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## ABUSE OF POWER VERSUS SYNODALITY

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### Abstract

There is plenty of abuse of power today in the Church. It triggers disunity, individualism and power politics and power struggle. Pope Francis, convoking a Synod on Synodality with the theme "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission," highlights that synodality is the remedy for power abuse and power struggle. Synodality is not a process that produces documents, but it plants dreams, draws forth prophesies and visions, allows hope to flourish, inspires trust, binds up wounds, weaves together relationships, awakens a dawn of hope, learns from one another and creates bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, and give strength to our hands. The above-mentioned purpose is possible for synodality when it recognizes the foundation of an ethics of power against power abuse, captures the purpose of power as the good of the human person, discerns the Power of the Spirit in light of Synodality to do away with all abuses of power, engages fully every person's ability against the disabilities caused by power-politics, chooses an exercise of authentic human freedom against abuse of power. Thus, synodality is the grace of hope in times of hopelessness caused by abuse of power and it is the need of the hour as the signs of abuses of power are heart-breaking.

**Keywords:** Abuse of Power; *Fratelli Tutti*; Justice; Megalomania; Reconciliation; Remedy; Synodality

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## Introduction

Synodality is the need of the hour. Christianity is a certainty of God's mercy and justice in times of crises. This had been true through different teachings of the Church since the Council of Trent up to Vatican Council I. The Catholic missiologist Robert Schreiter has observed that Vatican I paved the way for a "period of certainty" within the Church. But unfortunately, the Church after Vatican Council II is moving "from a period of certainty to a paralyzing uncertainty."<sup>1</sup>

The continuing effects of power abuse, warfare within the Church, hostility towards others and recklessness towards the vulnerable are actually conditioning the Church's identity as certainty of God's mighty power. This crisis could become a line of demarcation in the history of the reception and application of Vatican II. At this juncture, synodality can re-bring the identity of the Church as "certainty of God's mercy and justice" because it is a process that puts in focus different uses of power as abuses of power, which stand as weeds among good seeds in the good soil and which "choke the harvest that God intends for all."<sup>2</sup>

In the context of uncertainty, synodality is the discernment of abuses of power, the certainty of removing the abuses by defending human life in dignity and rights, rediscovering the central value of the human person and eliminating injustice and mercilessness. Synodality is thus a remedy for the abuses of power for it concerns the human person as the ethical foundation for the use of power in communion through participation and for mission.

Accordingly, my paper "Abuse of Power Versus Synodality" deals with: 1) synodality: the need of the hour, 2) the foundation of power, 3) the relevance of power, 4) power in the Church, 5) the use of power, 6) the abuse of power, 7) the relevance of synodality, and 8) synodality as remedy for abuse of power.

### 1. Foundation of Power and Synodality

The foundation of power and synodality is the human person with inherent power for his/her inherent nature,<sup>3</sup> namely: being made in the image of God. Freedom and conscience characterize "man's most

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<sup>1</sup>Massimo Faggioli, "Synodality and the abuse crisis: the Church is still stuck in Trent," *LaCroix International*, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022. <https://international.la-croix.com/>.

<sup>2</sup>Ruth Gledhill, "Catholic bishops acknowledge concerns about power and sexual abuse," *The Tablet*, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2022. <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/>

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, chapter 1.

intimate and secret cell; there, s/he takes refuge with his or her spiritual faculties in absolute solitude: only with God.”<sup>4</sup> In this lies human dignity which is the content of proclamation, and the Church is its guardian.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the human person in dignity is: 1) ontological, 2) relational-teleological, and 3) hominization.

### 1.1. Ontological

Human person is ontologically an incarnate spirit—“spirit is in the body,”<sup>6</sup> that is, his/her body is animated by the spirit. Since the spirit is good, it expresses its goodness or good actions through body. S/he is an ontological person whose power flows from the dignity as *imago Dei*.<sup>7</sup> As such, the human person “resembles God in a proper way. For God is spirit and the human person proceeds from Him in having as principle of life a spiritual soul capable of knowing, loving and of being uplifted by grace to participate in the very life of God.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, “the individual is not a person because of her/his talents, actions, or social position but by what s/he is in herself or herself: he or she is, of herself/himself, a person.”<sup>9</sup> Dignity is characterized by the fact of “being human” which bears with it an ontological appeal and constitutes itself as something good and powerful.

### 1.2. Relational-Teleological

Human person is a person in relationship, whose dignity is based precisely on this relational predisposition. No man or no woman can realize his/her personal happiness without relating to one another. The person is a social being, an active part of the social fabric or group within which he or she grows and develops: no one ever ceases to be a social actor, even in a religious institution like the Church. Human person is a teleological being aiming at being and doing good through his or her being, relationship and power. In the Aristotelian conception, since the person is a relational being, power is aimed at the good; he or she tends to use his/her power so as to realize his/her own good, that of his/her own family and, consequently, that of the society (*polis*) in which s/he lives, by living a virtuous life.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pio XII, Broadcast on the “Day of the Family,” 23 March 1952: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1952/documents/hf\\_pxii\\_spe\\_19520323\\_la-culla.html#\\_ftnref1](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1952/documents/hf_pxii_spe_19520323_la-culla.html#_ftnref1), accessed on 17.07.2018.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1979.

<sup>6</sup>Ramon Lucas Lucas, *Man: Incarnate Spirit*, Italy: Circle Press, 2008, 1ff.

<sup>7</sup>Cfr. Favi Jose Miscel, “Corporeity in the Design of the Love of God,” *Camillianum* 26 (2009) 229-281, 229.

<sup>8</sup>Massimo Mazzolani, *La persona e il bene comune*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1948, 25-26.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Romano Guardini, *Persona e personalità*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1926, 31-33.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VII, 1.

### 1.3. Hominization

Human person is endowed with hominization, that is, the power or the inherent capacity which is interlinked with the power of the Creator. Human person has at his disposal ever more effective therapeutic power together with rights and duties.<sup>11</sup> For John Paul II, “Man is the image of God with the mandate received from his Creator to subdue and to dominate the earth. In carrying out this mandate, every human being reflects the very power of the Creator of the universe, which is good.”<sup>12</sup> This mandate *till it and keep it* (Cf. Gen 2:15) explains how this power should be used in practice: it implies the protection and care of creation, and therefore also of the other person or, in Christian terms, of one’s neighbour.

### 2. Power in Negative and Positive Vibration

According to R. Guardini, power is “the ability to set reality in motion.”<sup>13</sup> Karl Rahner defines power as “a certain self-assertion and resistance proper to a given being and hence as its innate possibility of acting spontaneously, without the previous consent of another, to interfere with and change the actual constitution of that other.”<sup>14</sup> Rahner makes it self-evident that each of us because we exist inevitably has power in certain sense and to certain degree.

Power has got both negative and positive vibrations. As negative vibration, power is *exploitative*, which is the most destructive, because it presupposes violence or the threat of violence on the victim; *manipulative*—one exercises power over another in subtle ways; *competitive*—is employed against another unfairly, even in the achievement of a good end, or used only for the attainment of more power for its own sake; *nutrient*—is exercised, implying an inferior-superior relationship and distorting specific relationships within the Church.<sup>15</sup> It is also *sycophantic* which is a power wherein a person is involved in extreme obedience or flattery towards authorities for gaining some personal benefits.

As positive vibration, power is *integrative*, exercised with and for the other, in complete harmony with the other’s interests and desires.<sup>16</sup> This power is always good; makes collegiality work and renders Christian community possible; it goes in line with the

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Donum Vitae*, 1987, # 1.

<sup>12</sup>John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 14 September 1981, # 4.

<sup>13</sup>Romano Guardini, *La fine dell’epoca moderna. Il potere*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1951, 118.

<sup>14</sup>Karl Rahner, “The Theology of Power,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VI, trans. Karl-H and Boniface Kruger, Baltimore: Helicon, 1969, 391.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Rollo May, *Power and Innocence*, New York: Norton, 1972, 99-121.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. May, *Power and Innocence*, 99-121.

“power” of the Holy Spirit, who is the ultimate principle of *koinonia* and synodality. The more is the integrative power, the greater is the love that concerns the person individually and collectively.

### 3. Use of Power in the Church

We speak of power in the Church in relation to the “power” of the Holy Spirit and the authority of Christ for the service of her mission. Therefore, power in the Church is a sign of a synodal power of the entire community because 1) the Church is itself the sacrament of community: whatever authority exists within the Church, as distinct from the general authority to proclaim the Gospel, is for the sake of building and sustaining the reality of community (*communion*); 2) the Church is the whole people of God: so, power belongs to all, although exercised in various ways, by various persons, for the good of the whole and in the manner of Jesus who was among us as one who serves (cf. Mk 10:45) and as one voluntarily powerless (cf. Phil 2:5-11) (*participatory*); 3) the Church is a responsible community: authority and power are exercised only in ways which respect the freedom in faith and the voluntary character of discipleship in the Church (*responsibility*); and 4) the Church is a missionary community which has its authority and power that are eschatological in nature (descending—Jesus’ mission, and ascending—our mission).

The use of power<sup>17</sup> consists of various contours, namely, (1) principal forms of ecclesiastical power exercised by certain key individuals, pastoral leaders, and/or groups and agencies; (2) acquisition of power through appointment, election, ordination, installation, ritual act, recognition, spontaneously by the fruitfulness of their ministerial work;<sup>18</sup> (3) exercise of power in a manner consistent with the nature and mission of the Church and the values and spirit of the Gospel; (4) evaluation of power in terms of accountability, credibility and stewardship or transparency; (5) need for power insofar as God is ineffable, and insofar as the Spirit of God breathes freely across the earth, there is need for power.

### 4. Abuse of Power

When “power assumes a character that cannot be identified in the light of Revelation, it becomes demonic.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, abuses of power take place in the Church.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Richard P. McBrien, *The nature and use of power in the Church*, Baltimore: Helicon, 1969, 38-49.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Synod of Bishops, *The Ministerial Priesthood/Justice in the World*, Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1972, 44.

<sup>19</sup>Romano Guardini, *La fine dell'epoca moderna. Il potere*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1951, 123.

#### **4.1. Megalomania: Root Cause of Abuse of Power**

The root cause for abuses of power is the so-called *megalomania*. It is the excessive desire for power to dominate, to control, to subdue, to demand, to command, to play 'god,' to make oneself the reference-point, to join the mighty, to enjoy at the pathetic situation of others, to create self-monument, to keep others at one's mercy, to possess, to accumulate, to dispense as one wants, to suspend other's will, to decide for others what is good and bad. It does not consider the capacities of others, while tolerating inhuman actions against the powerless.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4.2. Abuse of Power in General**

Abuse of power generally consists in: 1) spiritual-pastoral power, 2) hierarchical-institutional power.

##### ***4.2.1. Spiritual-Pastoral Power***

The first aspect concerns the power abuse in the relationship between a cleric and a vulnerable person. This refers to a cleric's inappropriate crossing of certain boundaries, allowing the relationship to become too private, and creating a clear imbalance of power between pastor and faithful. This is linked to the conception that the cleric has of his own position as a "man of God" with important spiritual authority. The faithful see him in a completely idealized way, put their trust in him, obey him, listen to him, and not contradict him. In many cultures the priest is defined as a powerful person whom one should follow. So, there is a pastoral relationship of sacred trust, which, in the case of power abuse, is betrayed: the sacred space of trust is violated.

##### ***4.2.2. Hierarchical-Institutional Power***

Authors often underscore the responsibility of the ecclesiastical institution for maintaining silence about the allegations of power abuses and denying the real presence of this phenomenon within the Church. Due to this, the good of the victims is marginalized, while precedence is given to the "good name" of the institution.<sup>22</sup>

This hierarchical-institutional power covers up allegations of abuses against the vulnerable.<sup>23</sup> We might consider that the abuser

<sup>20</sup>Angela Rinaldi, "Church and Abuse of Power: Spiritual and Hierarchical Power in Relation to Sexual Abuse of Minors," *UISG* 16, 1 (2018) 15-27, 15-16.

<sup>21</sup>Kenneth Goldsmith, *Megalomania*, New York: Bravin Post Lee, 1993, 388.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Bruno Maggioni, *Vangelo, Chiesa e politica*, Milano: Ancora, 2011, 63.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Patrick Parkinson, "Child Sexual Abuse and Churches: A Story of Moral Failure?" *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 26 (2014) 130.

manipulates the victim by imposing silence on him/her, and the ecclesiastical institution chooses to protect its image at the expense of the victim. This power commands a superficial deference, blocks honest human communication and ultimately leaves the cleric practicing it isolated.<sup>24</sup> This power is used “for self-preservation, guarantee of interests, and consolidation of the institutions.”<sup>25</sup> It forgets the ongoing attention to the needs and voices of victims, survivors and thus the principle of justice.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the characteristics of this power are: 1) culture of silence; 2) culture of impunity, 3) clerical narcissism,<sup>27</sup> 4) clericalism,<sup>28</sup> 5) secularism, wherein “faith is often rejected, derided, marginalized and ridiculed.”<sup>29</sup>

### 4.3. Abuse of Power in Particular

Abuse of power in particular is done (1) by theologians who abuse the power of their competence, and by the hierarchy who abuse the power in regulating, teaching, and forbidding, (2) by a “third magisterium” of both bishops and theologians having a censure of the pope himself if he fails to act against some of his brother bishops, (3) through the lack of accountability of the bishops who do not seem responsible in the formulation and expression of their own theology and in the use of money, (4) through coercion, (5) when the faithful are simply reliant on magisterial *diktat* or *fiat* without any development of doctrine, (6) through top-down, command-and-obey-style teaching and communication,<sup>30</sup> (7) in being elites who go to ‘the small’ [picture] and forget the ‘big’,<sup>31</sup> (8) by lay perpetrators in lay-run communities who abuse the vulnerable and the women.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Doyle, “Clericalism: Enabler of Clergy Sexual Abuse,” *Pastoral Psychology* 54 (2006) 212.

<sup>25</sup> Maria, Luisa Saffiotti, “Le violenze dei preti sui minori: una dinamica di sistema,” *Il Regno* 11 (2011) 344.

<sup>26</sup> Gerry O’Hanlon, “Pope Francis and Church Reform,” *The Way* 59, 4 (2020) 101-117, 104.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas P. Doyle, “Clericalism: Enabler of Clergy Sexual Abuse,” *Pastoral Psychology* 54 (2006) 191-199.

<sup>28</sup> Brendan Callaghan, “On Scandal and Scandals: The Psychology of Clerical Paedophilia,” *Studies* 99 (2010) 343-356, 351.

<sup>29</sup> Pope Francis, *Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2019.

<sup>30</sup> O’Hanlon, “Pope Francis and Church Reform,” 105-106.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, *Concluding speech of the 2019 Amazon Synod*, 26 October 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Massimo Faggioli, “Abuse of power and Synodality: Why isn’t the crisis part of the synodal conversation?” <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/abuse-scandal-synodality>, accessed on June 30, 2022.

#### 4.4. Effects of Abuse of Power

There are many effects of abuses of power. The following is an emblematic list: (1) majoritarianism and minoritarianism with sectarianism in the Church, (2) degree of comparison which breeds a sort of inferiority complex producing “culture of walls”<sup>33</sup> which creates a sort of wall within the wall, a sort of enmity within fraternity, a sort of groupism within the group, a sort of revenge within coexistence, a sort of revolution within structures, a sort of division within unity, a sort of escapism within responsibility, a sort of “populism” within people’s power,<sup>34</sup> (3) handiphobia, which is an excessive fear from the part of the powerful towards the powerless, (4) bargaining, which is carried out for accumulation of things at the cost of poverty, exclusiveness at the cost of inclusiveness, freedom at the cost of obedience, mansions at the cost of the Kingdom of God, (5) individualism, which is of two kinds: “I” individualism concentrates power on the first person singular (I, me, mine, my, myself); and “We” individualism is on the first person plural (we, us, ours, our, ourselves),<sup>35</sup> and (6) divide and rule policy, whereby one particular powerful group wants to divide its members into sub-groups and wants to rule over the newly made group, and the newly made group gets divided into another group which wants to rule without anybody’s intrusion.

#### 5. Relevance of Synodality

In the context of power abuse, power struggle, power politics, power game in the Church, we need synodality which is the *heartbeat* that has to rejuvenate, reinvigorate, renew the life of the Church against all abuses of power, *to make the real body by giving importance to all the members.*<sup>36</sup>

##### 5.1. Etymology and Biblical Foundation of Synodality

The word ‘Synod’ (σὺνοδος) has its root in Greek. Composed of a preposition σὺν (with) and the noun ὁδός (path), it is about a path taken together.<sup>37</sup> Etymologically, the Church is synodal not only in

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (FT), Vatican Library Edition, Vatican City-Rome, 27-28.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, 159.

<sup>35</sup>Yuji Ogihara and Yukiko Uchida, “Does individualism bring happiness? Negative effects of individualism on interpersonal relationships and happiness,” Kyoto University, Japan. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00135/full/>

<sup>36</sup>Don Aguiar, “Synodality – Strange word” <https://mattersindia.com/2021/11/synodality-strange-word/>, accessed on November 25, 2021.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, New York: Paulist Press, 2015, 49.



the sense of walking, but also in the sense of crossing the same threshold, to dwell together, thus to reunite.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the precise meaning of 'synod' is 'walk on the road (or, path) together.' When walking together, people tend to interact, cooperate, exchange ideas with each other, listen and learn from each other, and together make decisions against power abuse.<sup>39</sup> While the term 'synod' refers to a structure with all its power abuse, the term 'synodality' refers to a process of walking the Way with a common direction of sharing through lived experiences.

In her very earliest days, the Church was synodal. As Archbishop Christophe Pierre writes:

Biblically, the Council of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15) is the 'primordial and fundamental model' of synod. There the primitive Church wrestled with the influx of Gentiles and the dictates of the law. The apostles and elders met to consider, discuss, and debate matters. After consulting with one another and the Holy Spirit, a consensus was reached. Peter presided over the assembly. James presided over the local Church. Others, like Paul and Barnabas, participated.<sup>40</sup>

For John A. Renken,

Synodality in the context of the life and mission of the Church focuses on the living journey of disciples following Jesus (the 'Way'—John 14:6) through this world to an eternal Kingdom, a Kingdom whose life is already reflected (albeit imperfectly) in the journey. It expresses that disciples accompany each other on the journey to the eternal Kingdom, even as we share in that Kingdom's life in time, here and now.<sup>41</sup>

The International Theological Commission (ITC) speaks about synodality as the path along which the People of God walk together in Jesus who is 'the way, the truth and the life,' and as the expression of the Church's ordinary way of living and working, and as the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Alphonse Borras, "Ecclesial synodality, participatory processes, and decision-making procedures: A Canonist's point of view," ed. Massimo Faggioli, *For a Missionary Reform of the Church: The Civiltà Cattolica Seminar*, NJ: Paulist Press, 2017, 221.

<sup>39</sup>Jonathan Lewis, "Theologian says Church needs both synodality and primacy." <https://cruxnow.com/interviews/2019/01/theologian-says-church-needs-both-synodality-and-primacy/>

<sup>40</sup>Christophe Pierre, "Synodality and Pope Francis: The Church that Walks Together," *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 77, 1 (2021) 3-23.

<sup>41</sup>J.A. Renken, "Synodality: A Constitutive Element of the Church Reflections on Pope Francis and Synodality," *Studia Canonica* 52, 1 (2018) 5-11.

<sup>42</sup>International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, 6.

## 5.2. Synodality for Pope Francis

Synodality has been in the mind of Pope Francis since 2013 when he announced the decision to celebrate the synod on the family and marriage on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013. In the opening speech of the 2014 synod, Francis said: you will give voice in synodality; it is a great responsibility: to bring the realities and problems of the Church.

Francis explained synodality as the invitation to have honest voice:

One general and basic condition is this: speaking honestly. Let no one say: 'I cannot say this, they will think this or this of me'. It is necessary to say with boldness all that one feels [...] without polite deference and hesitation. At the same time, one must listen with humility and welcome, with an open heart, to what your brothers say.<sup>43</sup>

For Francis, synodality is the best way to proclaim the Gospel to the world for it is an essential dimension of the Church and a new way of being the Church. "It is precisely this path of synodality which the Lord expects of the Church of the third millennium."<sup>44</sup>

At the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops by Pope Paul VI, Pope Francis used the image of an inverted pyramid against the power-grid, in which the top is located beneath the base: the top listens and the base speaks and vice versa. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.<sup>45</sup>

Speaking to the ITC in 2018, the Holy Father said that the theme of synodality was very close to his heart: synodality is a form, or a style. It is walking together. It is not an institutional reform but it is part of the ecclesiology of the people, where all voices (especially women's) are heard and listened to. It is part of the Catholic Church's life through a change in style only. Synodality is a form by which the whole Church prays, listens to the Holy Spirit, and listens to each other, and then by patient discernment, seeks what is best for the Church, for her people and her mission.

Pope Francis wants the synodal Church to be a field hospital that gives priority to the wounded.

The 'field hospital church' is the antithesis of the 'self-referential church.' It is a term that triggers the imagination, forcing us to rethink our identity, mission, and our life together as disciples of Jesus Christ. In this

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<sup>43</sup>Pope Francis, opening speech of the 2014 Family Synod, 6 October 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Pope Francis, "Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops," 17 October 2015.

<sup>45</sup>Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis*, Vatican Library: Dicastery for Communication, October 17, 2015.

field hospital the medicine of mercy is used to meet the present need; it is available to all and requires no prescription.<sup>46</sup>

A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. Isa 11:12), which cherishes the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of people 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>47</sup>

Synodality is the vigil and conversion of the people of God which are gifts that only the Lord can give us. It is enough for us to ask for his grace through prayer and fasting. [For Jesus], prayer and fasting had a special place in determining all his subsequent action (see Matthew 4:1-11). Even synodality cannot escape this logic, and must always be accompanied by the grace of conversion so that our personal and community work can represent and increasingly resemble that of the self-emptying of Christ (cf. Philippians 2:1-11).<sup>48</sup>

Pope Francis insisted upon the spiritual dimension of synodality. He said,

Without spiritual dimension, we run the risk of starting from ourselves and from the anxiety of self-justification and self-preservation that will lead us to make changes and adjustments, but halfway, which will end up enveloping us in an endless spiral that kills and suffocates the most beautiful, liberating and promising announcement we have and which gives meaning to our existence: Jesus Christ is the Lord.<sup>49</sup>

Francis proposes synodality as something against power-politics, power-abuse and power-dictatorship of functionalism which is “a new ideological colonization that tries to convince that the Gospel is a wisdom, it is a doctrine; it is not an announcement, it is not a *kerygma* (proclamation).”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Cupich Cardinal Blase, *Field hospital*, in *A Pope Francis Lexicon*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018, 72.

<sup>47</sup> Pope Francis, Speech for the fiftieth anniversary of the bishops' synod, October 17, 2015. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/32835/pope-francis-50th-anniversary-of-synod-renews-the-call-to-discipleship/>

<sup>48</sup> Massimo Faggioli, “Synod and Synodality in Pope Francis’s Words,” *The Way* 59 4 (October 2020) 89-100, 97.

<sup>49</sup> Pope Francis, “Lettera al Popolo di Dio che è in cammino in Germania,” 29 June 2019. [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190629\\_lettera-fedeligermania.html/](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190629_lettera-fedeligermania.html/)

<sup>50</sup> Pope Francis, Meeting with participants in the conference of the diocese of Rome, 9 May 2019. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2019/5/9/convegno-diocesi-di-roma.html/>

In the opening speech of the Amazon Synod of October 2019, the Pope highlighted,

Synodality is not at round tables, not in conferences and discussions; it is not a parliament; it is not a parlour; it is not demonstrating who has more power in the media and on the web, in order to impose some idea or some plan; it is not a congregationalist Church to find out who has the majority; it is not a sensationalist one so distant from the Catholic Church.<sup>51</sup>

The Pope highlighted again that synodality means walking together under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit who is the primary actor of the synod, and who should not be driven away from the hall.<sup>52</sup> Thus, synodality ‘rings true’ to democratic sensibilities of the twenty-first century. It presumes active collective involvement. It must be the object of every participant and process to seek the truth under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The discernment process might take the form of voting or election, but it must be the truth and not the majority that necessarily prevails.

## 6. Synodality Vs Abuse of Power

As the signs of the time are heart-breaking, synodality is the need of the time to shun clericalism that leads to different types of abuse (power, economic, conscience, sexual), and to shun exclusion and to favour communion which finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. The synodal Church is a forum of welcome to the great multitude from every tribe, tongue and nation without allowing anyone to experience exclusion, isolation and even homelessness due to power-politics.

Synodality is needed against isolation because synodality is participation: it is a call for the involvement of all to engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another. Power is used to make everyone participatory in the mission of Jesus to “make disciples of all the nations.”<sup>53</sup> Jesus restores them to a place in the community of mission where all can contribute towards the common good.<sup>54</sup> Pope Francis calls Christians to share their joy, and point to a horizon of beauty and invite others to a delicious banquet.<sup>55</sup>

Synodality is the need of the time against a life within four walls because synodality is mission. Our mission is to witness to the love of God and is intended to better witness to the Gospel, especially with

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<sup>51</sup>Pope Francis, Opening speech of the 2019 synod for the Amazon, 7 October 2019.

<sup>52</sup>Pope Francis, Opening speech of the 2019 synod for the Amazon, 7 October 2019.

<sup>53</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 15.

<sup>54</sup>Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 189.

<sup>55</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 14

those who live on the peripheries of our world. Humility is needed from the authority to go before the people, pointing the way and keeping their hopes vibrant, without assuming and with merciful presence, to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and allowing the flock to strike out on new paths.<sup>56</sup>

Synodality is the need of the time against monopoly of one-direction-talking because the synodal Church is a narration of everyone, irrespective of authority (2021-2022: 1<sup>st</sup> phase). It is against the pharisaic knowledge because the synodal Church is centred on the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and on the openness to him (2022-2023: 2<sup>nd</sup> phase). It is against stiff-necked power-abuse because the synodal Church is prophetic (2023: 3<sup>rd</sup> phase) as it selects what has to be communicated to people, connects the people to God through their powerful message of God’s intervention, and calls the people of God to renewal.

Synodality is the need of the time against the power centred on the institutions which oppress the individual. The synodal Church, harmonizing the institutions through constant listening to the Spirit, is open to the charismatic gifts of the Spirit, which are meant for uplifting individuals for the sake of the community.

This can be summarized as follows<sup>57</sup>:

INSTITUTION	VERSUS	SPIRIT AS WIND/ FIRE
Office (Institutional) claiming power over its subjects		
Discipline flowing from sovereignty – with law	(To be harmonized by discernment and constant listening to the Spirit.)	Charismatic/ free gifts of Holy Spirit that uplift individuals for the sake of the community
Government – hierarchy – with power of individuals and groups		

Synodality is the need of the time because it tries to create centres and institutions for the study of abuse in the Church. Synodality

<sup>56</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 31.

<sup>57</sup>Nihal Abeyasingha, “Synodality, the Synod Structure and Ecclesia Semper Reformanda,” *Asian Horizons* 14, 1 (2020) 655-671, 661-663.

requires institutional commitment to fight against all abuses in a coordinated way instead of working through a series of projects.<sup>58</sup> Synodality creates a link between abuse scandal and the Church reform, which is absent not only at the clerical level but also for activists and academics only. It is the need of the time against a dichotomy that had developed in the Church over the centuries: there were those who had the right and mandate to speak, the 'hierarchy,' and those who had to listen, the 'laity.'

## **7. Synodality as Remedy for Abuse of Power**

Synodality is a powerful remedy against all abuses of power because of its very nature as verification, reconciliation, compassion and power.

### **7.1. Synodality is Verification**

In the context of abuses of power, synodality is a verification to see: (1) whether power destroys peace; (2) whether there is slothfulness or indifference to the power-abuse; (3) whether power works for the salvation of all. Verification demands an introspection into many abuses, listening to each other's lived painful experiences caused by power-abuse and discerning the power of the Holy Spirit to burn all that shuns human dignity.

### **7.2. Synodality is Reconciliation**

Power-abuse divides the Body of Christ but synodality reconciles everyone because God is 'Abba'. The 'Abba' consciousness in the 'Our Father' prayer reveals the value of reconciliation between God and humans: the heaven reconciles with earth; the holy reconciles with the unholy, the will of God reconciles with human will; daily full stomach reconciles with empty-stomach, the powerful reconcile with the powerless, the forgiven reconcile with those unforgiven, and those healed reconcile with the wounded. Broken relationships are mended through forgiveness which does not mean impunity, but rather, justice and remembrance, because to forgive does not mean to forget, but to renounce the destructive power of evil and the desire for revenge (cf. *FT*, # 241-242). Forgiveness is an invitation 'for giving the power that is lacking in the other' so as to be empowered.

### **7.3. Synodality is Compassion**

The third ethical way is an ethics of compassion which is "to suffer with" the abused members of the Church. To be compassionate, we

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<sup>58</sup>Faggioli, "Abuse of power and Synodality: Why isn't the crisis part of the synodal conversation?"

need mercy. Mercy is the ascending word, which has its descending pitch, that is, compassion of Jesus. When we are in the ascending contemplation in the tent of God for His mercy, we automatically descend in the tent of human frailty.<sup>59</sup> Being compassionate is expressed through ethical actions to become proactive in compassion.<sup>60</sup> As God is compassionate, we are called to become *go'el* as God.

#### 7.4. Synodality is Fraternal Power

Synodality is *Fratelli tutti* consciousness which itself is the fraternal power. This consciousness safeguards everyone from isolation and dreams of a single human family (# 8). It goes against a “culture of walls” (# 27-28) and uses an ethics that overcomes cultural barriers (#77). It is love that builds bridges (# 88). It demands us to go ‘outside’ the self to find “a fuller existence in another” (# 88), opening towards “universal fulfilment” (#95). It calls for a sense of solidarity and fraternity, which is the “primary and vital mission of education” (#114). It protects everyone in dignity and rights (#121). It calls for an ethics of relations, aiming at the good of all (#126). It demands an ethics of better politics in the Church, aiming at the common good (#180). It calls for friendship in communities, which is the “art of encounter” with everyone. No one is useless and no one is expendable (# 215); instills in us an ethics of kindness which is a star “shining amidst of darkness” and “frees us from the cruelty, the anxiety, the frantic flurry of activity” (# 222-224).

#### 7.5. Synodality is Life-Laundry

Synodality as verification, reconciliation, compassion, *Fratelli tutti*, is an invitation to do a life-laundry which consists of 3 kinds of washing: (1) self-power, (2) abuse of power, and (3) megalomania so that the power will be used in light of an ethics of power that proceeds from God for the good of the human person after the example of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

### Conclusion

Power is good and everyone is invested with it and those who exercise it are responsible for all that follows.<sup>61</sup> Power is carried out with responsibility because the source of power is God, the model is Christ, and the *telos* is the good of the person. When it comes to abuse

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<sup>59</sup>Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, # 7.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, # 85.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. Max Weber, *Il lavoro intellettuale come professione. Due saggi*, Torino: Einaudi, 2004, 141-142.

of power, the abuser distances oneself from God and from the model as well as from the task assumed for the good of the human person and respect for the dignity of the person. The millennial paradigm shift (synodality) has not yet been realised. But it is clear that the momentum has shifted 'in reverse' from abuse of power to the right use of power. Synodality itself is power which is exercised through a relationship that is established among subjects and which is to be consistent with the source (God) from which it comes and with the *telos* that it proposes (for the good).