Spirit in the faithful.

James Kumar, CSsR, discusses the issue of “Migrants in a Synodal Church,” and argues that the Church and the civil authorities can work together to bring about a lasting and just solution to the humanitarian crisis brought about by migration. Among the many moral and social principles that could be applied towards such a solution, he focuses on the ‘Universal Destination of Created Goods’ as one of the working principles towards an effective solution.

Finally, we realize that if the Church is to become truly synodal, then a good formation in our seminaries and religious houses is imperative. This is what Sr Vimala Chenginimattam, CMC, insists upon in her article “Synodality: Implications for Seminary and Religious Formation,” and draws some implications for synodality in both seminary and religious formation. She also details various approaches for the integration of formation in a synodal way, while also creating a textual space for the discourse of reformation to take

place in the formation process and inviting paradigm shifts in the bottom-to-top pedagogy in priestly formation. The article also stresses the integration of spiritual and intellectual formation in seminary and religious formation.

We hope the articles in this issue will deepen our reflection on synodality and help us to make the Church in the world, and also in India, truly synodal, so that it becomes a beacon of light and hope to all. For, as Pope Francis stated,

A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. Is 11:12) in a world which...often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.<sup>3</sup>

**Anthony L. Fernandes**

*Editor, Special Issue*

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<sup>3</sup>Pope Francis, “Ceremony Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops.”