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ETHICAL EXERCISE OF LEADERSHIP IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

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Abstract

The less synodality, pertaining to participation and fraternity, is understood, the more it is talked about. With its democratic face, synodality calls for a change in the style of doing and leading. It is walking together that mutual understanding and appreciation of both—the leading and the lead—takes place. Its purpose is not to win over the other or outshine the other, but the common good—the reason behind the talk of synodality. The paper makes attempt to explain synodality in the primary context of ecclesial leadership. The Christian perspective of leadership becomes ethical only when leadership is redefined as serving the good of everyone at stake that prerequisites openness and humility. The missionary discipleship is the criterion of judging how synodal we are that our focus is more on ministering than administering. This mission is the source and end of synodal leadership. Therefore, synodal leadership invokes to rectify the exercise of authority as suppressing the other, or its style domineering that might have affected fraternity, equality, and impartiality endangering the shepherding envisaged by Jesus.

Keywords: Christian Leadership; Ecclesial Leadership; Ethical Leadership; Servant Leadership; Socialized Charismatic Leadership; Synodal Leadership; Synodality in Ministry

Introduction

Where two or three come together, there arises the question of power or the feeling who is prominent. Where dignity, respect, and

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mutuality are called for, it is not power but fraternity that adds up. Though from its beginning of Church has witnessed synods, its style or spirit requires renewal in our time, where a significant element of the talk on synodality falls on the role of authority. Though service, instead of authority, is epitomized in the Church, our history may not endorse this fact. Therefore, this paper attempts to reflect on how to exercise authority or have ethical leadership in the Church in the light of synodality talks. The paper has three parts: the first part is regarding how synodality is prefigured in the Gospel, taking two decision-making scenes; second, how leadership paradigms can contribute to Church leadership; and third, typical ways to exercise authority in the Church to make it synodal.

1. Synodality and Leadership

The very thought of synodality brings to mind the idea of leadership or its change of style, not to mention some of the expectations and concerns. A reflection on synodality would help better understand what leadership means about the purpose of the existence of the Church—to give the world the Gospel message of the life and resurrection of Jesus. For some, it helps to acknowledge and appreciate the essence and uniqueness of Christian leadership in the context of leadership patterns that unravel the great characteristics of synodality remaining ambiguous and volatile to some extent. Two metaphors pertaining to synodality are found in the scripture—the first is the episode of the trial of Jesus, and the second is entrusting God’s people to the leadership of Peter.

1.1. Hierarchical Leadership at the Trial of Jesus and Synodality

Joseph Ben Caiaphas, the high priest of the year, who presides over the Sanhedrin, wants to accuse Jesus by all means. He heeds the accusations of the chief priests and the Pharisees and wants to suppress him because Jesus is found to be a threat. Neither did he want to displease the elders, chief priests, and the Romans nor did he want the religious order and traditions to get violated. Then, he sends Jesus to Pilate, who, though he had known of Jesus and His messianic claims, was influenced by the crowd. Among differing opinions concerning the direct role of Pilate in the decision to execute Jesus, a close analysis makes it clear that Jesus was condemned as a violator of Roman law, not Jewish law. While Pilate reassessed the consequence, discerned the best, and washed his hands of Jesus’ blood, the Jews yelled and got their demands accepted. What is to be noted is the role played by everyone in making a decision: the interests of both Romans and the Jews are considered, and decisions are made considering different factors.

1.2. Peter Being Asked to Feed His Sheep – Synodality Prefigured

Completely shattered by the death of Jesus, Peter tells others of his decision to go fishing, and others too make up their mind to go with him. Jesus appears to them, but their confused minds could not recognize him. Therefore, Jesus addresses them without losing his patience, engages in a dialogue, guides them in their job, and serves them in satiating their immediate need. Finally, there is a surge of fraternity. The understanding of synodality! While reinstating Peter, Jesus asks the same question thrice—do you love me—to emphasize the importance of love and unswerving obedience to the Lord in the future ministry he would be entrusted with. The mission God entrusts is to be responded with unconditional love, going beyond one's concerns and getting into the realm of care. Synodality in reference to authority demands love and care for the people in fulfilling the mission, and love and loyalty to the Church while making claims of the former.

2. Insights from Modern Leadership Theories for Leadership in a Synodal Church

Leadership in a Synodal Church shows us what an adult Church looks like. Having seen two metaphors, one specifically dealing with governance and decision-making and the other with ministry or entrusting mission, we see how contemporary leadership studies could give insights into synodal leadership. We limit ourselves to two models of leadership that would endorse some of the ideals of leadership exemplified by Jesus.

2.1. Loss of Synodality and Socialized Charismatic Leadership

The notions of 'journeying together' and 'pilgrim' belong to the very essence of the Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology. Even the convening of the Council itself was in a synodal manner. It is evident in its preparation in terms of broader discussions involving bishops all over the world, religious orders, Catholic universities, etc.¹ Participation was the *modus* that the council Fathers had a say in the process. The imposition from the Holy office was not followed.² Perhaps, in the following years one can also see efforts to maintain the synodal manner. Nevertheless, the synodal spirit started losing its

¹For background and details, see Giuseppe Alberigo, "Le ragioni dell'opzione pastorale del Vaticano II," *Synaxis* 20 (2002) 489–509. During the First Session, the notion of pastorality became more and more influential for determining the Council's orientation.

²Christopher McMahon, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2010, 3.

appeal and power: imposition and assertion became a fashion in the place of the fraternal and dialogical culture, and participation was restricted to a minority or people of a close circle. It seems to have forgotten what *Lumen Gentium* (#12) emphasizes, the Church means the gathering of the faithful in the first place. Sharing the baptismal dignity of being vested in Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, they make up the Church community. This would have helped to broaden the concept of the synod as a process with dynamic features. In this respect, mainly, Pope Francis is innovative in “introducing new possibilities for the understanding of the Church, its hierarchical structures and its leadership, and its service to the world.”³

From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis as a socialized charismatic leader, emphasized a pastoral praxis of synodality, giving utmost importance to the Church as people of God journeying together. He wanted to translate authority into service in this journey of walking together. Authority consisted of thinking with the Church and service in moving with the Church in a fraternal and dialogical culture. For him, “the service of good-spiritedness and discernment make us men of Church—ecclesial men—not clerical men—‘men of others,’ having nothing that isolates, but placing everything that we have in common and at the service of others.”⁴ Socialized charismatic leaders articulate a vision that serves the organization’s interests and governs in an egalitarian manner. They seek to empower followers actively and govern through established channels of authority to accomplish their goals.⁵ Charismatic leadership can play a major role in line with synodality when the Church is often surrounded by a crisis of one form or another, specifically in bringing radical changes both in understanding the realities in the Church and the style of functioning. Thus, synodality would pave the way to regain what is lost in the semi-bureaucratic and hierarchical functioning.

2.2. Servant Leadership and Regaining Synodality

This model, developed by Robert Greenleaf, is based on Herman Hesse’s *Journey to the East*, which teaches that a great leader is first seen as a servant.⁶ This concept of leadership is valid and relevant in

³Jacques Haers, “A Synodal Process on Synodality: Synodal Missionary Journeying and Common Apostolic Discernment,” *Louvain Studies* 43, 3 (2020) 215-238, at 216.

⁴Haers, “A Synodal Process on Synodality,” 224.

⁵Stephen G. Fogarty, “The Dark Side of Charismatic Leadership,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies*, 13 (2010) 7-20, at 10.

⁶Robert Greenleaf, *Servant-Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977 (reprint, 2002), 21-22.

the Catholic perspective on leadership, as the Church is the servant of its people. Nevertheless, 'servant leadership' leads to a very challenging, more humane, deeper, and spiritual understanding of leadership. It underlines the noble fact that leadership is at the service of others and overrules that leadership is diametrically on par with the position one holds. Greenleaf never formally defined servant leadership but envisaged a leader as one who goes ahead and guides the way: it can be the mother at home, head of an organization, or one with influence.⁷ The *kenosis* of Jesus would be a Biblical and perfect example in that he forfeits his privileges to serve humanity better. Altruism, simplicity, and openness are hallmarks of this model, where a capacity for listening and interacting exists. As the leadership style of Jesus reflects, servant leadership also honours the personal dignity and worth of all who are led. It creates an occasion to evoke as much as possible the innate creative power of each of the followers. "[It] transcends self-interest to serve the needs of others by helping them grow professionally and emotionally. The fulfilment of others' needs is said to be the servant leader's ultimate goal."⁸ It is not the human instinct to grab power but the quest for or the expression of humaneness that makes a servant leader.

Synodality invites us to rediscover Jesuan style oriented to service – "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (Mt 20: 28a). This is very much possible in the creation of a dialogue culture and listening to people along with reading the signs of the times. When one is chosen or assigned for ecclesiastical positions from among the contemporaries, a shift in the attitude takes place: from 'I am the servant of servants of God' (*servus servorum Dei*) to the claim, 'I am different,' 'I am first and the most important,' and 'mine is the last word.' The uniqueness and distinction are reasonable and intelligent, considering the equity based on merit and position by way of ministry, but not on account of any reasonable highness in themselves. To the extent the Church is for all – both for the least and lost; great and small, the privileged and the underprivileged, saints and sinners, synodality under discussion could be seen as equivalent to servant leadership. Perhaps, it is what synodality in terms of leadership demands: Servant leadership is not rooted in a quest for power, fame, or any self-centred goal. It is something a person

⁷Greenleaf, *Servant-Leadership*, 23, 27.

⁸Richard L. Daft, *The Leadership Experience*, 2 ed., New York: Harcourt College Publishers, 2002, as quoted in Lussier Robert N., and Christopher F. Achua. *Leadership: Theory, application and skill development*, 2 ed., Eagan, MN: South-Western, 2004, 362.

discovers, not a leadership style one leader can teach another.[...]. He or she listens well and feels the human condition. Servant leaders are concerned with the least privileged in society and strive to help others grow as persons.⁹

The best example for such a leadership is found in the Gospel of Luke¹⁰ which depicts a leader (the greatest in the group) as the one who is like a servant. The maxim mostly remains in letters or in principle and is often echoed — ‘authority is service.’ That is possible only when one tries to see through the eyes of the followers and with the firm determination that the common good is not compromised for anything valuable personally and immediately. Further, De Pree asserts, “[t]he servanthood of leadership needs to be felt, understood, believed and practiced if we’re to be faithful.”¹¹ The claim of being a servant leader is futile unless it becomes a lived reality to be acknowledged.

2.3. Synodality and Christian Perspective of Leadership

A Christian understanding of leadership may depend upon the concept of God and how humanity and community are understood. How the community conceives God tells how the community understands human relationships and organizational dynamism, as how one understands oneself in relation to God may reflect on one’s interpersonal relation and responsibility.

Christian theology understands God as three persons in eternal relation to one another. God is what he is in virtue of what the Father, Son, and Spirit give to and receive from one other. In the mutual relations of giving and receiving, each of the divine persons manifests his own personhood and affirms that of the other persons.¹²

This is the framework of synodality where people differently gifted but equal, give and take; first on account of mission and responsibility among the equals that foster a relationship of dependence, formality, due control, and respect. Everyone serving the Church or as a member of the Church has a mission, better to say, a ministry though they differ according to one’s call or state of life, and there could even be things that are not typically ministry in the strict sense. “Ministry is a public ecclesial activity; it is inspired by the

⁹ Andrea Giampetro-Meyer et al., “Do We Really Want More Leaders in Business?” *Journal of Business Ethics* 17, 15 (1998) 1727-1736, at 1734.

¹⁰ “But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?” (Lk 22:26-27).

¹¹ Max De Pree, *Leadership Jazz*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 10.

¹² Fogarty, “The Dark Side of Charismatic Leadership,” 16.

Spirit working through an individual; it is exercised on behalf of the ecclesial community and therefore carries implicit and explicit authorization from the community.”¹³ The good of the community is the norm of ministry, even regarding its style and magnitude.

According to theologian Jürgen Moltmann, the doctrine of the Trinity indicates a community of men and women without supremacy and subjection.¹⁴ When everyone is taken into account, their dignity is affirmed and contributes to the common good. In return, it makes possible the development and expression of oneself. A feeling of superiority on account of better knowledge, skills, relationship, etc., would be natural. Still, when the vested power of one is above the power holder, his/her position, dignity, and the role of others, it amounts to domination, subjugation, and unchristian attitude. Synodality reminds that “[t]he liberation He brought called for those in power to see themselves as servants and siblings, free from the appetite for greater power [...]. He does not introduce or bless privileges that give rise to classes and divisions between persons [...]. (His) is the power of love.”¹⁵ Synodality is opposite to autocratic hierarchy that violates the reflection of the Trinitarian community. It is more in tune with the democratic community that in no way implies a place of anarchism but a community without suppressing superiority and worthless slavery. In such a community, in the words of Miroslav Volf, “people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession.”¹⁶

Synodality envisages not merely seeking an opinion poll or having some socialistic tenets but transcending the aristocratic and autocratic styles. It is the convergence of socialized charismatic leadership and servant leadership that corresponds to the model of Jesus, who always held the dignity of everyone in the community; found the pluri-voice or differences in the voice as of the one lost sheep out of the flock of ninety-nine, but never disparaged them. In the words of Fogarty, “[t]he more an organization is characterized by the

¹³Anne Benjamin and Charles Burford, *Leadership in a Synodal Church*, Mulgrave: Garratt Publishing, 2021, 9.

¹⁴Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 192.

¹⁵Leonardo Boff, “The Power of the Institutional Church – Can it be Converted?” (1981), extract in Gerard Mannion, et al., ed., *Readings in Church Authority: Gifts and Challenges for Contemporary Catholicism*, Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003, 536.

¹⁶Miroslav Volf, *After our likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 198.

symmetrical and decentralized distribution of power and freely affirmed interaction, the more will it correspond to the nature of God and the more likely it is to unleash the human potential of its participants.”¹⁷ The Church as an organization or consisting of thousands of micro organizational units should, as synodality demands, be a place where right and transparent relationships and openness, unity and diversities become the paradigm in leading the Church, more specifically, ‘taking care of His lambs.’

3. Ethical Exercise of Authority in the Church

For Christians, the first thought of authority brings superiority, and for many the loyalty to authority is seen as just a means, not an end in self, and is integrally related to the purpose. By “authority,” one means the quality by virtue of which persons or institutions make laws and give orders to people and expect obedience from them. This definition nuances an adherence to a hierarchical order and its stipulations without any consideration for the importance of objective reality (truth) and the subjective expressions of individual opinions and values. Today when people talk of democratic style and dialogical culture, ‘ordering’ or ‘lording over’ style in the exercise of authority seems inexpedient, unproductive, or unnecessary as individuals fail to feel their dignity and autonomy. No one can claim to have the perfect possession of rightness and the wholesale deal of truth, as if there is no room for question, clarification, dialogue, etc. “Every (person) has the duty and therefore the right, to seek the truth in matters religious, in order that they may with prudence form for themselves right and true judgements of conscience, with the use of all suitable means” (DH #3).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly talks about the need for legitimate authority: “Human society can be neither well-ordered nor prosperous unless it has some people invested with legitimate authority to preserve its institutions and to devote themselves as far as is necessary to work and care for the good of all” (CCC #1897). Again, “the duty of obedience requires all to give due honour to authority and to treat those who are charged to exercise it with respect, and, in so far as it is deserved, with gratitude and goodwill” (CCC #1900). It means there could be times when authority does not deserve obedience, whether the matter under consideration is not ethical or when it does not serve the common good. “It (authority) must not behave in a despotic manner, but must act for the common

¹⁷Fogarty, “The Dark Side of Leadership,” 17.

good as a ‘moral force based on freedom and a sense of responsibility’” (CCC# 1902). These two points say something about the issues regarding authority in our time when there is a rising feeling that authority takes the way of arbitrariness, using it as a means to keep the status quo or to safeguard position and prestige; it is nothing but pastoral schizophrenia.

3.1. An Understanding of the Church and the Role of Authority

Understanding the Church is important to know and fulfil our place in it as members. Membership is not based on any merit; it is a gift and a call. Everyone has received a universal call to holiness. While some get attracted to the person of Christ and the richness of Christ’s teachings and remain as members of the Church, some become disciples on account of their substantial adhering to the person of Christ. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines a disciple this way: “The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it” (CCC # 1816). As people of God, everyone shares the three-fold ministry of Christ. As Pope John Paul II said, all the faithful, together with the clergy and consecrated people, make up the one people of God and the Body of Christ,¹⁸ and the only task for everyone is a missionary task—to witness Christ. Even the hierarchy stands at the service of the same.

In the words of Pope Francis, “all the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization.”¹⁹ In this process, the Church of Christ is led by the Holy Spirit, which seems to be a forgotten factor as a few take the leadership claim exhaustively; therefore, synodality renews the Church’s faith in the Holy Spirit. It is to be so assimilated that even in formal leadership, discerning and leading is by virtue of the action of the Holy Spirit and fidelity to the Gospel.²⁰ To be faithful to the people of God in the local Church, communal discernment is indispensable that implies ‘carefully and courageously listening to the groans of the Spirit’ (cf. Rom 8:26), which emerge through the explicit, or sometimes silent cry that goes up from the People of God. To the question of how and how far, the answer we can find in the

¹⁸Pope John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, 30 December 1988, #28. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jpii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html.

¹⁹Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, #120.

²⁰International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, # 21.

words of Pope Francis: “To listen to God, so that with Him we may hear the cry of His People; to listen to His People until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.”²¹ Understanding authority should emerge from understanding the nature of the Church—a redeeming, reconciling, missionary Church, and its role in the particular context, perhaps, going beyond what is safeguarded in the law book.

3.2. Journey with Open-mindedness and Humility

The understanding that we are here as witnesses and our mission is on behalf of the Church only for a limited time and only in the given context makes us better service providers with undivided hearts and reverence. We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come (Cf. Heb 13:14). It would give us the freedom of sojourners, no clinging to a particular place, position, people, or privilege. This knowledge, though theoretically possessed, does not bring about the beauty of real service or make it experienceable; what is more important is commitment and constant vigilance lest we fall prey to a totalitarian attitude of having everything under one’s control. Being victims of our systems, traditions, and non-integral formation, lack of holistic vision, far off from realities and the real context needs, our service gets relegated to ritualistic actions. Therefore, people in leadership often get preoccupied with consequences, benefits and reputation, support-seeking, safeguarding of one’s good name, wider coverage, popularity, and fame even after death as the protagonist of this or that. Such undercurrents limit our mission, distance us from the mission of the Church, and cloud our vision and identity as disciples, leading us to an unhealthy attitude – I should grow, no matter if He decreases; I should be safe, no matter what, others have to suffer. Synodality may remain at the level of discussion unless it becomes a process that goes deep into our mentality, so much so that we get out of the feeling—we are okay, and we are right, and everything around us looks good. Dialogue with people does not mean sitting around and talking—it involves remaining open to them and understanding them as much as possible.

Vatican II clearly says that we are not a Church of pilgrims but a pilgrim Church going through history (LG #48). As long as we are on this earth endowed with real sanctity, though imperfect (LG #48), it

²¹Pope Francis, *Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, AAS 107 (2015) 1141; International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March, 2018, #114.

may have weaknesses and imperfections that should not comprise the mission. Synodality may make us realize our false stance as pilgrims that we are perfect: it is they who have to change; we are preachers, others are listeners; we do not need, others are in need; we are givers, others are takers. Instead of the traditional way of controlling, overpowering and dominating, leadership should be seen in discovering, freeing up, and empowering of the gifts of the People of God and making them feel that they are fellow travellers with a shared quest and mission. The glory of God should replace the over-concern for success and triumph.

3.3. Becoming Pastors, not Administrators

We see the growing bureaucratic style of functioning in the Church that seems to have been accepted as a standard way of functioning, which sometimes gives the feeling that the Church is nothing less than a corporate. Having a secretariat has become inevitable under the pretext of making everything systematic and efficient. What efficiency could be proud of if we utterly fail in our primary task of missionary discipleship? Both administrative setup and administrative inefficiency are desirable and good only when they contribute to mission and pastoral activity. Besides, “they [competent management and administration] are tools at the service of mission, vision, and values and strategic outcomes: necessary to support the mission, not sufficient to promote it.”²² Unless we are careful of becoming merely a part of the machinery, it is not unlikely that we become mere institutional administrators²³ and managers, ending up in careerism.

Priests and Church leaders commissioned with a ministry are primarily pastoral shepherds with the smell of the sheep; the other roles, however rewarding and advantageous, should not disorient their mission as pastors. In our situation, a pastoral conversion is very much needed that would give a facelift to priestly life as some of the roles they play now give an impression of that of managers, obsessed with power and running the show.

3.4. Making Leadership a Ministry: Trans-relational, Transparent and Sensitive

The time is up for leadership to be put in perspective. Ecclesial leadership is no more a one-person show with a patriarchal style but a matter of discernment and moving as pilgrims, as we have seen above, adequately taking into consideration the concerns of the time.

²²Benjamin and Burford, *Leadership in a Synodal Church*, 3.

²³Parochial administrator is a term we find in Canon Law too. See CIC, Can. 539.

For Anne Benjamin and Charles Burford, ecclesial leadership is rightly centred on and draws its inspiration from the person of Jesus Christ.²⁴ It should consider the context of His people, characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, without losing the courage to listen to them and hold on to truth and morals. John Crothers is of the opinion that it is effective when it is internalized and becomes a leadership of the heart and not just leadership of the head.²⁵ Secondly, making a leadership ministry, in other words, Jesus's command of 'feed and take care of sheep and lamb' (Jn 21:16-17) is challenging. This mission of Jesus entrusted to the Church urges the Church leaders for a kind of leadership that belongingness and commitment to it (*yes, Lord, I make it known to you that I love*) makes one powerful to serve, not to be served. Authority in the ecclesial circle is not the power to elicit service and benefits in one's own interest. One's charism and character are decisive only when one lets the Holy Spirit work. That becomes a ministry, 'the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit's charism and an individual personality on behalf of the Christian community to witness, to serve and realize the Kingdom of God.'²⁶

The fact that the laity share in the common priesthood (cf. LG 10) necessitates a new reflection on hierarchical ministry, namely as collaborative. Pope Benedict affirms that "it is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and the respective roles of the consecrated and of lay people."²⁷ Distinctiveness does not constitute superiority, but creates space for wider relationship and perfection. Everyone is served and no one is excluded. S. Alexander Haslam and colleagues postulate Jesus of the gospels as an exemplar of a 'transrelational model' of leadership.²⁸ The New Testament always gives us only a picture of transrelational leadership—going beyond one's world and moving towards the community. Pope Francis, too,

²⁴Benjamin and Burford, *Leadership in a Synodal Church*, 5.

²⁵John Crothers, *The Clergy Club*, Melbourne: Garratt Publishing, 2018, 17.

²⁶Thomas F. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, Paulist Press: New York, 1983, 142.

²⁷Pope Benedict XVI, Opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the theme of Church membership and pastoral co-responsibility, 26 May 2009.

²⁸Branson Christopher, Marra Maureen and Buchanan Michael, "Re-constructing Catholic school leadership: integrating mission, identity and practice," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 11 (2019), 3. See also, S. Alexander Haslam, Stephen D. Reicher and Michael J. Platow, *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence and Power*, London: Routledge, 2020, xiv.

calls for such a Church—a synodal Church characterized by receptivity, mutuality, transparency, and accountability;²⁹ such a leadership enhances mutual relationship.

Leadership in a Synodal Church can become a reality only when accountability, transparency, and inclusion are embraced and lived following the pattern Jesus who humbled himself unto death on the cross (Mt 20: 25-27). This demands of the leaders of the Church – be humble as servants, not for any reason other than for the edification of the flock entrusted to our care. Authority in the synodal Church is a ministry, and

as vicars and legates of Christ, [it is to govern] the particular churches entrusted to them by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power, which indeed they use only for the edification of their flock in truth and holiness, remembering that he who is greater should become as the lesser and he who is the chief become as the servant (LG #27).

The Church or parish community remains united with a specific identity because of shared doctrines and beliefs. Besides them, there are factors like good and valid conventional practices, customs, and values of a particular place and culture that could be called ecclesial culture. Perhaps, for a particular community, the ecclesial culture could be the norm by which they measure everything. In order to blend both authority and our vision and plans in a specific context, the ecclesial culture is important; if needed, it should be renewed. The faithful, even though they may not voice it in the official forums, expect that the pastors or those who represent them are insightful, honest, impartial, simple, approachable, compassionate, resourceful, and principled. They do not expect an instant miracle worker or hero while dealing with them, but a person with values and principles and an understanding heart. That is what we find very striking and heart-winning in the case of John Maria Vianney.

3.5. Mission as the Source and End of Leadership

The folly of many ordained ministers for overpowering and becoming assertive like a secular leader could be the failure to identify one's role and responsibility in alignment with the mission of Jesus. According to Francis J. Moloney, "[a]ll conversation about leadership in the Christian tradition must begin and end with the

²⁹Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission* (Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches), Vatican City: September 2021, # 9,10. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/09/07/210907b.html>.

figure of Jesus of Nazareth.”³⁰ It is the same mission on behalf of the Church in a different time and place for which the efforts should be oriented to discover and rediscover Jesus in the scripture and traditions. The style should inundate the qualities or faces of Jesus in the Gospel—the compassionate face, the caring face, the consoling face, the face of moral indignation, the contemplative face, and so on. This is the missionary dimension of leadership. In changed and challenging situations, the tensions of leadership rise, especially where there is no vivid answer and caught between two less desirable choices: the duty to be faithful to the Gospel or Gospel values, on the one hand, and the responsibility of the position, on the other hand, could be crucial. Such situations underline the need for deep and vibrant spirituality. Leaders should consider not only the theological perspectives but also the ecclesial culture, the traditions, and faith informed by reason. Perhaps, no immediate answer could be found, but there could be a response in line with God’s invitation to carry out the loving, redeeming, healing, reconciling, liberating, forgiving, and challenging mission.

Conclusion

‘Synod’ was a coming together, primarily mentally, though the physical aspect was not neglected in the history of synods. The purpose was consensus, unity, and fraternity. Discriminating factors and differences are always present, natural or man-made. The role of authority is to discern and decide the best, the just, the appropriate, and salvific in such situations. In history, however, the exercise of authority, its style and dynamism has affected fraternity, equality, and impartiality and it has caused divisions. We have seen two narratives pertaining to authority found in the Gospel and some elements of synodality in them. The life of Jesus offers a paradigm based on relationality and humility, resulting in reconciliation, redemption, and liberation. The savant and socialized charismatic leadership patterns of the management world, too, can enrich the concept of Synodality as far as authority is concerned in leadership. A Christian leadership paradigm should be reflected upon to better understand synodality in our time that is bereft of the autocratic and dominating style and by exercising authority as a moral force based on freedom and a sense of responsibility always in line with the common good. While we talk of synodality, what people look for is a hierarchical change in leadership or a redefining of hierarchy power.

³⁰Francis J. Moloney, *Broken for You: Jesus Christ The Catholic Priesthood & The Word of God*, Bayswater: Coventry Press, 2018, 6.

To make authority morally just and pastorally enriching, we have to understand the nature of the Church, its mission, and the specific role one has to play as a disciple; the existence of the Church and her mission is for the salvation of the flock of Christ. This mission is the source and end of leadership. Leadership is not a matter of playing the role of managers or administrators but shepherding with the smell of the sheep—not being far away from them, their struggles, and concerns. True authority is service only when it comes from the heart; when the least and last have got a place in the heart.